

## Definition and Forms of Plagiarism

### I. Definition of Plagiarism

Derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* (“kidnapped”), to plagiarize means “to commit literary theft” and to “present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* [11<sup>th</sup> ed.; 2003; print]). Plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person’s ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person’s work constitutes intellectual theft. Passing off another person’s ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantages constitutes fraud. Plagiarism is sometimes a moral and ethical offense rather than a legal one since some instances of plagiarism fall outside the scope of copyright infringement, a legal offense. (*MLA Handbook* 52).

### II. Consequences of Plagiarism

1. “Plagiarism in a work provokes skepticism and even outrage among readers, whose trust in the author has been broken” (*MLA Handbook* 53).
2. “Plagiarists are often seen as incompetent—incapable of developing and expressing their own thoughts—or, worse, dishonest, willing to deceive others for personal gain” (*MLA Handbook* 53).
3. “Students exposed as plagiarists may suffer severe penalties, ranging from failure in the assignment or in the course to expulsion from school” (*MLA Handbook* 53). (Please see the more information about Darton State College’s policies on plagiarism in the Online Writing Center.)
4. Plagiarism damages teachers’ relationships with students, turning teachers into detectives instead of mentors and fostering suspicion instead of trust (*MLA Handbook* 53).
5. When graduates’ skills and knowledge fail to match their grades, an institution’s reputation is damaged.
6. Students who plagiarize harm themselves. They lose an important opportunity to learn how to write research papers, a skill that is required in a wide range of careers. (*MLA Handbook* 53)

### III. Forms of Plagiarism:

1. Unintentional plagiarism:
  - a. Students sometimes forget where they have read a piece of information they decide to include in their papers. To avoid this form of plagiarism, keep meticulous records of you sources!
2. Submitting a paper that was written by somebody else as your own.

3. Repeating or paraphrasing wording:
  - a. Even if you cite a verbatim (word-by-word) passage, if you fail to put the passage in quotation marks, you are plagiarizing.
  - b. If you paraphrase or summarize a passage, not quotation marks are needed, but citations are.
  
4. Taking a particularly apt phrase
  - a. Sometimes you find in your sources a word or phrase that you particularly like. Including that word or phrase without quotation marks and citations is plagiarism.
  - b. Paraphrasing and argument or presenting a line of thinking.  
Even if you do not borrow words or sentences from a source but adopt the line of thinking presented in your source, you must include citations to show that the line of thinking is not your own. (*MLA Handbook* 56-68)

IV. When Documentation MIGHT not be Needed:

1. Certain pieces of information are considered “common knowledge.” Who the current president of the United States is, what planets can be found in our solar system, the opening and closing dates of WWII, etc. could be considered common knowledge; therefore, the information does not have to be cited. HOWEVER, what constitutes common knowledge is sometimes difficult to determine. Therefore, when you are in doubt about what to cite, include the citation.

Work Cited

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: MLA, 2009. Print.