Plagiarism Lesson
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1 Introduction

Maybe you’ve been there: You have a paper to write, but your mind is completely blank. You feel overwhelmed, you have other assignments to think about, but the paper has to be written. Perhaps you start with a Google search to get some ideas about your topic. You eventually make your way to a website that actually sells entire essays to any student who needs them. You might think, "If I buy this essay, it’s mine; I own it, so I can do whatever I want with it, including submitting it in my class." Right?

Or maybe you have a friend who has written an essay that happens to work perfectly for your own class assignment. If your friend gives you the essay, it becomes yours and you can submit it as your own, right?

Actually, neither of these examples would be ethical because whenever you submit written work that you did not write, you have committed plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offense in academia. Depending on the individual institutional policies, students who commit this offense may fail the essay/exam they plagiarized, fail the course in which they plagiarized, and/or have to attend a disciplinary hearing to decide on other sanctions. Even if the plagiarism is accidental or unintentional, it is plagiarism nonetheless. Plagiarism is considered a form of fraud and/or intellectual theft, and you must take it seriously.

Plagiarism is such a serious offense that it is definitely worth reviewing in detail. In this mini-unit, you will learn what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, and what the consequences will be if you are found plagiarizing in a StraighterLine course. This mini-unit also includes a quiz that you must complete before beginning this course.
2 What is plagiarism?

While the definitions of plagiarism may vary slightly, StraighterLine defines plagiarism as follows:

Your essay is considered plagiarized if you use another person’s words or ideas without acknowledging that person’s work. This is also known as intellectual theft, and it doesn’t matter if the person sold you the material or gave it to you; submitting another person’s work as your own is never okay.

Likewise, if you attempt to pass off another person’s ideas or words as your own in order to earn a higher grade or obtain some other advantage, you have plagiarized. If you submit a paper that has previously been submitted in another course (either by someone else or by you), you have plagiarized. If you purchase material and attempt to pass it off as your own, you have plagiarized.

Finally, there is really no such thing as “unintentional” plagiarism; either you provided documentation for source material or you didn’t. StraighterLine does not differentiate between intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

In other words, you will have plagiarized if you do any of the following:

1. **Use phrases or passages from another source without giving credit to that source.**

2. **Use ideas from another source without giving credit to that source.** So even if you merely paraphrase material rather than quoting exact words, you still must provide documentation to credit that source. You should also reword the material so that the sentences and ideas do not follow the original material too closely.

3. **Use images, photos, charts, graphs, or other visuals from another source without giving credit to that source.**

4. **Submit an essay that was previously submitted in another course.**

5. **Submit an essay that you did not write (this includes purchasing essays).**

6. **Accidentally forget to cite a source.**
3 How can plagiarism be detected?

3.1 Turnitin

Every essay you submit in a StraighterLine course will automatically be sent through Turnitin, which evaluates the originality of your work. Turnitin will identify any source that has been used in your paper, and this includes essays previously submitted to other academic institutions or to StraighterLine. The results are displayed in an originality report. Here is an example of what an originality report might look like:

![Originality Report Screenshot]

The multicolored, numbered list on the right side shows all of the sources that were used in the paper. If those sources are appropriate and are properly documented, the paper is most likely not considered plagiarized; however, if the source is inappropriate (for instance, if it’s been submitted previously), or if the material has been used without documentation, the paper will receive a zero.

You will be able to view the originality reports for your submissions at StraighterLine.
3.2 Turnitin
The image below is another example illustrating a portion of an originality report. The passage on top with the pink text shows the original source where the material was obtained. Turnitin can locate source material in more than 30 languages, and it will locate not only websites but also any published content. Notice that the highlighted text is almost identical to the pink text. The writer seems to have changed the final phrase somewhat, but this clearly should be in quotation marks and cited. Better yet, the text could be paraphrased into the writer’s own unique voice. We’ll turn back to this same example a bit later in this unit.

3.3 Turnitin
Now let’s look at another originality report that seems to suggest plagiarism:

Based on the highlighted passage, do you think this is an example of plagiarism?
It would be if the writer had not cited the material; however, notice two things: 1. There are quotation marks around the highlighted material; and 2. The writer included a citation for the material (since the author’s name—Berman—is mentioned before the quote, only the page number needs to be included in the parenthetical citation).

The point here is that highlighted passages in the originality report do not necessarily indicate plagiarism. As long as you have given the correct name of the source and the correct page number (if there is one), then you will be okay. Just remember that you want to maintain your own voice. In this sample paragraph, the author’s own words account for the majority of the paragraph’s content, so the quote serves to support the writer’s own idea.

