Acknowledging, Paraphrasing, and Quoting Sources

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What is Plagiarism?

An important part of being a graduate student is being able to incorporate material from published sources into your own writing. Consequently, it is very important that students be careful not to plagiarize. Plagiarism refers to the use of someone else’s work as that of your own. There are two kinds of plagiarism: intentional and unintentional. Intentional plagiarism is when a student knowingly falsely presents someone else’s work as their own, while unintentional plagiarism refers to presenting someone’s work as your own unknowingly or as a result of improper documentation. Regardless of whether it is intentional or unintentional, plagiarism is a serious offense, and the university has a very strict policy for addressing issues of plagiarism. For additional information regarding QU’s plagiarism policy, please view the Graduate Student Catalog at http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/catalog.php. Beyond this, academic integrity is a crucial part of being successful in your academic and professional career; therefore, every effort should be made to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism can be avoided by understanding the material you plan to cite, paraphrasing well, and acknowledging the work of others through proper citation.

What Must be Documented?

The first step in avoiding plagiarism is knowing what must be documented.

Direct quotes MUST be documented. Direct quotes refer to the inclusion of an author’s specific language in your own work. The exact language being borrowed must be placed inside quotation marks with the source being credited.

Paraphrases also MUST be documented. A paraphrase refers to interpreting the meaning of an author’s work into your own words. This may include summarizing the ideas presented in an article, summarizing research findings, the presentation of steps in a process, the characteristics of an unfamiliar medical condition, or the tenets of a theory or specific methodology. It is important to point out, however, that while you have “put it in your own words”, the actual meaning of the work is still that of the author’s, and therefore, must be documented. In other words, if a source has provided any of these, the source must be acknowledged.
**Common knowledge** considered to be in the public domain does not need to be documented. Common knowledge refers to factual information that is found in numerous reference works such as encyclopedias or dictionaries. Some examples of common knowledge include the birth and/or death dates of well-known figures throughout history, the dates of important historical events such as the start of a major war or the overthrow of a political regime, etc.

**Field-specific common knowledge** does NOT need to be documented as well. Field-specific common knowledge refers to the information that is “common” only within a specific field. Some examples include important facts or theories that are generally familiar to readers within a specific discipline. For example, an author would not need to cite a reference to Piaget’s developmental stages in a paper for an education class since Piaget’s work is a part of the general or common knowledge shared by readers in the field. Regarding field-specific common knowledge, the author must be certain that the information is widely known within the field. As a general rule of thumb, if a piece of information has been shared multiple times in different reference works without being documented, it is most likely considered field-specific common knowledge. When faced with uncertainty, students should ask a professor in the field.

*When in doubt, it is best to be cautious and cite the source. Also, when including both common knowledge and field-specific common knowledge in your work, if the exact language of the source is being used, you must treat it as a direct quote. That is, the borrowed language must be placed inside quotation marks and credit must be given to the source.

**Documentation Styles**

The information that is being cited and the documentation style guide used in the field (i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago, AMA, IEEE, etc.) will determine the way in which you credit a source.

Students should ask the professor who assigned the writing task if they are unsure which documentation style is appropriate.

*Below are links to some commonly used documentation style guides:*

**APA**
http://www.apastyle.org/

**MLA**
http://www.mla.org/

**Chicago**
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/
Example Paraphrases

As described earlier in this document, paraphrasing is sometimes described as restating someone else’s ideas in your own words. However, many students struggle with the question of how different a paraphrase must be from the original source to be considered a legitimate paraphrase. The following examples have been designed to illustrate the differences between a word-for-word plagiarism, a patchwork paraphrase and a legitimate paraphrase.

**Original Source**

Nothing matters more to educational improvement than the quality of teaching. In McKinsey’s decade-long research in over 50 countries, they have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession (2002). In the world’s best performing school systems, over 10 applicants apply for every teaching job. In England, it is just 2. It’s a stark disparity. Not only that, but 50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years, and that turnover is higher in tougher schools in poorer communities. Weak recruitment and low retention drain teaching quality.

