

Avoiding plagiarism

When you write an essay or research project, you are expected to use information from books, journals, the Internet and other sources, as well as your own ideas.

You must always tell your reader when you have used other people's work.

If you don't, this is plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft. Teachers will fail plagiarised work!

When you use information from other sources you must:

1. quote the information directly or indirectly
2. write the source of the information after your quote
3. include a List of References showing the sources you used to find the information.

Direct and indirect quotations

There are two ways of referring to someone else's work in your own writing. Both are called quotations, even though only one way actually uses quotation marks.

Direct quotations

The writer's actual words are copied exactly, and put in quotation marks. You shouldn't use many direct quotations in an essay or report.

Examples:

- "The grammar of a language is not a neat, logical, regular phenomenon." (Crystal 1988, p.11)
- According to O'Connor (1996, p. xi) "the fact that a word can be found in the dictionary doesn't make it acceptable English."

Indirect quotations

Most of the time, you should indirectly quote information. You summarise or paraphrase the writer's ideas and write them in your own style without quotation marks.

Examples:

- All languages have exceptions to grammatical rules to a greater or lesser extent. (Crystal 1988, p. 11)
- O'Connor (1996, pp. xi-xii) believes that dictionaries are valuable tools, but must be read carefully to avoid using informal or colloquial expressions inappropriately.

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Summarising without plagiarising

A summary is a short, clear description of the main facts from a longer piece of information. Remember to always give details of the source of the summarised information.

1. Scan the original text quickly to get an idea of its overall meaning.
2. Read the text again, noting down the key points.
3. Cover the text.
4. Turn the key points into short sentences that give the main ideas of the original.
5. Read the text again, and add anything important that you missed before, but make sure you don't copy directly!

Paraphrasing without plagiarising

Paraphrasing means rewriting information in a different way. When you paraphrase, make sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words. Use a combination of methods. Remember to always give details of the source of the paraphrased information.

Simple methods of paraphrasing

- Change the length of sentences.
- Change sentence structure in other ways, such as active to passive.
- Use a thesaurus for synonyms, but be careful of slight changes in meanings.
- Check that your paraphrase covers the full meaning of the original information.

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The best way to avoid plagiarism when you paraphrase information is to:

1. read over what you want to paraphrase carefully,
2. cover up the text so you can't see any of it and so you aren't tempted to use it as a "guide",
3. write out the idea in your own words without looking at the original, and
4. compare your paraphrase with the original to be sure you haven't unintentionally used the same expressions, and to check that you haven't changed the meaning.

Sources

Crystal, D 1988, Rediscover Grammar with David Crystal, Longman, England.

O'Conner, PT 1996, Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English, Riverhead Books, New York.