

Plagiarism Toolkit: Defining Plagiarism

The act of plagiarism occurs when failing to give credit by citing others' words, ideas, art/visuals, or information used in papers, projects, or any assignments prepared for a course. As defined in *The Liberty Way*, plagiarism violates the *Student Honor Code* and the standards of academic integrity required of all Liberty students.

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Types of Plagiarism

Plagiarism Terminology

Would it be considered plagiarism if you replaced enough key words with synonyms or reordered the sentences in a brief passage from your source material to use in the intro of your paper? Both would be classified as plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs whenever credit is not given to an original source for any of its wording or ideas used in your paper.

The Writing Center's Plagiarism Toolkit guides you during all stages of the writing process to avoid plagiarism—resources that will explain how to effectively paraphrase content, to properly cite direct quotes, and to format your citations by learning your field's citation style. Without proper citations, the use of any material from original sources qualifies as one of **three types of plagiarism: intentional, unintentional, or self-plagiarism**. *The Liberty Way* lists three broad areas that fall under the heading of "plagiarism."

- omitting quotation marks or other conventional markings around material quoted from any source
- paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting a passage from a source without referencing the source in a proper citation
- purchasing/acquiring material of any kind and representing it as one's own work; replicating another person's work and submitting it as one's own work

Defining the terminology used in discussing plagiarism will help you resist the act of intentional plagiarism, as well as avoiding the more common act of unintentional plagiarism. Direct **quotations** use the specific and exact language from another source in your own work. Quotations must be marked with parenthetical citations or footnotes and placed in quotation marks (""). **Paraphrasing** encompasses the reading of a specific passage from another source and then conveying its meaning in your own words. A paraphrase must be marked with a parenthetical citation or footnote to credit the original source of the passage. (See [Writing Aid on Effective Paraphrasing](#).)

A *summary* involves giving a recap of the main ideas and arguments in an outside source. If summarizing an entire source with a general overview in your own words, simply give credit to the author in both your lead-in to the summary and in the bibliography or “References” page according to your discipline’s style guide. When summarizing a specific passage, you must include a phrase introducing the source prior to your summary and a parenthetical citation or footnote after it.

Intentional Plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism includes knowingly submitting a paper as your own that you did not write or using any portion of another writer’s material without citing the source. This type of plagiarism also occurs when writers create their own content but cite an actual source that doesn’t include that content. Including a reference entry for a non-existent source is also intentional plagiarism.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Students are often unaware that plagiarism has occurred, which is *unintentional plagiarism* (also called “accidental/passive”). Unintentional plagiarism takes place when credit is not given to the content’s original author, by missing either citations or quotation marks for the material used. The most common form of unintentional plagiarism is improper paraphrasing, such as the practice of *patchwriting* (rephrasing only parts of source material with synonyms, deletions, and altering sentence structure). Refer to our [Writing Aid on Effective Paraphrasing](#) for help with avoiding this type of plagiarism. The Writing Center offers formatting resources across all style guidelines to help you properly cite sources and avoid unintentional plagiarism. (See our “Quick Guide” pages for your particular writing style guide to help with citation formatting and requirements: [APA](#), [Turabian](#), [MLA](#), and [AMA](#).)

Self-Plagiarism

You may not think that using large sections of material from one of your own papers from a previous course would be considered plagiarism; however, using such content for another paper in a subsequent class is referred to as *self-plagiarism* and is prohibited by the Liberty Academic Code of Honor without instructor permission. Regardless of the type of plagiarism, the best way to avoid it is by **always giving credit to your sources whenever referring to other writers’ content, even when that content is your own from a previous paper**. Keep citations of your own work to a minimum; reusing the same sources is acceptable. Proper citations generally include naming the author, publication year, and/or the page number. Our “Quick Guide” pages and “Sample Papers,” across all major writing styles, provide you with citation formatting guidelines and requirements for both direct quotes and paraphrased content.

Plagiarism Scenarios

Academically honest students in no way attempt to take credit for another’s words, ideas, or research. Rather, they represent both their own thoughts and those they cite with integrity, accuracy, and respect. Such students do not use a quote out of context, use another’s research without proper citations, or steal information from other students’ work. The following scenarios describe common practices that lead to plagiarism.

Omitting Quotation Marks

- **Obvious Plagiarism:** This type occurs when you quote directly from a source without setting the quotation off with proper punctuation (“”) and without citing the source. *Always* give credit to source material where credit is due!
- **Less Obvious Plagiarism:** You remember to punctuate all the longer quotations in a paper but forget that quotations of only a few words also require quotation marks. A specific phrase that clearly comes from a particular source (e.g., “crucified with Christ”) always needs quotation marks.
- **Hidden Plagiarism:** Thinking that you have properly paraphrased a source, you set off the source material with only a citation, when you actually quoted most of the text and needed quotation marks as well. Even if you think you’ve put everything in your own words, refer to the source and check to make sure no exact phrases were used. Missing required quotation marks constitutes plagiarism.

