Plagiarism
Guidelines from the Muskingum College Department of History

Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense. The penalties for plagiarism are severe, ranging from an F on the assignment to failing the entire course. In repeated cases, it can lead to expulsion from the college. Thus, it is incumbent upon the student to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it.

In college, you are continually engaged with other people’s ideas: you read them in texts, hear them in lecture, discuss them in class, and incorporate them into your own writing. As a result, it is very important to give credit where it is due. Plagiarism is using others’ ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information.

Avoiding Plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit or acknowledgement whenever you use:
• Another person’s idea, opinion, or theory;
• Any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge;
• Quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or
• Paraphrase of another person’s spoken or written words

Intentional Plagiarism

When you directly copy another person’s ideas, words or opinions into your own paper, you have committed intentional plagiarism. You are attempting to pass off another person’s work as your own. Cutting and pasting information from an internet website is a typical example of intentional plagiarism.

Unintentional Plagiarism

More often, plagiarism results from a lack of understanding, especially with regard to paraphrasing another person’s work. The following examples demonstrate how paraphrasing can constitute unintentional plagiarism and how to avoid it.

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1 The following discussion of plagiarism is derived from the website, “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It” at http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html, and Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 44-46.
Original Passage

In the early twentieth century, most Latin American nations were characterized by two classes separated by a great gulf. At the top were a small group of Europeans-descended white people, the *patrones* (landlords and patrons), who, along with foreign investors, owned the ranches, mines and plantations of each nation. Like the established families of most societies elsewhere in the world, the *patrones* monopolized wealth, social prestige, education, and cultural attainments of their nations. Many of them aspired to the ideal of nobility, with high standards of personal morality and a parental concern for those who worked for them. Some *patrones* lived up to these ideals, but most, consciously or unconsciously, exploited their workers.²

Plagiarized Paraphrase

In the early twentieth century most Latin American nations were characterized by two classes separated by a large chasm. At the top were a small group of white people, called *patrones*. Along with foreign investors, the *patrones* owned the ranches, mines and plantations of their countries. Like aristocrats all over the world, the *patrones* controlled the wealth, social status, education, and cultural achievements of their countries. Many of them had high standards of morality and were concerned for their workers, but most, consciously or unconsciously, abused their workers.

This attempt to paraphrase constitutes plagiarism. The writer has simply replaced one word with a synonym. Example: great gulf became large chasm, monopolized became controlled, prestige became status, exploited became abused. Furthermore, the writer of the paraphrased passage has deleted a few phrases and restructured other sentences. Still, the second passage is essentially the same as the first.

In a genuine paraphrase, the writer reads and interprets the meaning of the passage using their own words. Consider the following paraphrase of the original passage:

The society of Latin America at the beginning of this century was sharply divided into two groups: the majority of the population, comprised of workers, and a wealthy minority, known as *patrones*, who were descended from white Europeans. Although they were a small portion of the population, the *patrones* retained control over the bulk of the nation’s resources and enjoyed elite status. While the *patrones* professed concern for their workers, they tended to exploit the workers to retain their economic and social dominance.

Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Put in quotations any phrase of four words or more that comes directly from the text and cite where it came from. Citing the source of your quotation or paraphrased passage protects you from plagiarism.

2. Paraphrase, but be sure to use your own words and style. Do not simply rearrange or replace a few words.

3. Check your paraphrasing against the original text. If it is still very similar, paraphrase your own paraphrasing. Just remember to retain the original meaning of the source.