To Cite or Not to Cite?
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.

Plagiarism in the news

Plagiarism is a hot topic these days, and with good reason; we live in a copy-and-paste world of electronic documents that makes plagiarizing "easy." Let's assume that a student instinctively knows that stealing a passage from an engineering textbook or a printed journal is a serious (and punishable) mistake. Now imagine the same student finding a similar passage by means of a search engine on the Internet; is the constraint against theft as powerful? It should be but evidence suggests that when it comes to citing sources, many students view the Internet through a weaker pair of ethical lenses—which may account for the recent upsurge in reports of plagiarism.

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

(http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml).

(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

A source for sources. The Center for Technical Communication has elected to use the American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style for all the written assignments we evaluate. No style is "better" than the other; be it MLA or APA, the key is to stay consistent and give credit where credit is due. What follows is a list of references for four inexpensive, spiral-bound handbooks that offer concise writing tips along with APA and other citation guidelines.

Lunsford, A. (2002) *EasyWriter*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
DiYanni R., & Hoy II P. (2001) *The Scribner essentials for writers*. Boston: Allyn and
    Bacon.
Raimes, A. (2000) *Pocket keys for writers*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
Alred, G., Brusaw, C., & Oliu, W. (2002) *The technical writer's companion* (3rd ed.).
    Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

"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. The easiest way is to cite parenthetically. This means that you put the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number inside a pair of parentheses. If there is no author, put the first three or four words of the title of the article or book in quotes, followed by the date and the page number. If there is no date or page number, leave them out. Place the parenthetical citation after the quote but before the period at the end of the sentence.

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 after that paraphrased information every time you paraphrase. However, to make it easier to document correctly, you can use parenthetical citation here, too.

O what a tangled web we weave. Material on the Internet often doesn't list an author and frequently seems to be whirling anonymously through cyberspace. Nevertheless, it belongs to someone--an individual, a publication, or an organization. <u>Therefore, any material you take from the Internet must also be acknowledged</u>. Suggestion: check out the APA guideline link on <u>CTC's</u> web site for information on correctly citing Internet material.

Let's be graphic about graphics. Any time you use someone else's design, graphics, illustration, or photograph, you must cite that material, too. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but *whose* picture? Let your reader know. Cite the source next to the caption that describes the graphic.

ASK! If you have any questions about documenting or citing material, ask questions. Here at the College of Engineering, you can check with the <u>CTC</u>. They have individuals who can help you with documentation and citation questions.

A final thought. Better to cite too often than not often enough. The road to academic hell is paved with plagiarized papers.