

## WRITING PAPERS: SUCCESS WITHOUT PLAGIARISM

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*"My books need no one to accuse or judge you:  
the page you have used stands up against you and says, 'you are a thief.'"* — Martial

*"When one is pretending, the entire body revolts."* — Anais Nin

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Planning is essential for tests and it is also the first step in putting forth your best performance in writing a paper. Try these steps:

- Be kind to yourself. Write out due dates on a calendar to see when the pressure will be on. Start early, especially if you have several papers due at one time. Chances are, you'll get a better grade.
- Professors are impressed by papers that demonstrate careful use and documentation of source material. Conversely, they devalue a paper that even hints of improper use of another person's work. If you find yourself running out of time, contact the professor ahead of time and discuss the situation. Don't be tempted to use another's work — professors are trained to be sensitive to style and can often tell when a student turns in work she or he did not do.
- If you use outside sources, *published or unpublished*, take care. Write down complete bibliographical information. Write quotations exactly word for word, and enclose them in quotation marks. When you paraphrase, do it right. This booklet will clarify how to paraphrase and summarize effectively, while avoiding the danger of plagiarism, and it will explain when to use documentation. Although this booklet uses Modern Language Association (MLA) style for consistency, there are many other popular styles that are used in research. Different professors in different subjects usually require the style most often used by their discipline. Some of the other styles are American Psychological Association (APA), and Council of Biology Editors (CBE) styles. Reference to *Keys for Writers*, and other reference books will explain many different styles and technical points of documentation, which are not the concern of this booklet. *Keys* is on reserve in the library.
- Including photocopied source pages with your paper could impress your professor and save headaches as you complete the paper. Copies allow you to check information, and as you check, you may notice other useful points. Also, because a professor may want to see how you used the sources, or a computer may eat your paper, it helps to save all notes and drafts.

### ACKNOWLEDGING SOURCES: GIVING PROPER CREDIT FOR IDEAS

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*"I had rather all the world should accuse me, than mine own conscience."* — Katherine Philips

*"He didn't want to be great, but to be thought great. . . .  
He borrowed from others in order to make an impression on others."* — Ayn Rand

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Notice the parenthetical documentation — (Hodges 424) — that appears at the end of the first example below. It acknowledges, using the MLA parenthetical style, the author and page of the source quoted.

- **QUOTATION:** *Keys for Writers* states that, “You need to document the sources of your information, not only in research papers but also in shorter essays in which you mention just a few books, articles, or other sources to illustrate a point or support your case” (Raimes 96).

If you paraphrase someone else’s ideas in your own words, as in the example below, the source of the ideas must still be acknowledged.

- **PARAPHRASE:** *Keys for Writers* states that in shorter essays as well as in research papers, information from all sources requires documentation (Raimes 96).

This applies to summaries also. In the following summary the author’s name appears in the text, so it is omitted from the parenthetical reference.

- **SUMMARY:** Raimes notes that acknowledging sources is necessary (96).

The important point here is that **when you use another’s ideas, you must acknowledge the source whether you quote the exact words of the source, or whether you put the ideas into your own words.** If you are moving from your ideas to material from a source, give your reader a clue. One way to do this is to mention the author’s name, as in the following sentence: The guidelines for acknowledgment stand, as Hodges notes, for “any published or unpublished work” (424). Note that information gained through unpublished papers, interviews, conversations, television shows, the Internet, or any other source must also be documented. Some professors even allow students to use each other as outside sources — allowing students to read each others’ papers, or to interview each other. In such cases, ideas gained from other students must be treated just like ideas from published sources: they must be documented. Be careful, however; some professors do not want students even to proofread each other’s papers. **In each class, ask what guidelines apply.**

An exception to the general rule of documentation is common knowledge, or ideas that are so well known that they do not represent “distinctive ideas or interpretations of specific writers” (Hodges 424). Common knowledge refers to ideas that experts hold in common. Hodges observes that a student may have to do a good bit of research to develop a feel for what is and is not common knowledge. Any idea that appears in three or more sources is probably common knowledge. If you are not sure, to be safe, either ask your professor, or, as Hodges advises, “cite it” (424).

As with all studies that use parenthetical citations, this booklet ends with a list of works cited where you can find complete bibliographical information about its sources.

### **ACKNOWLEDGING WORDING: GIVING PROPER CREDIT FOR EXPRESSION**

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*“But I didn’t know people could take songs from you.”* — Elizabeth Cotton

*“Half the truth is often a great lie.”* — Benjamin Franklin

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The section above stressed that a writer must give credit for any idea obtained from an outside source unless the idea is common knowledge. This is the most important point to consider when using sources. But because you will gain credit for your wording as well as your ideas, you must also be careful to avoid using a writer’s unique wording or vocabulary unless you quote exactly, using quotation marks to give the writer credit both for wording and ideas.