Speaking of using your own voice, we’ll move on now to some strategies for putting source material in your own words.
4 What does “paraphrasing” mean?

4.1 Using your own voice

We’ll discuss specific guidelines for avoiding plagiarism in the next chapter, but one way to avoid plagiarizing is to paraphrase material into your own words. Paraphrasing is more than simply changing a few words or restating an idea in different words; you should rephrase the material to match your own language and style—in other words, use your own voice. Let’s look at some examples.

The following passage of original text was taken from page 42 of an article written by Gregory Smith. Consider the original text in relation to the plagiarized version underneath:

Original Text: When determining which is better, life in the city or life in the country, it is important to consider the individual’s preferences. If someone lives in the country and enjoys wide open spaces, this individual would feel cramped in a city environment.

Plagiarized Text: When determining whether life in the city or in the country is better, it is very important to identify the individual’s preferences. If someone likes wide open spaces, that person will likely enjoy life in the country but would feel cramped in a city environment (Smith 42).

The exact words and phrases from the original text have been highlighted in the second passage. Notice that the plagiarized text has not been copied 100% word-for-word, but hopefully it is clear that this passage has not been sufficiently paraphrased from the author’s original words. Sentence structure and whole phrases from the original passage have been left intact.

It’s also important to understand that the second passage is plagiarized even though a citation is given. One problem is that the writer did not sufficiently change the wording in the passage. Also, the highlighted phrases are exact words and phrases from the original passage, yet no quotation marks are used.
To fix this problem and have a non-plagiarized passage, the writer would need either to use quotation marks around the verbatim phrasing or change the wording and style more sufficiently (in other words, paraphrase). The ideal solution is to paraphrase the material since you should try to use direct quotes mostly for passages that are really unique or important.

Take a look at the revised passage below:

Non-Plagiarized Text: Everyone should consider his or her own lifestyle before deciding whether life is better in the country or in the city. A person who enjoys a fast-paced lifestyle and buildings in close proximity may prefer city life, while one who enjoys large yards, privacy, and the great outdoors may opt for the country (Smith 42).

Compare the highlighted phrases in this revision and the plagiarized passage above. This revised passage has been sufficiently paraphrased, thus no quotation marks are needed. Rather than keeping whole phrases intact, this revision includes only a few exact words from the original. This is what we mean when we talk about using your own "voice" (or language and style) in your papers. And again, note that a parenthetical citation is required even though the writer did not quote directly. You must provide this kind of documentation whenever you use another person's ideas. Since this passage is sufficiently paraphrased and provides documentation to give credit for the idea, the passage is not plagiarized.

4.2 Using your own voice
Let’s take another look at the Turnitin example you saw in section 3.2:
Consider how you might paraphrase the above highlighted passage. Remember, paraphrasing is about more than simply changing some words; you need to find your own voice by putting the passage into your own language and style. Here is the original text, followed by a failed attempt to paraphrase:

Original Text: The purpose of positive discipline is to keep students and staff safe and to maintain a school environment that facilitates student learning and positive social-emotional-behavioral development.

Plagiarized Text: The objective of positive discipline is to make sure students as well as staff are safe and to sustain a school environment that enables student learning and positive social, emotional, and behavioral development (Taylor 78).

Looking at the highlighted text, it is probably obvious that this passage is not sufficiently paraphrased. But notice that the writer did attempt to change some words (for example, instead of objective, the word purpose was used; and facilitates was changed to enables). Still, the sentence structure is identical, and whole phrases are left intact. At the very least, the verbatim text should go in quotation marks, but it would be ideal to paraphrase as much of the text as possible. Below is a revised version:
Notice that the sentence structure in this revision has been modified, presumably to be more consistent with the writer’s own writing style.

Another important point to note here is that the highlighted term positive discipline is in quotation marks. Here’s the reason why: This term is an example of what the MLA manual describes as a “particularly apt phrase,” which means it is a term or concept invented or coined by someone. A particularly apt phrase typically is not part of a general knowledge base, and you should give credit to whoever coined it. Compare the positive discipline term to the other highlighted terms in the above passage (students, staff, learning environment). Although these exact words were used in the original passage, you need not put them in quotes because they are more common terms (i.e. no one deserves credit for coining them).

4.3 Using your own voice
We need to look at one more example, and this time we’ll take a different approach. Instead of highlighting the exact words left intact, we have highlighted direct synonyms of words in the original passage. Take a look at this snippet from page 75 of an article by Donald Holt:

1 For more information about MLA’s definition of “particularly apt phrases,” see section 2.5, page 15, of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition.
Remember, the highlighted words in this passage represent words that were changed. Notice that many words have been changed, but the changed words are merely exact synonyms of words in the original. It seems like this writer simply took a thesaurus and changed the major words, leaving the sentence structure and style unchanged. You need to do more than this if you want to adopt your own voice. Look now at this revised version:

**Non-plagiarized text:** Pride and Prejudice critiques the issues faced by single, impoverished women, despite the fact that the novel opens with “the anonymous figure” of Mr. Darcy, a wealthy bachelor (Holt 75).

