

## PLAGIARISM: HOW TO IDENTIFY AND AVOID IT

### INTRODUCTION

plagiary, pla'ji-ri, n (arch.) one who steals the thoughts or writings of others and gives them out as his own: the crime of plagiarism. -adj. (obs.) practising or got by literary theft. -v.t. pla'giarise, -ize, to steal from the writings or ideas of another. -ns. pla'giarism, the act or practice of plagiarising; pla'giarist, a person who plagiarises. [L. plagiarius, a kidnapper, plagiary- plaga, a net.] from Chambers English Dictionary

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic ethical standards. For this reason, it is important that you know what it is and how it can be avoided.

### WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

The meaning of plagiarism may be understood best by examining both the definitions given by authorities and the forms in which it is manifested.

### THE RANGE OF DEFINITIONS IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

"Plagiarism...means trying to pass off someone else's work as your own."<sup>1</sup> "Plagiarism (derived from a Latin word for kidnapper) means using another person's language or ideas without acknowledgement."<sup>2</sup>

"Plagiarism is defined as the attempt to fob off another's thought or language as one's own."<sup>3</sup>

"Fundamentally, plagiarism is the offering of the words or ideas of another person as one's own."<sup>4</sup>

"Q. What constitutes plagiarism? A. Two or more words taken from a source without

quotation marks."<sup>5</sup> "Plagiarism means taking material written by another and offering it as one's own."<sup>6</sup>

"To take an idea, even a suggestion, or the peculiar expression of another without acknowledgment of its source is to give the reader the false impression that the idea is your own. This is plagiarism."<sup>7</sup>

"Plagiarism exists when a writer "leads his reader to believe what he is reading is the original work of the writer when it is not."<sup>8</sup>

### FORMS

Each form of plagiarism implicitly claims originality but is based, in fact, upon the words or ideas of someone else. For the purposes of illustration, we will use the following passage from Irving Leonard Markovitz, Power and Class in Africa, An Introduction to Change and Conflict in African Politics (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977), p. 207:

THE "STYLE" OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE, FROM THE BRANDS OF CIGARETTES THEY SMOKE TO THE CHILD-REARING PRACTICES THEY FOLLOW, COMES FROM ABROAD. SEYDOU BADIAN DENOUNCES "OUR CADRES" WHO ARE "MORE INTEGRATED IN THE ECONOMY OF OUR FORMER METROPOLES THAN IN THOSE OF THEIR OWN COUNTRIES. THEIR NEEDS, THE HABITS THAT THEY ACQUIRED, THEIR TASTE - ALL THESE CONSTITUTE A WEIGHT THAT CRUSHES OUR STATES. TO BRING ALL TO A CERTAIN LEVEL MIGHT BE THEORETICALLY EASY, BUT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY A WAVE OF A MAGIC WAND..." BUT MORE DISTURBING THAN THE STYLE OF LIFE AND "FOREIGN" ALIGNMENTS THAT SEPARATE THE ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE FROM THE MASS OF THE POPULATION IS THE CRUSHING BURDEN OF THIS BOURGEOISIE UPON THE NATION'S ECONOMIES, A BURDEN THAT WEIGHED EVER MORE HEAVILY.

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29 SEYDOU BADIAN, LES DIRIGEANTS D'AFRIQUE NOIRE FACE A LEUR PEUPLE (PARIS: FRANCOIS MASPERO, 1965), P. 89 (MY TRANSLATION).

Plagiarism from this passage may take two general forms, one involving an exact copy of the original and the other involving only a partial copy.

### **EXACT-COPY PLAGIARISM<sup>9</sup>**

A word-for-word copy of someone else's work without citing that person as the source is one form of plagiarism. An example would be:

THE "STYLE" OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE, FROM THE BRANDS OF CIGARETTES THEY SMOKE TO THE CHILD-REARING PRACTICES THEY FOLLOW, COMES FROM ABROAD...

An extreme form of exact-copy plagiarism is a paper or "take-home" examination that is entirely the work of someone other than the person whose work it purports to be.

### **PARTIAL-COPY PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism that does not involve an exact copy takes the following forms:

#### **(1) Paraphrase plagiarism<sup>10</sup>**

The work may be paraphrased, i.e., the ideas may be borrowed though the words are slightly changed. An example would be:

The way of life of the dominant group is patterned after the way of life of people abroad. Maintaining their way of life is very costly to poor countries. Eliminating this exploitative class is not something which is easy to accomplish.

Note that even though the words are different, the ideas come from the passage by Markovitz. Unless credit is given to the source, this is an example of plagiarized material.

#### **(2) Mosaic plagiarism<sup>11</sup>**

A mosaic of copied and paraphrased materials presented without citing the source is another form of plagiarism. An example follows:

The pattern of life of the ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE, FROM THE BRANDS OF CIGARETTES THEY SMOKE TO THE way they raise their children, comes from outside the country. MORE DISTURBING THAN THE STYLE OF LIFE AND "FOREIGN" ALIGNMENTS is the terrible burden this way of life puts upon the poor.

In this case, note that not only do the ideas come from Markovitz, but also many of the words.