**Word-for-Word Plagiarism**

Nothing is more important to educational improvement than teaching quality. A decade-long research in more than 50 countries, they have never seen an education system achieve or maintain world-class status without the best talent in its teaching profession. In the world’s best performing school systems, more than 10 applicants apply for each teaching job. In England, it is only 2. This is a stark disparity. Furthermore, 50% of teachers exit the profession in less than 5 years, and that turnover is higher in tougher schools in poorer communities. Weak recruitment and low retention drain teaching quality.

Notice in the above example that the ideas, language, and method of expression used in the paraphrase is almost identical to that of the original source. Furthermore, no credit has been given to the original source to indicate that the material has been “borrowed”. Even if the author of the paraphrase had acknowledged the original source, this would still be considered a paraphrase because none of the borrowed language has been
placed inside direct quotes. And, if all of the borrowed language would have been placed within direct quotes, the passages would appear very cluttered and, consequently, difficult to read due to the large amount of exact language borrowed from the original text.

**Original Source**

Nothing matters more to educational improvement than the quality of teaching. In McKinsey’s *decade-long research* in over 50 countries, they have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession (2002). In the world’s best performing school systems, over 10 applicants apply for every teaching job. In England, it is just 2. It’s a stark disparity. Not only that, but 50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years, and that turnover is higher in tougher schools in poorer communities. Weak recruitment and low retention drain teaching quality.

**Patchwork Paraphrase**

According to McKinsey (2002), one of the most important aspects of improving the education system is enhancing the quality of teaching. *In this decade-long research in over 50 countries*, an education system has never witnessed a sustainable world-class status *without top talent in its teaching profession*. Top performing school systems around the world typically draw in more than 10 applicants for each teaching job, while in England there is a stark disparity: the number is as low as 2. Moreover, more than half of all teachers leave the profession within 5 years. The turnover is much higher in *tougher schools* found in *poorer communities*. In summary, weak recruitment and low retention rates have a negative impact on the quality of teaching in our school system.

In the above comparison, a better effort has been made to paraphrase the original text. To begin with, the patch-work paraphrase begins with an acknowledgement of the source. Also, this paraphrase borrows significantly less of the exact language and/or phrasing from the original. However, this is still considered as plagiarism since none of the borrowed language has been placed inside of direct quotation marks. The absence of direct quotation marks in the patch-work paraphrase falsely presents all of the information as that of the author’s rather than that of the original source. A patch-work paraphrase is very common in unintentional plagiarism in which the author does not intend to falsely present another’s work as that of their own. Regardless, it is the student’s responsibility to take measure to prevent such plagiarism.
Nothing matters more to educational improvement than the quality of teaching. In McKinsey’s *decade-long research* in over 50 countries, they have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession (2002). In the world’s best performing school systems, over 10 applicants apply for every teaching job. In England, it is just 2. It’s a stark disparity. Not only that, but 50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years, and that turnover is higher in tougher schools in poorer communities. Weak recruitment and low retention drain teaching quality.

According to McKinsey (2002), one of the most important aspects of improving the education system is enhancing the quality of teaching. McKinsey’s research spanned ten years and investigated more than 50 countries. In this time, “they have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession” (McKinsey, 2002, p. 12). Top performing school systems around the world typically draw in more than 10 applicants for each teaching job, while in England there is a “stark disparity” (McKinsey, 2002, p. 14); In England, the number is as low as 2. Moreover, McKinsey (2002) points out that more than half of all teachers leave the profession within 5 years. The turnover is much higher in “tougher schools” found in “poorer communities” (McKinsey, 2002, p. 14). In summary, weak recruitment and low retention rates have a negative impact on the quality of teaching in our school system.

In this final comparison, a legitimate paraphrase has been presented. In this example, the author has primarily used her own words to summarize the meaning of the original text. Furthermore, the author has acknowledged the original work and placed any borrowed language and/or phrases inside direct quotation marks. Also, notice how proper documentation has been provided following all direct quotes.

**Specific Steps to Follow to Produce a Legitimate Paraphrase**

Some students may find it difficult to produce a legitimate paraphrase. One of the most important steps in paraphrasing correctly is to be sure that you understand the material you have read. NEVER simply pull out a particular idea or phrase that you would like to cite without first understanding the context in which it was presented. There are several ways to approach writing a proper paraphrase:
Approach A: Put the source away; then write.

