

Plagiarism Frequently Asked Questions for the Department of Political Science at Southern Illinois
University Edwardsville

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1) What is plagiarism?

- Plagiarism is, "... presenting another existing work, original ideas, or creative expressions as one's own without proper attribution. Any ideas or materials taken from another source, including one's own work, must be fully acknowledged unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered "common knowledge" may differ from subject to subject. To avoid plagiarizing, one must not adopt or reproduce material from existing work without acknowledging the original source. Existing work includes but is not limited to ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, and pictures. Examples of plagiarism, subject to interpretation, include but are not limited to directly quoting another's actual words, whether oral or written; using another's ideas, opinions, or theories; paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written; borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; and offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment" (Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees 2012; Southern Illinois University Edwardsville 2012a, 2012b).
- The Lovejoy Library (2012) gives some additional guidance about what constitutes plagiarism.
 - The Library states that plagiarism, "...the act of representing the work of another as one's own, may take two forms. It may consist of copying, paraphrasing or otherwise using the written or oral work of another without acknowledging the source, or it may consist of presenting oral or written course work prepared by another as one's own."
 - Their materials also state any of the following actions, without limitation, constitute plagiarism:
 - "Buy or use a term paper written by someone else" (Lovejoy Library 2012);
 - "Cut and paste passages from the Internet, a book, or an article and insert them into your paper without citing them" (Lovejoy Library 2012);
 - "Use the words or ideas of another person without citing them" (Lovejoy Library 2012); or
 - "Paraphrase that person's words without citing them" (Lovejoy Library 2012).

2) Why is plagiarism such a big deal?

- Plagiarism consists of two acts that occur simultaneously: theft and fraud. It is theft because someone else's ideas or words are being taken. It is fraud in that these ideas or words are misrepresented as one's own.
- "Plagiarism is also a form of cheating" (Prarie View A&M 2010).

- “If you worked hard on something and someone else took all the credit, you’d be upset” (Prairie View A&M 2010).
- In the United States, it can be a violation of federal copyright laws.
- The point of assignments, papers, and similar exercises is to help you learn the material that is taught. Such learning cannot happen if someone else’s work is being used in place of one’s own (Hodkinson 2010).
- “School assignments are intended to facilitate learning, or to assess learning, or both. Plagiarism undermines these purposes” (Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees 2012).
- Our university is in the credentialing business. Accordingly, the credentials (i.e., degrees) that our university issues are valid to the extent that those who have achieved them have done so with integrity. In effect, those who plagiarize and/or cheat to get a degree present their academic qualifications under false pretenses (Hodkinson2010). In aggregate, plagiarism and cheating harm the university and devalue the degrees that the university issues.
- Those who commit plagiarism cheat their fellow classmates who did their work honestly.
- Those who commit plagiarism cheat themselves of an education (Lim 2010).

3) How can one avoid being accused of plagiarism?

- The Lovejoy Library gives five guidelines that students can employ to avoid being accused of plagiarism:
 - “Use your own ideas. The focus of the paper should be based on your own ideas” (Lovejoy Library 2012).
 - “Use the ideas of others sparingly—as support or reinforcement of your own ideas” (Lovejoy Library 2012).
 - “When taking notes, include complete citation information for each item you use” (Lovejoy Library 2012).
 - “Use quotation marks when directly stating another person’s words” (Lovejoy Library 2012).
 - “A good strategy is to take time and write a short draft of your paper without using any notes. This will assist you in focusing on the content of your paper and help prevent your being too dependent upon your sources” (Lovejoy Library 2012).

4) Citation

a. Why should I cite?

- Acknowledging your sources allows you to give credit to those who have provided material for your writing (Rivers 2010).

- It helps the reader place your work within a larger discussion of the issues that you present (Rivers 2010).
- It saves you from the embarrassment and consequences that come with being accused of plagiarism (Rivers 2010).

b. When should I cite?

