

Plagiarism: The Ethos Stealer

Brief: Engaging in plagiarism, intentionally or unintentionally, is a serious offense that can result in loss of credibility with your audience and potential serious consequences with your school administration.

Learning Objective: Define plagiarism and understand its different forms.

Key Terms:

- **Intentional Plagiarism:** Deliberately choosing to pass off someone else's words or ideas as your own.
- **Paraphrase:** Restating the meaning of a text or passage using your own words.
- **Plagiarism:** Copying someone else's ideas, text, or other creative work and presenting it as one's own.
- **Unintentional Plagiarism:** Accidentally giving the impression that someone else's words or ideas are your own because you failed to include proper attribution or acknowledgment.

What is Plagiarism?

When your audience perceives you've engaged in dishonest behavior, the positive ethos you've worked so hard to establish with your audience is tarnished, significantly diminishing your credibility. According to New York University School of Journalism's *Handbook on Ethics, Law and Good Practice*, plagiarism can be defined as "attempting to pass off someone else's words or ideas as your own without proper attribution or acknowledgment," and "is, simply stated, stealing." Because stealing what doesn't belong to you is considered dishonest behavior, at NYU and in most other academic and professional settings, plagiarism carries with it serious consequences, including expulsion and/or termination.

Plagiarism's association with stealing dates as far back as the 1st century, when the Roman poet Martial used the Latin word *plagiarius* (literally "kidnapper") to complain that another poet had "kidnapped his verses." While much has changed in how we share information in our Digital Age, the operating principle that when a speaker quotes or cites a person, text, image, or other piece of intellectual property they must give credit to the original source has endured across the centuries.

Detecting Intentional Plagiarism

The ease with which we can use the internet to "copy and paste" information makes the idea of plagiarizing tempting to some students. When pressed for time with a looming deadline, it's easy to think a quick copy and paste of a few sentences here or maybe a paragraph there might be a solution. While it may be easy to Control+C, Control+V your way through a speech, it's certainly not wise.

If a writer has a unique writing style and authorial voice, it can be easy to identify plagiarism if the content is cut and pasted into a work with a completely different tone and style. Additionally, many academic and professional services use software to detect whether text has been copied from previously published books, articles, and other works.

Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism

While most students try to avoid intentional plagiarism, such as outright copying another's works, they are more likely to run into trouble unintentionally. Sometimes the problem stems from working too closely with source material and forgetting exactly where a piece of information or quote comes from. To avoid unintended plagiarism, students should develop new content with the aid of notes with specific citations, as opposed to citing whole sources such as books, articles, or web pages.

Another common form of unintended plagiarism occurs when students paraphrase someone else's words and fail to cite the source. Paraphrasing without a citation is plagiarism, even when the student doesn't know they are required to include a citation or when they simply overlooked adding the citation.

Common Forms of Student Plagiarism

According to a 2015 survey of teachers and professors by Turnitin, an internet-based plagiarism detection service, the top 10 forms of student plagiarism are:

- Submitting someone's work as their own.

- Taking passages from their own previous work without adding citations.

- Rewriting someone's work without properly citing sources.

- Using quotations, but not citing the source.

- Interweaving various sources together in the work without citing.

- Citing some but not all passages that should be cited.

- Melding together cited and uncited sections of the piece.

- Providing proper citations, but failing to change the structure and wording of the borrowed ideas enough.

- Inaccurately citing the source.

- Relying too heavily on other people's work. Fails to bring original thought into the text.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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