

Avoiding Plagiarism

Read: *The Penguin Handbook* p. 322-334.

In your essays, you will be supporting your claims with logical argument and evidence. Through reading and research, you will find specific examples, facts, and figures to illustrate your points. Using summary, paraphrase and direct quotation, you can bring in the testimony of others whose ideas support your views. To avoid plagiarism, however, you must handle the information ethically as well as give credit to your sources through citation and documentation.

Most students realize that copying source material word for word and using it as if it were their own or putting their own name on a paper someone else has written and pretending it is their own work constitutes blatant plagiarism. But plagiarism can occur in a number of other ways as well. Penalties for plagiarism are severe even when the plagiarism occurs unintentionally, so you must be extremely careful to use source material in a responsible and appropriate way.

The following examples illustrate plagiarism in the use of source material:

“The separation of human beings from nature and the parallel detachment of human consciousness from the human body has transformed Western man into an alien on his own planet. Much of the outside world has become a kind of 'no man's land,' a scarred and polluted terrain full of dangers — a foreboding environment where wars are fought, animals are slaughtered, forests are razed and burned, and human refugees wander aimlessly from place to place in search of safe havens. In the new indoor world, modern man and woman attempt to escape their last connection with the outside world by suppressing their own animal senses and freeing themselves from their own physical nature. A marvelous array of machines, big and small, have been invented to replace nearly every part of our bodies, providing us with mechanical surrogates from head to toe.”¹

Example 1

Using a quotation without supplying quotation marks is plagiarism.

A marvelous array of machines, big and small, have been invented to replace nearly every part of our bodies, providing us with mechanical surrogates from head to toe.

Jeremy Rifkin says we now have a marvelous array of machines, big and small, that are providing us with mechanical surrogates from head to toe (500).

¹ Original Source: Rifkin, Jeremy. "The Age of Simulation." *The McGraw Hill Reader*. 7th ed. Ed. Gilbert H. Muller. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000. 499-507.

Even though the student has used an attributive tag and has cited the page number, there are no quotation marks to indicate that the highlighted portions of the sentence are taken verbatim (word for word) from Rifkin's text. This is plagiarism.

Revised to avoid plagiarism:

Jeremy Rifkin says we now have "a marvelous array of machines, big and small," that are "providing us with mechanical surrogates from head to toe" (500).

Example 2

Paraphrasing using a sentence structure that too closely resembles the structure of the original sentence (plugging synonyms into the original sentence) is plagiarism.

A marvelous array of machines, big and small, have been invented to replace nearly every part of our bodies, providing us with mechanical surrogates from head to toe.

A wonderful variety of machines, in sizes small and large, have been designed to take the place of almost all of our body parts, giving us artificial substitutes from top to bottom (Rifkin 500).

The student has put Rifkin's idea into his own words, but he has not broken free of the original sentence pattern. This is plagiarism.

Revised to avoid plagiarism:

Acting as substitutes for our bodies, a wonderful variety machines of all sizes now do for us what we used to do for ourselves (Rifkin 500).

Example 3

Paraphrasing too closely (making only minor word changes) is plagiarism.

In the new indoor world, modern man and woman attempt to escape their last connection with the outside world by suppressing their own animal senses and freeing themselves from their own physical nature.

We men and women in the modern world suppress our animalistic senses and live indoors, trying to escape and not have to connect with the outside world so we can free ourselves of our own physical natures (Rifkin 500).

The student has altered the structure of the original sentence but made only minor word changes: suppressing/suppress; freeing themselves/be free; man and woman/men and women; animal/ animalistic; indoor/indoors; their/our; themselves/ourselves; from/of, nature/natures. This is plagiarism.

Revised to avoid plagiarism:

People today live their lives inside in a man-made environment, removing themselves from the natural world so they can somehow pretend and forget that they, like all other animals, are a part of it (Rifkin 500).

Example 4

Using an original source several times but citing it only once is plagiarism.

