Plagiarism

            Throughout your course of study in the MBA program at Missouri State, you will be required to write papers and reports in satisfaction of various requirements for many classes.  This is all part and parcel of the unavoidable, ongoing learning and assessment process that occurs within the MBA program.  In writing papers and reports, you will find it often necessary to refer to various sources of information and ideas to help complete the task at hand.  When you include in your paper information and ideas that were researched, remember to give credit to the source of all information and ideas that are incorporated as part of the completed work.  This is important.  Regardless of the source of your research, whether it be the required text of the class, reference books from the library, or magazines and periodicals, failure to document the source of information along with what is presented, constitutes an unlawful act of plagiarism.

Why is Plagiarism Wrong

According to the Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, plagiarism is defined as:

*“To steal or purloin and pass off as one’s own (ideas, writing, etc. of another).”*

Plagiarism occurs when ideas and information that are not your own are included in your work without giving proper credit to the source or ideas.  It is important to remember those ideas and information do not belong to you.  They belong to the people who made the original effort to find and compile the information and to those who expended much creative energy to formulate and express those ideas.  When you incorporate researched information and ideas as part of your work, these “borrowed” bits and pieces of information and ideas help to bolster and substantiate your own creative effort.  “Borrowing” makes it necessary to document the source of all facts and notations.  In documenting, you acknowledge the effort and creativity of others, whose work played a part to help produce a paper or report for which you are graded.

            To acknowledge the contribution of others neither diminishes nor negates your own effort or originality.  What you eventually complete and hand in is still a product of your sweat and toil.  After all, it was through your effort, doing the necessary research, that the required data and concepts were uncovered.  It was also through your own creative energy that all those pieces of information and ideas were brought together to form the coherent picture for presentation.  By documenting sources along with the completed work, you give credit where credit is due.  In doing so, you accomplish what is only ethically just.  At the same time, documentation also allows readers to check on how the sources have been interpreted and can help them locate other related information.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Documentation of sources also serves as protection by shielding you from any errors that may exist in the information used and presented that were through no fault of your own.[[2]](#footnote-3)

            Plagiarism results in passing off the effort of others as your own.  This has serious moral and ethical implications and is often taken very seriously in the academic community.[[3]](#footnote-4)  It is also an illegal violation of U.S. copyright law.  Besides the legal issues, here at Missouri State, plagiarism is also against University policy as it is considered academic dishonesty.  The University takes a tough stance where plagiarism and academic dishonesty are concerned.  Penalties for students caught plagiarizing include:

* Lowering of student’s grade, denying students credit for assignments or examination, or recording of a failing course grade for guilty students.
* Requiring students to hand in additional assignments or take additional examinations.
* Recommending guilty students for disciplinary probation, suspension or dismissal. [[4]](#footnote-5)

How to Avoid Plagiarism

            The best way to avoid being guilty of plagiarism is to ensure that whenever you refer to and incorporate external sources of ideas and information into written work, credit for those sources is properly documented and included in the completed assignment.  There is a general misconception that credit must only be given if the included information has been copied word for word as it appears in the reference materials.  This is NOT true.  Even if an idea or piece of information that was researched is expressed entirely in your own words, as long as that idea or information is the result of someone else’s effort or creativity, you still have to document the source.  Hence, regardless of whether the information was copied verbatim or in the form of a summary or paraphrase, proper documentation must always be included to credit the source of the information.

            As discussed above, there are two main ways that your research can be incorporated into your report or any other written assignment.  Materials can be written word for word as it was published or information can be presented in your own words in the form of a paraphrase or a summary.

When You Copy Word for Word

 (The following example is taken from the book “Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers” by Campbell/Ballou/Slade, 8th Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990, 67-8).

             Verbatim quotation of source material is useful especially in cases when there is a need to:

* Provide an authority.
* Preserve the integrity of the source author’s wording.
* Ensure accuracy of copied material.

 Useful as it may be, **direct quotation should be used sparingly.**  Copying huge chunks of passages from an article even when proper credit is given is still considered wrong.  When exercised, material quoted must be given such that the language of the original document is accurately preserved.  This will include all punctuation, spelling, emphasis, even errors that may appear in the original.  Information that is to be directly quoted must be enclosed in double quotation marks.  For example:

*Ernst Robert Curtius’s term “the Latin Middle Ages” includes a range of Roman legacies, including “the share of Rome, of the Roman idea of the state, of the Roman church and of Roman culture”*

**When You Summarize or Paraphrase**

 (The following example is taken from the book “Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers” by Campbell/Ballou/Slade, 8th Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990, 66-7).

