

Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism means “representing another’s words or ideas as one’s own.” These words or ideas may be few or many--a phrase, a paragraph, or several pages--but the principle is the same. Learn to acknowledge and cite all sources properly, using quotation marks around (or, in the case of longer quotations, properly introducing and indenting) words not your own. Use footnotes or endnotes to acknowledge another person’s words or ideas. All plagiarism is a form of stealing (another person’s words and ideas); when deliberate, it represents lying as well (about one’s sources). As a Davidson student, you are expected to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it in your writing. Claiming ignorance or lack of intention is not an acceptable excuse. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade in a course.

Examples of Plagiarism and of Acceptable Paraphrasing

Assume you are writing a term paper about child-raising practices among white women in the South before the Civil War. A leading secondary source on this topic is Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). You jot down the following passage on breast-feeding:

Reminiscences of southern white childhood written after the Civil War often tell of white babies suckling at the breasts of black mammies. Yet a careful examination of personal letters and journals reveals that a large proportion of middle- and upper-class southern women breast-fed their infants, out of concern for the children’s health and development as well as in recognition of their own duties as mothers (pp. 111-12).

One could plagiarize from this passage in three main ways, as illustrated below.

- **Presenting the idea without acknowledgment:** In the decades following the Civil War, many white Southerners reported that they had been breast-fed by black women. In fact, however, it appears that most southern women in the middle and upper classes had breast-fed their own children. [Here the wording is more or less your own, but the source of the material is not acknowledged in a footnote or endnote; it should be acknowledged.]
- **Failing to use quotation marks** (places at which quotation marks should be used are bracketed): Careful research has shown [“]that a large proportion of middle- and upper-class southern women breast-fed their infants, out of concern for the children’s health[”] and development.¹ [Corresponding note 1 indicates author, work, and page; by failing to use quotation marks in the text, however, you make it appear, wrongly, that the words used are your own.]
- **Paraphrasing too closely:** After the Civil War, Southerners remembering their childhood often told of white children being suckled at the breasts of black women. But a careful study of letters and journals shows that a large percentage of middle- and upper-class southern mothers actually breast-fed their own infants because they were concerned about their children’s health.¹ [Here, too, the source is acknowledged in a note, but the wording is not really your own.]

Here is an example of how the passage could be used acceptably, employing both broad paraphrasing and direct quotation: According to a widely held view, slave women typically nursed the children of prosperous Southerners before the Civil War. In reality, as historian Sally G. McMillen has argued, “a large proportion of middle- and upper-class southern women breast-fed their infants, out of concern for the children’s health and development as well as in recognition of their own duties as mothers.”¹ [Footnote or endnote 1 cites source and page.] Note, however, that you should use quotations such as this one sparingly. Why? Using your own words is preferable.

Other Suggestions for Avoiding Plagiarism

Have confidence in your ability to write a good paper.

In other words, think about researching and writing the paper not as a process of pasting together the ideas

and insights of others, but as one of refining your thesis or key question and of working out effective ways to present your argument and the evidence to support that argument.

Be careful in taking notes.

At the top of each page, put the name of the author, the name of book or article, the place and date of publication, and the relevant page-number(s). (You may use shorthand references here.) If quoting, double-check to make sure you have recorded words and punctuation accurately, and put quotation marks around them. When paraphrasing in your own words between quotations, use some method, such as brackets ([]), to indicate which passages are paraphrased.

Write your name at the top of each page.

Keep track of anything that contains your own ideas for the paper, and keep these pages separate from notes based on sources.

Identify your sources.

Citing your sources in the text of your paper either specifically (According to historian Robin Barnes, . . .) or generally (One observer noted at the time that . . .), as well as in the footnotes or endnotes. Identifying sources in the text (a) provides clarity to help the reader and (b) makes it more likely that you will properly cite material that you quote directly or paraphrase from another author's ideas.

Start early.

Begin writing a paper at least a week in advance, and leave two days for final revision of a complete draft. Planning ahead in this way will allow time for checking quotations against original sources and for checking footnotes or endnotes for accuracy.

Seek help when you have questions about proper citation.

Your teachers are always glad to offer guidance. Good writers' manuals or guides to research and writing contain sections about proper citation and about plagiarism and ways to avoid it. In addition, Bates College has an excellent web-site discussing plagiarism: <http://www.bates.edu/pubs/Plagiarism/plagiarism.html>