The most obvious and serious kind of plagiarism is using both someone else's wording and ideas without giving credit. Another very serious offense is using another's ideas without giving credit. Furthermore, a professor may consider an inadequate paraphrase (one that copies another's wording and presents it as your own) to be plagiarism, even if you acknowledge the source. Because most researched information should be paraphrased, you need to know how to paraphrase correctly. The following examples come from *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, a book written by former Elizabethtown Professor Donald B. Kraybill. We will start by explaining plagiarism of wording; then we will explain how to avoid it.

- **ORIGINAL TEXT FROM PAGE 60:** "As a symbol of Amish culture, the horse articulates several key values: tradition, time, limits, nature, and sacrifice."

The example below shows blatant plagiarism. No credit is given to Professor Kraybill, and his sentence structure has been copied, with only a few words changed.

- **PLAGIARISM OF IDEAS AND WORDING:** As a symbol of the Amish way, the horse demonstrates many important values: tradition, limits, nature, and sacrifice.

But even if a student adds paranthetical documentation, as below, the sentence still copies Professor Kraybill's wording. It presents as a paraphrase something that is more like a quotation. But is it really a quotation? No, some words have been changed.

- **PLAGIARISM OF WORDING:** As a symbol of the Amish way, the horse demonstrates many important values: tradition, time, limits, nature, and sacrifice (Kraybill 60).

And even if the student changes a lot of words but keeps the same sentence structure, following the same subject - verb - object patterns and the same basic phrasing, the sentence may not be considered a complete paraphrase by some. Compare the version below with the original. Even with documentation, a professor may consider this plagiarism.

- **PLAGIARISM OF WORDING:** As symbols of the Amish way, horses demonstrate many important values: customs, terms, restraints, creation, and renunciation (Kraybill 60).

Another way of changing a text that seems to produce a paraphrase but doesn't is switching parts of a sentence around. Without documentation this is serious plagiarism of ideas and wording. Even with documentation, a student who just switches words and phrases around has suggested that the passage is his or her wording when in reality it reflects Professor Kraybill's way of phrasing.

- **PLAGIARISM OF WORDING:** The horse, as a symbol of Amish culture, articulates several key values: limits, nature, tradition, sacrifice, and time (Kraybill 60).

An acceptable paraphrase or summary avoids both the sentence patterns of the original, and any striking or skillful use of words or phrases. You may use common words found in the original. For example, if you paraphrased this passage, you would not have to replace the words "horse" or the word "Amish." The phrase "articulates several key values," on the other hand, is what Gibaldi and Ahtert call "particularly apt," (23) especially because of the word "articulates."

In general, you need to **avoid** using the **sentence structure**, the **phrasing**, and the **wording** that make the author's expression **unique**. Use your **own words** and your **own sentence structure**.

Although some disciplines may be less demanding in terms of paraphrasing, and may allow use of certain phrasing that is common in the discipline, if you follow the guidelines above you will be protected from charges of plagiarism in any situation. If you have questions, consult your professor.

The paraphrase below is OK, although without documentation it would be plagiarism of Professor Kraybill's ideas. Remember that even if you write a good paraphrase you must document the source. **Documentation is necessary whenever you use another person's ideas — whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize.**

- **ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE:** As Kraybill notes, the horse represents Amish life because it is symbolic of traditional values that enhance awareness of time and nature by setting limits (60).
- **ORIGINAL TEXT FROM PAGE 60:** "As a symbol of Amish culture, the horse articulates several key values: tradition, time, limits, nature, and sacrifice."

The same guidelines about wording that apply to paraphrase apply to summary as well. Although using exact quotations is easier, use of paraphrase and summary shows that you have a thorough understanding of the ideas in the source. Quotations should be used on a limited basis. Consistently writing good paraphrases and summaries shows college-level ability and effort. **The best way to write them is to read first, then turn over the book as you write.** When you finish writing, compare your version with the original to be sure you have changed both words and structure. The following suggestions for paraphrasing and summarizing are based on page 105 of Hult's book, *Researching and Writing Across the Curriculum*.

To paraphrase:

- Change the order of the ideas.
- Simplify complicated concepts by breaking them into easily understood ideas.
- Replace abstract jargon with clear, direct language.
- Use different sentence patterns. Change verbs of being to action verbs. Cut out prepositional phrases; replace them with adjectives or adverbs. Change active verbs to passive verbs. Change the subject of the original, making the direct object (or some other word from the original) the new subject in your sentence. In general, avoid repeating three or more words in a row from the original.
- Use a thesaurus or a dictionary to help locate synonyms; substitute them for original words, but do not forget to use different sentence structures.
- Without altering or distorting them, select the ideas you want to use to support your point. Omit ideas that are **not relevant** to your point. Take care not to omit, just because they conflict with your viewpoint, ideas that **are relevant**. You may wish to refute or disprove these ideas, but to use the source honestly, you should include all relevant information.

Because expectations for college-level research and paraphrasing are usually much more demanding than many students have encountered previously, we also recommend close study of section 10d in the *Keys for Writers*, which is on reserve in the High Library.