- A student is expected to appropriately cite *anytime and every time* that s/he uses content or ideas that come from a source other than oneself.
- More specifically, students should cite when:
 - “Referring to someone else’s ideas, opinions, or theories” (Purdue University Online Writing Lab 2010).
 - Copying exact words, including those from any website (Purdue University Online Writing Lab 2010).
 - “Reprinting or copying graphical elements such as diagrams, illustrations, maps, charts, and pictures” (Purdue University Online Writing Lab 2010).
 - “Using ideas from others given in conversation, interviews, correspondence (letters or email) or heard during lectures, speeches, and from media such as television and radio” (Purdue University Online Writing Lab 2010).

c. How often should I cite?

- You should appropriately cite *anytime and every time* that you use content or ideas that come from a source other than yourself.
- If every sentence in a paragraph comes from a source other than oneself, then every sentence in that paragraph should be appropriately cited.

d. These standards are different than what I was taught in my English class. My English professor told me that I only need to include a single cite at the end of a paragraph or section if all of the information from that paragraph or section came from the same source.

- These standards are different, in part, because you are in a course that a political scientist teaches. The Student Academic Code states that students are expected to, “develop any paper, project, case study, art form or other print or non-print product according to established standards of a particular academic discipline conveyed by an instructor in the discipline” (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville 2012a).
- Correspondingly, political scientists expect that a student is to appropriately cite whenever s/he uses content or ideas that come from a source other than oneself.
- Since this is a political science course, the citation standards articulated in questions 4(a), 4(b), and 4(c) are the only operative standards in this class.

- That said, these expectations can differ slightly by discipline. Different academic disciplines have varying expectations with respect to the conditions under which one should cite material. In any event, students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the scholarly expectations in the courses that they choose to take.
- e. I have been accused by a previous professor of citing too frequently, and received a bad grade on my paper for citing in the manner that is proposed in this document. How should I proceed?**
- This situation does not absolve you from adhering to the standards that are outlined in this document.
 - Further, you are expected to cite material whenever you use content or ideas that come from a source other than yourself.
 - Your paper should consist of a combination of your own ideas, cited paraphrases, and cited quotes (SUNY Geneseo 2010).
 - Consequently, a paper that consists entirely of quotes or paraphrases will probably receive a poor grade because it contains no original ideas from the student.
 - In part, papers are graded based on your own ideas (that emerge from synthesizing all of the sources that you have read), your ability to choose appropriate sources that support your argument, and the proper use of citations (SUNY Geneseo 2010).
- f. If there such a thing as citing too much?**
- This does happen. That said, it is better to be advised to cite less frequently, then have to face an accusation of plagiarism for having cited too little.
- g. If I cite, can I still be accused of plagiarism?**
- You can still be accused of plagiarism, even if you cite. Here are a few situations in which this can happen:
 - You provide an incorrect cite.
 - You provide an incomplete cite.
 - You do not cite often enough.
 - You cite something that is not in your bibliography in an attempt to deceive the professor into thinking that the material that is used in your paper is not plagiarized when, in fact, it has been plagiarized.

5) Is there ever a situation in which it is okay not to cite?

- It is permissible not to cite when the material that is being used is:

- One's own ideas.
- Common knowledge.

6) Common Knowledge

a. What is common knowledge?

- “Common knowledge is knowledge presumed to be ubiquitous among members of the specific community being addressed” (Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees 2012).

b. What do we mean by ubiquity, as it relates to common knowledge?

- Members of a specific community, “...may be broadly conceived, such as the entire citizenry, or much more narrowly conceived, such as those who have studied geological evidence of the late Cretaceous Period” (Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees 2012).
- Some facts may be well-known in a particular discipline, and papers written within that group may presume that the information is commonly known (California State University San Marcos 2010b).
- When used by those outside of that group, that same piece of information may require attribution (California State University San Marcos 2010b).

c. What if I am not sure about whether a piece of material is common knowledge?

- A good rule of thumb in these situations is to cite if you are in doubt about a piece of information, and assume that the piece of information is not common knowledge.
- If the information has to be discovered in something other than a general reference resource, then it probably is not common knowledge and needs to be cited.
- Political scientists narrowly define that which can be considered common knowledge. When in doubt, you should assume that the piece of information is not common knowledge and should be cited. If all else fails, ask your professor.

d. Can you provide an example of what constitutes an acceptable and unacceptable use of common knowledge?