After you have read the passage you would like to paraphrase, read it again! Anytime you plan to paraphrase be sure that you have read the passage multiple times to be sure that you understand the material well. Once you are confident that you are able accurately restate the passage in your own words, put the original source away somewhere out of sight, and begin to rewrite the passage.

Approach B: Write from your notes.

Another approach to creating a legitimate paraphrase is to rewrite the text in your own words from abbreviated notes. As you are reading a journal article, for example, take notes on another sheet of paper. A day or so later go back to your notes and paraphrase from them.

Some students may still find it difficult to create a proper paraphrase by following the two approaches described above. If so, a more structured approach can be helpful.

Approach C: Change the structure, then the words.

While looking at the original source, first change the structure, then the words.

For example, look at the following passage from Charlotte and Elizabeth: Guardians of the Female Mind by Lamia Alafaireet (a literary analysis of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice):

Perhaps even more indicative of Mr. Collins’s disregard for Elizabeth’s need for physical privacy is his reaction to her refusal of marriage. After Elizabeth clearly rejects the proposal, Mr. Collins states, “it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly wish to accept, when he first applies for her favor; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time (Austen, p. 73). Mr. Collins goes on to say he will pursue the match anyway. The subtle threat of violating Elizabeth’s wishes implied by Mr. Collins’s inability to accept a woman’s “no”, adds a new dimension to the idea that Mr. Collins ignores Elizabeth’s need for personal space.

*Start the paraphrase by beginning at a different point in the passage. Generally, your starting point should be based on the focus of your paper. By doing this, you will naturally change some of the wording as well. For example, a paraphrase of the above passage could start as:

Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr. Collins’s marriage proposal is blatantly ignored and dismissed as the standard practice of proper young ladies.
Here, you may want to break up the longer sentences from the original passage or combine shorter ones in order to make the paraphrase more concise. See the below example.

Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr. Collins’s marriage proposal is blatantly ignored and dismissed as the standard practice of proper young ladies. Following Elizabeth’s initial refusal of Mr. Collins’s offer, he unashamedly violates her direct request for physical privacy, “it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly wish to accept, when he first applies for her favor; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time (Austen, p. 73). Oblivious to Elizabeth’s obvious disgust, Mr. Collins adds that he will pursue her regardless. Mr. Collins’s assumption that ‘no’ means ‘yes’ is further evidence that he “ignores Elizabeth’s need for physical space” (Alafaireet, 2012, p. 63).

*While a significant amount of the wording in the original source will change as a result of changing the structure of the source, you may need to go back and look for any noticeable words or phrases that could also be changed to help create a legitimate paraphrase. For example, use synonyms or a phrase that carries the same meaning.

Depending on the complexity of the original source, you may need to go through this process several times before you have produced a satisfactory paraphrase.

**Direct Quotes**

The overwhelming majority of your paper should be in your own words (i.e. paraphrased). Many students find it helpful to practice “putting it in your own words” by telling a friend or family member what the original source was about. Direct quotes should be used sparingly and with good reason. Some reasons for using direct quotes may include:

- To illustrate that an authority supports your point/argument (although this can often be accomplished by paraphrasing as well).
- To present an argument; to critique or comment on a particular point or idea.
- To include specific language that may be historically significant.
- To share a well-stated passage that, if paraphrased or summarized, may lose some of its meaning.

**About Direct Quotes**
A large part of your responsibility as the author of any paper is to guide your readers through your work. This means that a direct quote must be presented with some context. In other words, direct quotes need to be introduced to the reader. That is, you should NEVER simply drop quotes into your paper. It is not the reader’s responsibility to make connections between the points you are making in your paper and the justification and/or significance of the particular quotes you have chosen to present. Although there are numerous ways to integrate a direct quote into your work, at least two steps are required.

1. Signal that a direct quote is coming—generally, this involves mentioning the author’s name and/or some reference to the work.
2. An explanation (assertion) that illustrates the connection of the direct quote to your text.

It is possible for the signal and the assertion to appear in a single sentence as in the below example:

In a survey conducted by Akyel and Yalcin (1990), [signal] EFL teachers choose to expose their students to literature to achieve linguistic and cultural goals, which illustrates that EFL learners do benefit from reading literature [assertion].