Paraphrasing Specific Passages

- **Obvious Plagiarism:** You summarize a key argument that can be traced to a few specific passages but forget to use a citation. If in doubt, *always* use citations. Simply having a source on your bibliography is not sufficient.
- **Less Obvious Plagiarism:** You think you are summarizing a whole source, but you only use language and ideas from the introduction, which contains the main arguments. After you have written your summary, look back at the source and make sure you have not echoed any language or sequence of sentences unknowingly. If so, include quotation marks for exact source wording followed by a citation. Paraphrases would also require citations.
- **Hidden Plagiarism:** You remember hearing a specific phrase in the past and think it would fit well in the paper. In this case, Google the phrase and if it draws thousands of hits, it’s likely a common expression that would not need citing. If Google sends you to a particular source or set of sources, though, you need to cite it and use quotation marks when directly quoting the phrase.

Using Another Student’s Work

- **Obvious Plagiarism:** You turn in a paper written by someone else or you download a paper from the Internet and take credit for it. Both are cases of clear plagiarism. If you did not write your entire paper yourself, and if every source is not acknowledged and documented, you are plagiarizing.
- **Less Obvious Plagiarism:** Your classmate makes some intelligent comments on the discussion board that you want to explore further. You accidentally use your classmate’s ideas and pass them off as your own. For every thought you have, ask yourself where it came from. If you can identify a source of the idea or argument you have written in your paper, then you need to cite that source to avoid any hint of plagiarism.
- **Hidden Plagiarism:** You ask a classmate to look over a paper you wrote and then rewrite your sentences exactly as the classmate suggests. Do *not* let a classmate, spouse, colleague, or friend rewrite your papers under any circumstances. Reach out to your professor for guidance or to the Writing Center for tutor review and assistance.

When Do You Have to Document?

- When you quote directly, paraphrase, or summarize, cite it!
- When you use an idea in your work that you got from somewhere else, cite it!
- When you refer to a point your instructor made, cite it!
- When you find a source online that gives you useful background information, cite it!
- When you have others review your work, make sure they do no more than proofread!
- When you can trace the origin of your thoughts, phrases, and arguments to any location except your own brain, cite it!

When Can You Leave Out a Citation?

- When sharing your own analysis, personal experiences, or recommendations related to the topic
- When you do primary research and want to report the results of your study
- When you have a thought that grows out of—but is different from—what was discussed in class, on a discussion board, etc. But if you reference the original discussion board thoughts, be sure to provide a citation.
- When talking about your paper with a friend, colleague, instructor, or family member and come to a new realization that you then add to your paper
- When you reference a fact that is considered common knowledge, then no citation is necessary. Consider the following examples:
 - If your sources all assume something is true or well known, then you can too. (“Projection and displacement are common phenomena in the counseling profession.”)
 - If your next-door neighbor, spouse, and child all know something, consider it common knowledge. (“Sesame Street is a children’s television show.”)
 - If everyone in your field already knows something, treat it as common knowledge, though this will depend upon the target audience of your writing. (“Billy Graham is a well-known evangelist” would be considered common knowledge when writing for a publication reaching pastors and religious leaders.)
- **Summary:** If your idea, words, or thought cannot be traced to a specific person, place, or source, you do not have to cite it.

If in Doubt...

- Cite! It is better to over-cite than not to cite when you should. Refer to the following “Quick Guide” pages for your particular writing style guide to help with citation formatting and requirements: [APA](#), [Turabian](#), [MLA](#), and [AMA](#).
- Apply the feedback received from Writing Center draft reviews of your assignments that address potential plagiarism.
- Reach out to your professor if you are worried you might be plagiarizing. If you approach the professor for help with your concerns before the paper is due, there will be no penalties, and you will have a positive learning experience.
- Read the full explanation and discussion of [“Academic Honor” in The Liberty Way](#) and note the specific examples of academic dishonesty, falsification, and plagiarism to be sure you’re not in violation.

Technology has made it so fast and efficient for students to research and locate relevant source material. That same technology allows us to copy and paste with a click when preparing outlines and drafts. Keep in mind that a pasted quote from an online source can just as quickly become plagiarism if quotation marks and a complete citation are not added to the direct quote. Whether intentional or unintentional, plagiarism remains an ethical concern in writing—an academic violation that can be avoided by applying the Writing Center’s tools and resources on the topic of plagiarism. See [The Liberty Way](#) for more details about Liberty University’s policies regarding plagiarism.

Reference

Liberty University Division of Student Affairs. (2022). *The Liberty Way Student Honor Code 2022-2023*. Liberty University. <https://www.liberty.edu/students/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2022/10/The-Liberty-Way.pdf>