What is Plagiarism? From “The Student’s Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism”

Plagiarism is the practice, whether intentional or not, of using someone else’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own.

Plagiarism is stealing. By definition, when you plagiarize, you steal someone else’s work. Plagiarism is also lying. By passing someone else's work off as your own you are lying to your instructor and your classmates. Plagiarism is equivalent to copying from someone else’s paper during an exam and then pretending the work is your own.

Using ideas and information from outside sources in your writing is essential. After all, the best social science writing demonstrates an appreciation of the knowledge compiled by other researchers before. There is nothing wrong with the act of presenting an idea from an outside source; presenting that work as your own, either explicitly or implicitly, is wrong. Thus, it is important that you properly identify and give appropriate credit to these outside sources through the proper use of quotation marks, internal citations, and references.

Plagiarism is a dangerous crime because it is very easy to commit unintentionally. The risk is greatest when the writer is simply unaware of the proper method of paraphrasing and citing other people's work. Plagiarism, like speeding, is defined by the act -- not the intention. Writers, like drivers, are expected to be aware of what they are doing. Whether deliberate or intentional, the repercussions of plagiarism are the same, and they are harsh.

What must be cited? ANYTHING THAT IS NOT COMMON KNOWLEDGE

What constitutes plagiarism? Plagiarism takes many forms, ranging from the most egregious and easily detectable instances of copying someone else’s words to the failure to attribute paraphrased thoughts to the original thinker. These acts of plagiarism are very clear-cut and usually quite easy for instructors to detect.

- Papers purchased from a term-paper house or written by your mom, roommate, live-in bicycle repairperson, or anyone else other than yourself.
- Papers copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from the Internet, a book, or any other source.
- Papers worked on in conjunction with other people, either in this class or in another class, is also plagiarism since you are presenting other people's ideas and words as your own.
- Papers submitted for another course, recycled without further development.

Somewhat less blatant (but no less serious) are instances of plagiarism that involve the failure to follow the rules of fair use of published work.

- **Word-for-word copying**: As you likely know already, it is not acceptable to simply lift other people’s words and present them as your own. This is another sledgehammer approach to plagiarism - not very subtle!
- **Improperly paraphrasing**: Rather than quoting someone directly, it is often the case that you will summarize and reword, or paraphrase, an idea or a passage. Proper paraphrasing requires you to put the idea in your own words - you cannot use exact sentences or phrases from the original source. By definition, paraphrasing requires that you restate the idea in other words. Changing a few words, omitting or adding words, or altering the order of words or phrases is not enough.
- **Failing to cite the original source**: In general, it is better to put other people's ideas into your own words. However, doing so does not absolve you from the responsibility of attributing the thought to the original author. Even if I paraphrase an idea appropriately, I must still acknowledge the person from whom I borrowed the idea. Remember that the definition of plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without attributing them to that person.
- **Failing to Cite Information**: What needs to be cited? Anything that is not considered common knowledge. If the general population would not know the information, it must be cited. To avoid this, if you’re not sure, cite it.

The main point to keep in mind: If you want to incorporate another person’s ideas in your own writing you must either put the idea in your own words or use direct quotes. And, no matter whether you use quotes or paraphrasing, you must acknowledge the original source by properly citing the original author.

What are the Repercussions of Committing Plagiarism? Receiving a failing grade for the assignment, receiving a failing grade for the semester, or even expulsion from the university.

The most important repercussion of plagiarism is that you are yourself robbed of the opportunity to learn something. First, properly incorporating the ideas of others requires that you develop a fuller understanding of those ideas. You can only paraphrase effectively if you have a firm grasp of what the original author was trying to say. In addition, working to avoid plagiarism will undoubtedly improve your writing in general.