Another way to integrate a direct quote into your text is to think of a ‘Quote Sandwich’.

**Top Bun**: Introduce the quote

**The Meat**: Present the quote

**The Bottom Bun**: Provide your analysis and/or assertion

Example of a Quote Sandwich:

Furr’s (2004) investigation of literature in EFL classrooms analyzed the impact of literature circles on student’s classroom behavior [Top Bun]. According to Furr, “literature circles have performed the magic of motivating students to eagerly engage with stories as well as motivated them to read a great deal outside of class” (Furr, 2004, p. 12) [The Meat]. This investigation further supports the claim that participation in literature circles is conducive to facilitating a habit of reading among EFL learners. (Bottom Bun)

**How to Format Quotations**
To include a short direct quote into your text, enclose the borrowed language in double quotation marks as in the example shown above. For longer quotations begin on a new line and indent the entire quotation. This is generally referred to as block quotations. Block quotations do not have quotation marks at the beginning or the end. Rules about the formatting of block quotes (i.e. minimum length, how many spaces to indent, and whether to use single or double space) vary across documentation styles. Consequently, students should check the guidelines of the documentation style they are using.

**Punctuation and Quotation Marks**

1. **Parenthetical citations.** With short quotations, the citation should be placed outside of the closing quotation marks, followed by the sentence punctuation:

   
   *Rosenblatt, (1978)* characterizes a reader’s experience with literature as “a literary event” (p. 129).

   
   With block quotations, check the guidelines for the documentation style you are using.

2. **Commas and periods.** Commas and periods are placed inside of quotation marks when no parenthetical citation follows:

   
   *Aron and Loprest (2012)* point out that the special education system has given children with disabilities much greater access to public education by “establishing an infrastructure for educating them,” but despite such advances, certain sub-groups of students still suffer from “underidentification” (p.97).

3. **Semi-Colons and colons.** Semi-colons and colons are placed outside of closing quotation marks (or following a parenthetical citation):

   
   Without stronger evidence, researchers will be unable to “gauge the efficacy of special education services”; the formulation of effective reforms must be supported by empirical research (Aron and Loprest, 2014, p.97).

4. **Question marks and exclamation points.** Place inside closing quotation marks if the quotation is a question/exclamation:

   
   *Menand (2001)* acknowledges that H.F. Fowler’d Modern English Usage is “a classic of the language,” but he asks, “Is it a dead classic?” (p. 114).

   Place question marks and exclamation points outside of closing quotation marks if the entire sentence containing the quotation is a question or exclamation:

   
   How many students actually read the guide to find out what is meant by, “academic misconduct”?
According to Hertzberg (2002), Dahl gives the U.S. Constitution "bad marks in 'democratic fairness' and 'encouraging consensus'" (p.90).

Note that the phrases “democratic fairness” and “encouraging consensus” are already inside quotation marks in Dahl’s original work. Consequently, they are now placed inside single quotation marks because I am directly quoting the original sentence in which the phrases appeared inside double quotation marks (embedded quotation).

**How to Indicate Changes in Quotations**

Occasionally, an author may need to indicate a change or omission within a quotation. In such cases, ellipsis points (…) should be used. Do not use ellipsis points at the beginning or end unless it is not obvious to the reader that you are quoting only a portion of the whole.

Ellipsis points with an omission in the middle:

> The European Charter for Small Enterprises declared that “bankruptcy law reforms should become a clear priority for member states...and new bankruptcy laws should allow failed entrepreneurs a fresh start.”

Ellipsis points at the beginning:

> The European Charter for Small Enterprises encourages entrepreneurial activity, “...failure is concomitant with responsible initiative and risk-taking and must be mainly envisaged as a learning opportunity.”

*Note that in the above example, the sentence inside the direct quotation marks is much longer than what appears here. Consequently, ellipsis points are used at the beginning to indicate that this is not the beginning of the sentence.

Occasionally, the author may wish to include some clarification, comment, or correction within the quotation. In such cases, use square brackets [ ] (not parentheses) for any additions:

> The European Charter for Small Enterprises encourages entrepreneurial activity, “...failure is concomitant [disappointment is necessarily associated] with responsible initiative and risk-taking and must be mainly envisaged as a learning opportunity.”