- Acceptable Use
 - “Abraham Lincoln was a former president of the United States.”
 - This is an acceptable use of common knowledge if one is a student from the United States.
 - An American student would know that this information is ubiquitous, while other students potentially may not.

- Unacceptable Use:
 - “Abraham Lincoln courted a woman during his young adult years in New Salem, Illinois.”
 - This is not an acceptable use of common knowledge because this information is not ubiquitous among your peers.

e. Are lecture notes common knowledge?

- They are not common knowledge, and should be cited. The specific manner of citation depends on the method of citation that your professor prescribes.

7) Internet-Based Resources

a. Do I have to cite internet-based resources, even though they are part of the public domain?

- Yes, you have to cite these sources. The same citation standards apply, regardless of the source of that information (New South Wales University 2010).
- Material from the internet is the author’s intellectual property, even if you do not know who the author is (St. Andrews School 2000).

b. Do I have to cite a webpage when it does not include any information about the author?

- Yes, you have to cite this webpage.
- The operative principle with respect to citing is that a student is expected to appropriately cite *anytime and every time* that s/he uses content or ideas that come from a source other than oneself.

8) Paraphrasing

a. What is a paraphrase?

- A paraphrase is, “...a re-expression of someone else’s ideas in your own words” (California State University San Marcos 2010a).

b. Do I have to cite anytime that I use material that came from someplace else, even if I did not use it verbatim (word-for-word)?

- Yes, you do. You are required to cite material anytime that the material comes from a source other than oneself, *even if* you have did not use that material verbatim.

c. If I reword something that I found in an article or book and use it in my paper without citing it, have I committed plagiarism?

- Yes, you have committed plagiarism because that which was used in your paper without proper citation ultimately came from a source other than oneself.
- That said, there are ways that one can paraphrase material without plagiarizing it (see questions 8(d) and 8(e) for clarification on this point).

d. Is there such a thing as an unacceptable paraphrase?

- Yes there is. An unacceptable paraphrase is, "...usually caused by making only superficial changes to the original text such as replacing some of the words with synonyms or changing the sentence order. The paraphrase is so close to the original that it is considered essentially a direct quote without attribution" (California State University San Marcos 2010a).

e. What is an acceptable paraphrase?

- An acceptable paraphrase is a new way of expressing an idea, even though every effort was made to capture the original meaning (California State University San Marcos 2010a).
- However, this paraphrase *must* be appropriately cited.

f. What if I cannot think of a better way to explain something than the author whose work I am paraphrasing?

- In some cases, the author may convey an idea better than you can.
- You should try to paraphrase the idea, and then cite it appropriately.
- If you are certain that you cannot paraphrase from a source, then you should quote and appropriately cite the material (SUNY Geneseo 2010).

9) Can I be found guilty of plagiarism, even if I did not intend to plagiarize?

- Yes, you can. Section 1(i)(6) of the Policies and Procedures Related to Student Academic Standards and Performance makes no distinction with respect to intent when determining whether a student committed plagiarism (see Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (2012b) for more information).
- You are responsible for:
 - Understanding what constitutes plagiarism, and how to avoid it.
 - Keeping track of what is and is not in your assignment or paper (Price 2010).
 - Representing the words or ideas of others in an appropriate manner (Price 2010).
- Ignorance of the rules is not an excuse for disobeying them.

10) What happens if I am caught committing plagiarism?

