

# Avoiding Plagiarism

## ➤ What is plagiarism?

“The action or practice of taking someone else's work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one's own; literary theft.”

– *Oxford English Dictionary Online*

**Always give credit when you use other people's content—words, ideas, images and so forth—in your academic work.** Your assignments and exams must also be your own original work, not someone else's. Otherwise you are plagiarizing: taking credit for another's work, whether in part or whole, and whether intentionally or accidentally. The consequences of plagiarism range from a failing grade for an assignment or course to disciplinary probation or even expulsion from the university.

## ➤ Types of plagiarism

### Intentional plagiarism

- Buying a paper online or from another student
- Hiring or letting someone do your work for you
- Stealing or "borrowing" all or part of someone else's work (even if you have the author's permission)
- Cobbling together a paper by copying and pasting from different sources without citing any of it
- Submitting the same assignment twice (you're plagiarizing yourself!)
- Selling papers or allowing others to copy your work is also subject to academic penalties

### Plagiarism by improper citation (can be deliberate, but is often unintentional)

- Copying something word for word but not using quote marks (even if you cite it, it's still plagiarism)
- Using significant ideas and concepts from someone else without a citation—even if you put them into your own words (called paraphrasing), you need to give credit
- Paraphrasing too closely by making only small changes, still retaining the same structure and words as the original (even if you cite it!)
- Citing a source you didn't actually look at

## ➤ Tips for avoiding plagiarism

1. **Take careful, organized notes.** As you read and take notes from books, articles, etc., clearly mark which passages you copy word for word (direct quotes), which are paraphrases, and which are your own thoughts. Also include the original source's citation and the specific page numbers for each note. When you refer back to them later to write assignments, you'll know where you got the material and how it should be cited.
2. **Manage your time effectively.** Don't let stress, lack of time, or not understanding an assignment tempt you to plagiarize. Instead plan ahead and start your research early. Confused about an assignment? Get clarification from your instructor as soon as possible.
3. **Know how and when to cite.** You need to cite when using words, ideas or images from any medium, print or online: books, journal and newspaper articles, websites, films, songs, interviews, and more. Also give credit when you reuse photos, charts, diagrams, video clips, etc. You don't need to cite your personal thoughts and observations; your original artwork or other media; or folklore, myths, or “common knowledge”—facts that many people know that you can verify in numerous general reference sources.
  - **Use quote marks** when using someone's exact phrasing, even if it's only a word or two, and **cite it**.
  - **Paraphrase by putting a passage into your own words**, making sure you change the sentence structure and other distinctions of the original, without misrepresenting its meaning. Compare your paraphrase to the source and check that you haven't accidentally kept significant words or phrases.

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- **If an author has captured a concept perfectly, quote it**, or paraphrase most of it but put quote marks around the few words that could not be said any other way. **Always cite paraphrases!** You may not be using someone else's words, but you are using their ideas.

## ➤ Examples of paraphrasing and quoting

The following examples use an excerpt from the book *Reconceiving Midwifery*, edited by Ivy Lynn Bourgeault, Cecilia Benoit and Robbie Davis-Floyd (2004). The in-text citations shown below are in MLA style.

**Original text from pages 3-4** (the introduction, written by the editors):

Canadian midwives and their supporters are being watched with great interest. Both at home and abroad, midwives, social scientists, health policy analysts, health care advocates, childbearing women, and their partners are asking how this new conception of the midwifery profession has evolved, how it has become integrated into provincial health care systems that have until recently excluded midwifery care, and what integrating midwifery practice will do to help improve maternity care more broadly.

### **Wrong paraphrasing:**

Midwives from Canada are being looked at with keen interest. Here and internationally, midwives, health care advocates, health policy analysts, social scientists and families are wondering how this new conception of the midwifery profession has evolved, how—when so recently left out—it became part of health care systems in the provinces, and how midwifery will cultivate better maternal care as a whole (Bourgeault, Benoit, and Davis-Floyd 3-4).

This paraphrase merely replaces some terms with synonyms and changes the word order, leaving the sentence structure largely the same and even copying some of it word for word.

### **Correct paraphrasing:**

With its recent professional resurgence, progress in provincial health care policy, and potential to transform care for new and expecting mothers, Canadian midwifery has captured worldwide attention from several sectors of the health care industry (Bourgeault, Benoit, and Davis-Floyd 3-4).

This paraphrase has changed significantly from its original form yet delivers the same basic message.

### **Correct quoting:**

In their exploration of the "new conception of the midwifery profession," Bourgeault, Benoit, and Davis-Floyd position Canadian midwives as important players in the homebirth resurgence (3-4).

Here only a key phrase is quoted. Avoid quoting long passages when you can use a combination of your own ideas or a paraphrase of the author's ideas with a short and distinct quoted phrase. Also notice that the authors were incorporated into the text then excluded from the in-text citation.

For more about citations and style guides, see <http://library.uvic.ca/site/lib/instruction/cite/index.html>.

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