Compare the style of this passage with the original one. Do you agree that this revision has done a better job of using a different style? Also notice that this revision does use some synonyms, but since the sentence structure has been modified, that is okay. Finally, look at the highlighted phrase: This phrase is word-for-word, so it has been put in quotation marks. An important point demonstrated here is this: If you keep any whole phrases (sequences of words) intact, you should put the phrase in quotation marks.
4.4 Using your own voice: Review & Tips
Paraphrasing takes practice, but it is a skill you will want to acquire. Remember that you should never copy text word-for-word unless you put that text in quotation marks. When you are paraphrasing, try very hard not to copy the style of the original text. You'll want your paraphrased passages to sound like your own writing. Use vocabulary and sentence structure that is consistent with your own voice.

Here are some tips that may help you:

1. As you paraphrase, do so without looking at the original text.
2. Avoid simply changing words to synonyms.
3. If you have used exact phrases (i.e. sequences of words), put those words in quotation marks (better yet, keep rewriting until the whole passage is in your own words).
4. If a particularly apt phrase is used, always put that in quotation marks.
5. Finally, be sure the paraphrase is accurate. You should never change the meaning of the original passage.
5 How can plagiarism be avoided?

StraighterLine has some guidelines to help you avoid plagiarizing:

1. Place any exact words or phrases from a source in quotation marks, and provide a parenthetical citation.

2. If you summarize or paraphrase source material, be sure it is sufficiently reworded. Try to adopt your own style and voice. And importantly, you must provide parenthetical citations for summarized or paraphrased source material.

3. For assignments that do not require research, do not consult sources at all; use only your own thoughts and ideas. You'll avoid the temptation to lift ideas from other sources, and you won't have to worry about how effectively you have paraphrased or quoted.

4. Submit only your own work.

5. Never purchase essays to pass off as your own work. Purchased essays will always, 100% of the time, be identified by Turnitin.

6. Never submit essays that have been submitted in previous courses. Previously submitted essays will likewise be picked up in the Turnitin database.

7. Follow MLA-style documentation.

5.1 Knowing when to give credit

Another way to think about this issue is to consider when you should cite. In other words, when should you give credit to a source? If you give credit when it is needed, you will avoid plagiarism. Here are some examples of situations that require documentation to credit a source:

✓ If you use words or ideas from a book, magazine, song, movie, television show, website, newspaper, letter, computer program, advertisement, or any other type of source.

✓ If you conduct an interview and use that information in a paper. The interview might be on the phone, through email, in person, or in writing, but you still must provide documentation for this information.

✓ Whenever you use any information from the internet, including pictures, photos, audio, video, or anything else. If you own the image, then you do not need to cite.
Whenever you use any diagrams, charts, tables, illustrations, or any other visual materials. If you create the visual yourself, you do not need to cite the image.

Whenever you use verbatim wording or particularly apt phrases.

The main point, then, is that you must give credit and provide documentation whenever you use text, ideas, or anything else that a person other than you came up with. If you are writing an essay strictly about your own personal experience, with only your own thoughts and ideas, and only your own inferences, then you do not need to cite.
6 What are the consequences of plagiarism?

Academic honesty is expected of all students, and plagiarism is a violation of StraighterLine's academic honesty policy. Thus, any student found plagiarizing will automatically fail the course.
7 Honor pledge

By continuing with your *StraighterLine* course, you are acknowledging that you understand what plagiarism is, what the consequences are, and you are agreeing to the following honor pledge:

*I understand what plagiarism is. I understand that I will fail any course in which I am found plagiarizing. I understand that it is my responsibility to avoid plagiarizing sources; I will properly paraphrase, summarize, and/or quote any source material by using MLA-style documentation. I will not purchase a pre-written essay, and I will not submit work that has been submitted previously. Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to ask if I have any questions regarding plagiarism.*
6 Conclusion

Our ultimate goal at StraighterLine is that the tips in this mini-unit will help you avoid plagiarism. Just remember that it is always better to submit your own work, even if you think it could be improved, rather than risk failing a course due to plagiarism.

You may return to this presentation at any time during the course to be reminded about how you can avoid this serious charge.

Again, please remember that we are here to help. If you have questions about plagiarism or how to avoid it, please contact us.