       Summarizing or paraphrasing is expressing the original idea or information in your own words.  When you summarize, the original is condensed, whereas in a paraphrase, the original is restated in approximately the same number of words.  Though the words used to express the original idea may be different, it is important to ensure that the reproduction remains true and accurate in essence to the original with no altered emphasis or significant omissions.

       More often than not, summarizing and paraphrasing will be ( and should be) the most common way to include researched information into written work.  While directly quoting source passages can serve to enhance a paper, ***it cannot be emphasized enough that copying large portions of articles or books is improper even if proper credit has been given.*** The paper being written should ultimately reflect your own ideas and wording.  Researched materials should be summarized or paraphrased as this will serve to demonstrate your understanding of the material involved.

 An Example:

*original* I have said that science is impossible without faith.  By this I do not mean that the faith on which science depends is religious in nature or involves the acceptance of any of the dogmas of the ordinary religious creeds, yet without faith that nature is subject to law there can be no science.  No amount of demonstration can ever prove that nature is subject to law.

*plagiarism*                       *Science is impossible without faith that nature is subject to law.*

(Borrowed wording without quotation marks and failure to include”…” for words that were left out)

*plagiarism                               Faith makes science possible.  This does not mean that science rests on religious faiths or the acceptance of religious dogmas, but without the faith that nature functions according to laws, science cannot exist.*

(Imitated sentence structure)

*Correct Paraphrase                What makes science possible is the belief that nature functions in accordance to laws.*

(Documentation used to give credit for the idea even though the passage has been restated.)

*Correct Paraphrase                Science depends on faith, not religious faith, but the faith that “nature is subject to law”.*

(Another summary with a phrase quoted to preserve the tone of the original.)

*Correct Paraphrase                Even though it cannot be proven that “nature is subject to law,” as long as there is the belief that it is, science is possible.*

(Another summary with a phrase quoted to preserve the tone of the original.)

                 While it is important to document sources of your research, not all external data or information needs to be documented.  Well-known facts (for example, Christmas falls on the 25th of December), well-documented information that is consistent across different sources (for example, the World Wide Web was the brainchild of Briton Tim Berners-Lee), and common-knowledge says and proverbs (for example, “the pot calling the kettle black”) all do not require the documentation of sources. [[5]](#footnote-6)

Other Forms of Plagiarism

            Besides the failure to provide proper credit to sources, other forms of plagiarism include:[[6]](#footnote-7)

* Copying all or portions of other student’s papers.
* Handing in paper acquired from a “term paper mill”, fraternity file, or a friend as your own work.
* Copying answers from your text.

 There is NO excuse for Plagiarism

             Whether it was intentional or not, there is no excuse for plagiarism.  As an Missouri State student, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are aware, understand, and adhere to the rules and regulations of the University.  It is your duty and responsibility to be familiar with and practice correct documentation methods whenever research is part of your written assignments.  If this information is new or if you have never had to deal with these issues before, it is important to put in the effort to find out as much as possible about plagiarism.[[7]](#footnote-8)  In the end, no matter whatever reasons you may have, just bear in mind that once caught, there is just no excuse for plagiarism.

(prepared by Fang-Piau Kao, former student, MBA program)

1. Campbell/Ballou/Slade, *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers* (8th Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Campbell/Ballou/Slade, *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers* (8th Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Campbell/Ballou/Slade, *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers* (8th Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. *Bear Facts: Student Handbook 96/97* (Missouri State: Office of Student Activities and the Department of Residence Life and Services, 1996), 132-33.  For more information on Missouri State’s stance on plagiarism and academic dishonesty, refer to the handbook under the sections of *Academic Policies* and *Student Policies.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Campbell/Ballou/Slade, *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers* (8th Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *Bear Facts: Student Handbook 96/97* (Missouri State: Office of Student Activities and the Department of Residence Life and Services, 1996), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Students can start by looking at the “Bear Facts: Student Handbook 96/97” and at the same time, refer to various books that deal with writing of papers and reports like the publication “*Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers*” that was used as a reference in producing this document.  This document serves only as an overview and is not meant to provide a complete nor comprehensive guide as to the correct ways to provide documentation to source materials. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)