People in the Western world have separated themselves from the natural world. It's not surprising that this has led to a new attitude toward nature. We now think of it as a kind of "no man's land," a scarred and polluted terrain full of danger" (Rifkin 500). Not only do we spend most of our time in a man-made environment, today we have invented many things that actually make us forget that we have bodies. All kinds of wonderful inventions now do the work that our bodies used to do. Perhaps this is why we are so fascinated by TV programs like "Survivor," which put people in remote, rugged places so we can watch them from the comfort of our air-conditioned living rooms.

The highlighted portions of the paragraph are either quotes from or paraphrases of Jeremy Rifkin's article, but the student has interspersed her own sentences without making sure the reader knows which material came from Rifkin and which didn't. This is plagiarism. To avoid plagiarism, the student needs to clearly denote every instance in which she has used Rifkin's ideas. She can do this by supplying attributive tags and additional citations.

Revised to avoid plagiarism:

According to Jeremy Rifkin, people in the Western world have separated themselves from the natural world (500). It's not surprising that this has led to a new attitude toward nature. We now think of it as a kind of "no man's land," a scarred and polluted terrain full of danger" (Rifkin 500). Rifkin points out that not only do we spend most of our time in a man-made environment, today we have invented many things that actually make us forget that we have bodies. All kinds of wonderful inventions now do the work that our bodies used to do (500). Perhaps this is why we are so fascinated by TV programs like "Survivor," which put people in remote, rugged places so we can watch them from the comfort of our air-conditioned living rooms.

Written Assignment

Use the sections on plagiarism in *The Penguin Handbook* and the examples above to number and answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper. You do not need to recopy the questions.

In their essays, several students incorporated ideas from the passage below. Label each student's use of the passage as plagiarism or not plagiarism and explain why you chose the label you applied.

Original Source: Ravitch, Diane. "A Culture in Common." *Read, Reason and Write*. 4th ed. Ed. Dorothy Seyler. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995. 521-525.

Several cities have endorsed the trend toward using ethnicity as the organizing principle of the social studies curriculum. This is a dangerous development that may encourage ethnic separatism and cause intergroup tension. It is not the role of public schools to teach children the customs and folkways of their ethnic or racial group; that is, as it has always been, the role of the family, the church and the local community. Nor is it the role of the public school to encapsulate children in the confines of their family's inherited culture. It is the role of the public school to open children's minds to new worlds, new ideas, new possibilities. The historic mission of the American public schools — the common schools — has been to help forge a national identity that all Americans share. And the increasing diversity of our population makes it even more imperative that our schools teach children what we as Americans have in common. (522)

STUDENT ONE: In her article "A Culture in Common," Diane Ravitch makes clear her belief that it is not the role of public schools to teach children the customs and folkways of their ethnic or racial group. Instead, she urges public schools to help forge a national identity that all Americans share (522).

STUDENT TWO: Ravitch asserts that by traditionally focusing on the goals, values and experiences we share instead of on our differences, the public schools in our country have attempted to instill a sense of national unity. She believes this effort should continue, for despite the growing variety in our people's racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds, we must, above all, view ourselves and others as Americans (522).

STUDENT THREE: Ravitch warns that the increasing focus on multiculturalism in our public schools is a dangerous development that may encourage racial and ethnic separatism, ultimately fostering divisions between groups. While she does not object to families instilling their children with pride in their own unique cultural or racial heritage, she strongly opposes using ethnicity as the organizing principle of the social studies curriculum in American public schools.

STUDENT FOUR: Ravitch points out that it is not the job of non-private schools to place and hold children restrictively within the boundaries of the culture passed down to their family (522).

STUDENT FIVE: Historically, the American public schools have helped make all of us feel a part of one country, no matter what our ethnic background may be (Ravitch 522). Many of us have grandparents or great-grandparents who came to this country as immigrants. Some of us still enjoy the traditional foods and holiday customs they brought with them from their native lands. But though people who come to America from other countries all have a right to pass these special traditions down to future generations, it is the job of the public school to make sure that everyone eventually sees themselves as Americans first and foremost.