- Typically, a student who commits plagiarism receives an “F” for the entire course.
 - This action is consistent with section 1(i)(6) of the Policies and Procedures Related to Student Academic Standards and Performance (2012b). This section states that, “Normally a student who plagiarizes shall receive a grade of ‘F’ in the course in which the act occurs.”
- I prepare a report about the incident, along with the student’s paper and evidence that I used to charge the student with plagiarism.
- This report is sent to my department Chair, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Provost. The student receives a copy of this report as well.
- This report becomes a permanent part of the student’s academic file until s/he graduates.
- In egregious cases, I and/or the University can charge a student with academic misconduct, pursuant to Section 3(c)(2) of the Student Academic Code. In these cases, the university reserves the right to administer other penalties as appropriate if a student is charged with academic misconduct. These penalties can include, but are not limited to:
 - Disciplinary Reprimand
 - Oral or Written Warning
 - Restricted Access to certain designated areas
 - Disciplinary Probation
 - Restricted Course Enrollment
 - Suspension from the University
 - Expulsion from the University

11) Miscellaneous Matters

a. Enforcement

- i. **I do not think that you catch anyone. Students are too clever and can hide cheating better than professors can catch it.**
 - Ask around. There are plenty of students who have been caught plagiarizing in my courses.
 - I have more experience in catching plagiarism than many students have of cheating.

- Many plagiarized papers have certain symptoms that are dead giveaways.
- If I suspect that a paper is plagiarized, I will make a significant effort to prove it.
- Finally, it saddens me whenever I find plagiarism. I want to believe the best about my students.

ii. Why do I enforce policies and procedures with respect to plagiarism?

- I have a moral responsibility to enforce university policies and procedures.
- “The academy in general and this institution in particular, however, cannot abide the intentional misrepresentation of source material as one’s own in order to fraudulently advance one’s status within the academy or outside the academy” (Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees 2012).
- I refuse to be a party to a situation in which nonenforcement of university policies and procedures with respect to academic integrity incentivizes cheating.
- I have a responsibility to my colleagues. It would be unfair to the other professors at this institution if I allowed plagiarism and they did not.
- I have a responsibility to my students. If I allow some students to plagiarize when others do their work responsibly, have I not cheated those who did the right thing?
- I want your degree from this institution to mean something, and for you to have a sense of accomplishment for having received a degree. What true sense of accomplishment exists for those who have fraudulently obtained their degree?
- I want this institution to have a good name. When the institution has a positive reputation, everyone benefits.
- Finally, I want students to leave my classes having been expected to ethically discharge their responsibilities.

b. I have too much happening in my life right now. I have long term papers due in my other courses, and had to plagiarize in order to meet the deadline. It is your fault for making me do this work.

- Regardless of one’s life circumstances, it is my and the university’s expectation that each student do their work to the best of their abilities, and in a manner consistent with university policies and procedures.
- If a student chooses to commit plagiarism in this situation, s/he should be prepared to face the consequences.
- If you have personal problems, it is your responsibility to notify your instructors as soon as possible. These problems are more easily resolved sooner rather than later.

c. I did not commit plagiarism because there is no such thing as original work.

- One of the main objectives of a university environment is to give you the ability to create original work that differs from the parts from which it was created (Gabriel 2010).
- “You’re not coming up with new ideas if you’re grabbing and mixing and matching” (Gabriel 2010).
- This line of reasoning presupposes that there is nothing new that can be discovered. In reality, there are plenty of new things that you can discover, including your own ideas.
- When you leave this institution, you will be:
 - Expected to do your own work.
 - Held accountable for the work that you do.
 - Expected to be original and creative in whatever endeavor that you choose to undertake.

12) This plagiarism FAQ sheet scares me. Does this sheet mean that you plan to keep us in a perpetual state of fear for the entire semester? Why did you create it?

- The existence of sheet does not imply that I want to create a situation in which fear is a perpetual theme for the course. In fact, I want to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and collegiality in my courses. I trust my students; presume that they are here to learn, and that they are not plagiarists.
- I created this sheet to be transparent about my expectations with respect to academic integrity. In doing so, it helps “level the playing field” for all students who take my courses.
- I want to provide guidance with respect to ways by which students can avoid plagiarism.
- When previous students were accused of plagiarism, the administration asked whether I made it clear what constitutes plagiarism, and that it was unacceptable in my courses.
 - This document is a way to answer these questions in a clear, forthright manner.
- Finally, I created this document to provide a resource for my students that they can use during their academic career at this institution.

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