



Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism

Mark Twain and...kidnapping

“Adam was the only man who, when he said a good thing, knew that nobody had said it before him.” — Mark Twain

Lucky Adam. He never had to cite anything. The rest of us, however, don't have that option. We must acknowledge and cite our sources of scholarship or risk charges of plagiarism. The word, in fact, means kidnapper, from the Latin *plagiarius* (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 30), and there are penalties for those who “kidnap” other people's ideas and use them as their own. It's the academic kiss of death.

Let's be blunt

As an engineer-in-training, you need to know that plagiarism has consequences beyond your own prospects and reputation—it also damages your institution and the honest members of your profession by loosening the bonds of trust that tie us all together.

How does the University of Iowa define plagiarism?

The University of Iowa has strict guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism. The following are excerpts taken directly from the Student Academic Handbook, which is posted on the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences web site

(<https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code>).

(Note that we have credited our source.)

- Presentation of the ideas of others without credit to the source
- Use of direct quotations without quotation marks and without credit to the source
- Paraphrasing without credit to the source
- Participation in a group project which presents plagiarized material
- Failure to provide adequate citations for material obtained through electronic research
- Downloading and submitting work from electronic databases without citation
- Submitting material created/written by someone else as one's own
- Accepting credit for a group project without doing one's share
- Submitting the same paper in more than one course without the knowledge and approval of the instructors involved

How to avoid plagiarism

“Quotations.” The following is the rule of thumb concerning quotations. Any time you use more than three words in a row from another source, you must put those words in quotes. That quotation must then be directly followed by a citation.

Paraphrasing or the art of rephrasing other's phrases. Paraphrasing means that you have taken someone else's ideas, concepts or language and put them in your own words. Since writers often build on other people's ideas or borrow from other people's work to support their own scholarship, this practice is perfectly acceptable. HOWEVER, you must give credit where credit is due. If you use someone else's material and rewrite it in your own words, you must provide a citation every time you paraphrase.

ASK! If you have any questions about documenting or citing material, ask questions. Here at the College of Engineering, you can contact the Hanson Center. Our peer tutors and professional staff are here to help you with documentation and citation questions.