#### **(3) Source plagiarism**

Material you gather from one author that he has gathered from another is plagiarized if you do not give the author from whom you took the material credit. An example is the following:

Seydou Badian condemns those who are "MORE INTEGRATED IN THE ECONOMY OF OUR FORMER METROPOLES THAN IN THOSE OF THEIR OWN COUNTRIES. THEIR NEEDS, THE HABITS THAT THEY ACQUIRED, THEIR TASTE - ALL THESE CONSTITUTE A WEIGHT THAT CRUSHES OUR STATES. TO BRING ALL TO A CERTAIN LEVEL MIGHT BE THEORETICALLY EASY, BUT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY A WAVE OF A MAGIC WAND..."\*

\*SEYDOU BADIAN, LES DIRIGEANTS D'AFRIQUE NOIRE FACE A LEUR PEUPLE (PARIS: FRANCOIS MASPERO, 1965), P. 89 (MY TRANSLATION).

If you do include such a quote, you should indicate in the footnote where you found it, e.g., in the Markovitz book on page 207.

#### **(4) Incomplete-citation plagiarism**

Plagiarism also exists when a source is cited for only a part of the material copied. An example would be:

THE "STYLE" OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE, FROM THE BRANDS OF CIGARETTES THEY SMOKE TO THE CHILD-REARING PRACTICES THEY FOLLOW, AND "FOREIGN" ALIGNMENTS THAT SEPARATE THE ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE FROM THE MASS OF THE POPULATION IS THE CRUSHING BURDEN OF THE BOURGEOISIE UPON THE NATION'S ECONOMIES\*\*. A BURDEN THAT HAS WEIGHED EVER MORE HEAVILY.

\*\*Irving Leonard Markovitz, Power and Class in Africa, An Introduction to Change and Conflict in African Politics (Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice Hall, 1977), p.207.

The source for the whole passage quoted or paraphrased should be given, rather than for only a portion of the passage.

### **(5) Phrase Plagiarism**

Sometimes phrases are borrowed without giving credit to the source. Most frequently this is done in paraphrased material. The result is another form of plagiarism. An example would be:

The ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE live according to customs of people in other countries. It is not possible to eliminate this group and bring about equality among peoples of a given country BY A WAVE OF A MAGIC WAND. The ORGANIZATIONAL BOURGEOISIE constitutes a CRUSHING BURDEN on the backs of the masses of people of these countries.<sup>12</sup>

### **HOW CAN PLAGIARISM BE AVOIDED?**

The key to avoiding plagiarism is documentation. When you take words, ideas or facts which are not common knowledge<sup>13</sup> from someone else, cite your source. Proper format may be found in any manual of style. Among such manuals are: The University of Chicago Press, A Manual of Style, Fourteenth Edition, 1993 Revised (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956). Diana Hacker, A Writer's Reference (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999); and American Psychological Association, Publication Manual, Fifth Edition (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001.)

### **HOW SERIOUS IS PLAGIARISM?**

The seriousness of plagiarism can be gauged by the words of authorities and the experiences of those who have plagiarized. Writers have declared that:

"Plagiarism is the cardinal crime in the academic world..."<sup>14</sup>

"As a rather grim analogy, copying a passage from a source without indicating that it is borrowed can be considered a felony."<sup>15</sup>

"The academic counterpart of the bank embezzler and of the manufacturer who mislabels his product is the plagiarist..."<sup>16</sup>

The penalties assessed against those who plagiarize can be very severe. These may range between failure on a paper and expulsion. It is considered a very serious matter. Perhaps more important than these penalties is the fact that the dishonesty associated with plagiarism may undermine the reputation of the offender for the rest of his or her life.

### **CONCLUSION**

The crime of plagiarism must be avoided. Through proper documentation we may enhance the academic integrity of Claremont Graduate University.

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### **FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Langdon Elsbree and Frederick Bracher, Heath's College Handbook of Composition, Eighth Edition (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1972), p.596.

<sup>2</sup> William Coyle, Research Papers, Fifth Edition (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney and Carolyn Moss, The New Composition by Logic, Revised Edition (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p.29.

- <sup>4</sup> James Lester, Writing Research Papers, A Complete Guide, Third Edition (Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman, 1980), p. 49.
- <sup>5</sup> Helene Hutchison, The Hutchison Guide of Writing Research Papers (New York: Glencoe Press, 1973), p. 179.
- <sup>6</sup> Porter Perrin, Writer's Guide and Index to English, Third Edition (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1959), p. 635.
- <sup>7</sup> Florence Hilbish, The Research Paper (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), p. 112.
- <sup>8</sup> Harold Martin and Richard Ohmann, The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition, Revised Edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 274.
- <sup>9</sup> For further examples see *Ibid*, pp. 275-276.
- <sup>10</sup> For further examples see *Ibid*, pp. 277-278.
- <sup>11</sup> For further examples see *Ibid*, p. 276.
- <sup>12</sup> For further examples see *Ibid*, p. 278.
- <sup>13</sup> For a further discussion of the idea of "common knowledge" see Hilbish, op.cit., p.112.
- <sup>14</sup> Moss, op.cit.
- <sup>15</sup> Coyle, op.cit., p. 106
- <sup>16</sup> Martin and Ohmann, op.cit., p. 274.