

## Plagiarism

### **The English Department Statement of Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

### **Huh? I don't understand this at all ...**

Imagine that you work on a paper a lot and are really proud of it. You turn it into your professor and get an "A" on your paper. Now, it is a year later, and your paper is found by a student taking that same class. The student retypes the paper and puts their name on it. They turn it in and get an "A" as well. They have plagiarized your paper. How do you feel? This is the same thing as if you use the sources as your own without documenting them.

### **What does this really mean for me as a student?**

It is very, very serious! Plagiarism can have serious academic consequences, the worst of which is getting an "F" in the class and being expelled from the university.

### **How do I avoid this?**

Make sure that you give the original authors the credit they are due by documenting and citing everything you quote from and paraphrase. You don't have to cite common knowledge that an average American college student knows. For example, most people know that Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. However, in order to avoid plagiarizing, it is better to cite than not to cite.

### **What is paraphrasing, and how do I do this?**

First, for paraphrasing, a good idea is to read the original, make sure that you understand it, lay it aside, and then write it down in your own words imagining that you are explaining it to someone who will read your paper. IF you are having trouble putting it into your own words, then you probably don't understand it well enough to write about it. When you are finished, cite the author according to the style you are using.

Always remember, borrowing (both language and syntax) too heavily from a source, even if you cite it, is plagiarism. A good thing to keep in mind is to use no more than two of the author's original words.

### **Example of paraphrasing:**

Read the 3 paragraphs following the original source and try to figure out which have been plagiarized and which have been paraphrased.

Original Source: The park [Caspers Wilderness Park] was closed to minor in 1992 after the family of a girl severely mauled there in 1986 won a suit against the county. The

award of \$2.1 million for the mountain lion attack on Laura Small, who was 5 at the time, was later reduced to \$1.5 million. – Reyes and Messina, “More Warning Signs,” p. B1.

1. Reyes and Messina report that in 1992 Caspers Wilderness Park was placed off-limits to minors because of an incident that had occurred there some years earlier. In 1986, a five-year-old, Laura Small, was mauled by a mountain lion and seriously injured. Her family sued the county and eventually won a settlement of \$1.5 million (B1).
2. Reyes and Messina report that Caspers Wilderness Park *was closed to children in 1992 after the family of a girl brutally mauled there in 1986* sued the county. The family was ultimately awarded \$1.5 million *for the mountain lion assault on Laura Small, who was 5 at the time* (B1).
3. In 1992, officials banned minors from Caspers Wilderness Park. Reyes and Messina explain that park officials took this measure after a mountain lion attack on a child led to a lawsuit. The child, five-year-old Laura Small, had been *severely mauled* by a lion in 1986, and her parents sued the county. Eventually, they received an award of \$1.5 million (B1).

### **What if I want to use a direct quote?**

You must enclose the author’s original words in quotation marks in your paper. These act as a signal to the reader that the words in quotes are not yours. If you don’t use quotation marks, even though you cite it, you are still plagiarizing.

### **Example of direct quotation:**

Read the 2 paragraphs following the original source and try to figure out which has been plagiarized.

Original source: Early colonists viewed the lion as a threat to livestock, as a competitor for the New World’s abundant game, and most importantly, as the personification of the savage and godless wilderness they meant to cleanse and civilize. – Kevin Hansen, *Cougar*, p. 1

1. Early colonists took a dim view of the lion. According to Kevin Hansen, they saw it as a threat to livestock, as competitor for the New World’s abundant game, and most importantly, as the personification of the savage and godless wilderness they meant to cleanse and civilize (1).
2. Early colonists took a dim view of the lion. According to Kevin Hansen, they saw it “as a threat to livestock, as competitor for the New World’s abundant game, and most importantly, as the personification of the savage and godless wilderness they meant to cleanse and civilize” (1).

### **What is a dropped quote?**

A dropped quote means that you have put a quote in a paper and have not told the reader who the original author is, which can leave the reader surprised or confused, especially

when you have multiple references. You can avoid a dropped quote by using a signal phrase. This is a special phrase that prepares the reader for the quotation.

**Example of a dropped quote:**

What is the difference between these two paragraphs?

1. California law prevents the killing of mountain lions except for specific lions that have proven to be a threat to humans or livestock. “Fish and game is even blocked from keeping mountain lions from killing the endangered desert bighorn sheep” (Perry B4).
2. California law prevents the killing of mountain lions except for specific lions that have proven to be a threat to humans or livestock. The noted conservationist Tony Perry points out that, ironically, “Fish and game is even blocked from keeping mountain lions from killing the endangered desert bighorn sheep” (B4).

**Model signal phrases**

- ❖ Verbs in signal phrases with a neutral meaning

says	observes	reasons	indicates	responds
comments	points out	thinks	believes	
adds	writes	suggests	claims	
notes	reports	implies	compares	

- ❖ Verbs in signal phrases that indicate agreement

admits	confirms	grants	concedes	acknowledges
endorses	emphasizes	insists	declares	asserts

- ❖ Verbs in signal phrases that indicate disagreement

refutes	denies	contends
argues	disputes	

- ❖ Other signal phrases

In the words of [the author] ...  
According to [the author] ...  
As [the author] states...

**What are the citation/documentation styles?**

Whenever you paraphrase or quote, you must document or cite your sources. In order to do this, you have to use one of the accepted documentation styles. At GMU, the most popular documentation styles are MLA and APA.

*Adapted from: A Writer's Reference (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) by Diana Hacker.*