The IUP Writing Center
218 Eicher Hall · 724-357-3029 · www.iup.edu/writingcenter

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM AND KNOWING WHEN TO CITE SOURCES

Academic writing in American institutions is filled with rules that writers often don't know how to follow. A working knowledge of these rules, however, is critically important; inadvertent mistakes can lead to charges of ***plagiarism***, which is the unacknowledged use of somebody else's words or ideas. While other cultures may not insist so heavily on documenting sources, American institutions do. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university. This handout, which does not reflect any official university policy, is designed to help writers develop strategies for knowing how to avoid accidental plagiarism.

IUP students will want to make sure that they are familiar with IUP's official Academic Integrity Policy at *http://www.iup.edu/registrar/catalog/Indexpage/index.shtm* as well as any additional policies that their instructors have implemented.

The Contradictions of American Academic Writing

1. Show you have done your research, but write something new and original.
2. Appeal to experts and authorities, but improve upon, or disagree with experts and authorities.
3. Improve your English by mimicking what you hear and read, but use your own words, your own voice.
4. Give credit where credit is due, but make your own significant contribution.

Since teachers and administrators may not distinguish between deliberate and accidental plagiarism, the heart of avoiding plagiarism is to make sure you give credit where it is due. This may be credit for something somebody said, wrote, emailed, drew, or implied.

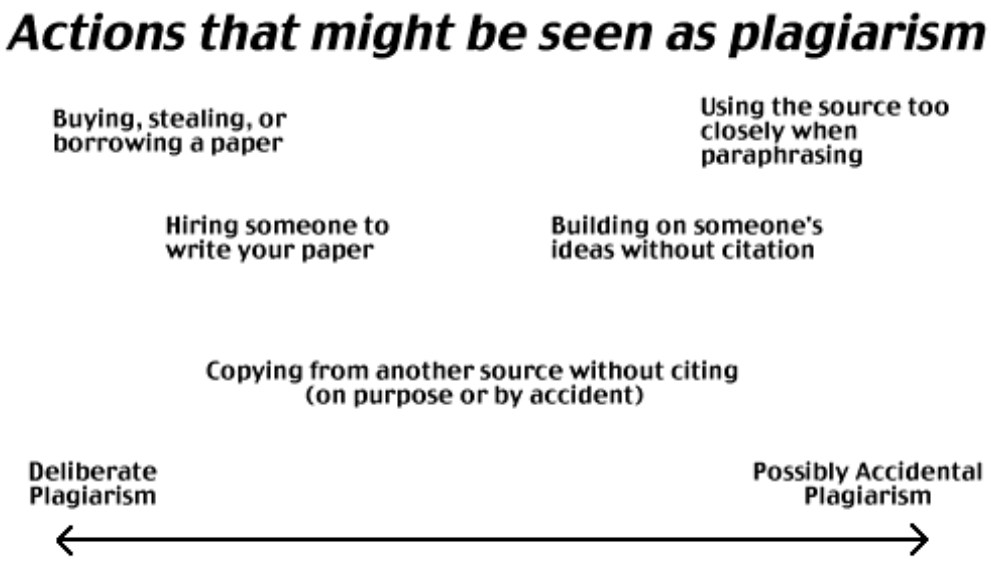
Choosing When to Give Credit

Need to Document	No Need to Document
• When you are using or referring to somebody else's words or ideas from a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium • When you use information gained through interviewing another person • When you copy the exact words or a "**unique phrase**" from somewhere • When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, and pictures • When you use ideas that others have given you in conversations or over email	• When you are writing your own experiences, your own observations, your own insights, your own thoughts, or your own conclusions about a subject • When you are using "**common knowledge**" — folklore, common sense observations, shared information within your field of study or cultural group • When you are compiling generally accepted facts • When you are writing up your own experimental results

Making Sure You Are Safe

	Action during the writing process	Appearance on the finished product
When researching, note-taking, and interviewing	• Mark *everything* that is someone else's words with a big **Q** (for **quote**) or with big quotation marks • Indicate in your notes which ideas are taken from sources (**S**) and which are your own insights (**ME**) • Record all of the relevant documentation information in your notes	Proofread and check with your notes (or photocopies of sources) to make sure that *anything* taken from your notes is acknowledged in some combination of the ways listed below: • In-text citation • Footnotes • Bibliography • Quotation marks • Indirect quotations
When paraphrasing and summarizing	• First, write your paraphrase and summary without looking at the original text, so you rely only on your memory. • Next, check your version with the original for content, accuracy, and mistakenly borrowed phrases	• Begin your summary with a statement giving credit to the source: *According to Jonathan Kozol, ...* • Put any **unique words or phrases** that you cannot change, or do not want to change, in quotation marks: *... "savage inequalities" exist throughout our educational system (Kozol).*
When quoting directly	• Keep the person's name near the quote in your notes, and in your paper • Select those direct quotes that make the most impact in your paper -- too many direct quotes may lessen your credibility and interfere with your style	• Mention the person's name either at the beginning of the quote, in the middle, or at the end • Put quotation marks around the text that you are quoting • Indicate added phrases in brackets (**[ ]**) and omitted text with ellipses (**. . .**)
When quoting indirectly	• Keep the person's name near the text in your notes, and in your paper • Rewrite the key ideas using different words and sentence structures than the original text	• Mention the person's name either at the beginning of the information, or in the middle, or at that end • Double check to make sure that your words and sentence structures are different than the original text

Material is probably "common knowledge" if:

- You find the same information undocumented in at least five other sources.
- You think it is information that your readers will already know.
- You think a person could easily find the information with general reference sources.

Always proofread, revise, and, when possible, sit down with a tutor and talk about your writing.