

# How to Avoid Plagiarizing

Psychology 105

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## **“Plagiarize:**

*“TRANSITIVE VERB: 1. To use and pass off (the ideas or writings of another) as one's own. 2. To appropriate for use as one's own passages or ideas from (another).*

*“INTRANSITIVE VERB: To put forth as original to oneself the ideas or words of another.”  
(American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).*

These notes are written in order to help you avoid plagiarism. Sometimes plagiarism is deliberate, done in the hopes that you've found something so obscure that the teacher won't recognize that it has been copied. Sometimes it is accidental, as when you make a statement that you read somewhere, but don't remember where, and you leave out the source [you can look for it] or you “just forgot” [don't] to put in a citation.

Deliberate plagiarism is dishonest. Accidental plagiarism is sloppy scholarship. When you write papers for your college courses, you should make a strong effort to make sure that you credit the sources of your words and your ideas. If you fail to do so and you get caught, the consequences are usually severe.

Some students plagiarize because they don't want to put out the effort to do the work. They think, “Why write a paper myself when I can get one that's already been written?” They may get caught, resulting a zero on the paper, or an F in the course, or they may even be kicked out of school. Or they may get away with it... in the short term. What they have to live with is the lost opportunity to learn, the lost opportunity to bolster their self-confidence by doing something challenging. They are left with the nagging feeling that they had to cheat in order to succeed, something that doesn't help much in building one's self-esteem.

Some students plagiarize not because they are lazy, but because they lack confidence in their own thought processes, such that everyone else's ideas look better than their own. But they don't want to appear “unoriginal,” so they copy someone else's ideas and present them as their own. I can't speak for all teachers, but speaking for myself, I'd much prefer for a student to rephrase and give credit for ideas that they got from another source than to present someone else's ideas as their own in hopes that their paper will appear to contain more “original thought.” What is more important to me, especially in introductory classes, is the ability to read, organize, digest, critically evaluate and present information that they have just learned. It's great when they can integrate their own ideas with this information, but “original thinking” is not an absolute must. And anyhow, most people require years of study before they are able to make an original contribution to a field.

So my advice to you, and what I demand in my classes, is that you avoid plagiarism, that you give credit to your sources for your materials and ideas, both when you quote them and when you paraphrase them. Here are a few examples of the correct way to do this, and corresponding examples of plagiarism.

There are two steps involved in correctly citing materials and ideas in written work: (In this class we will use the format prescribed by the American Psychological Association. See <http://furpaw.com/psy105> , "Citations in written assignments" for more information about this format.)

1. Place a **brief citation** in the text next to the material that contains the quote or idea that you are discussing.
2. Place a **complete reference** to the material at the end of your paper.

Examples refer to the following two paragraphs, which are taken from a paper written by Abraham Maslow. Portions that are underlined are used in the examples.

“For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined very simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waved aside as fripperies which are useless since they fail to fill the stomach. Such a man may fairly be said to live by bread alone.

“It cannot possibly be denied that such things are true but their *generality* can be denied. Emergency conditions are, almost by definition, rare in the normally functioning peaceful society. That this truism can be forgotten is due mainly to two reasons. First, rats have few motivations other than physiological ones, and since so much of the research upon motivation has been made with these animals, it is easy to carry the rat-picture over to the human being. Secondly, it is too often not realized that culture itself is an adaptive tool, one of whose main functions is to make the physiological emergencies come less and less often. In most of the known societies, chronic extreme hunger of the emergency type is rare, rather than common. In any case, this is still true in the United States. The average American citizen is experiencing appetite rather than hunger when he says "I am [p. 375] hungry." He is apt to experience sheer life-and-death hunger only by accident and then only a few times through his entire life” (Maslow, 1943, 374-375).

**brief citation.**

**Examples:**

**Correctly quoted:** The material below that is taken word-for-word from Maslow’s article is shown in quotes, and the citation credits the author and gives the page number from which the quote was taken.

According to Maslow, a chronically hungry man “tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating.” (Maslow, 1943, 374).

**Plagiarized direct quote:** The material below is taken word-for-word from Maslow's article with no citation. Quotes and a citation are BOTH necessary, but neither is given. (Portions that need to be quoted and cited are in *italics*.)

*A chronically hungry man tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating.*

**Correctly paraphrased:** The material below gives credit to the author of the article (Maslow) AND provides a citation for it as the source of the ideas. Both are necessary. Note that you do not need to provide a page number if you are paraphrasing or restating the ideas of an author, without directly quoting him or her.

Maslow states that there is a difference between hunger in the sense of feeling like you need to eat, and extreme, chronic hunger, which is on the borderline of starvation. Hunger of the latter type is rare-to-nonexistent in the lives of most people in the United States (Maslow, 1943).

← **brief citation.**

**Plagiarized paraphrase:** The material below takes Maslow's ideas, restates them, but gives neither credit nor citation (both are required).

There is a difference between hunger in the sense of feeling like you need to eat, and extreme, chronic hunger, which is on the borderline of starvation. Hunger of the latter type is rare-to-nonexistent in the lives of most people in the United States.

**Complete references** should be given at the end of your paper. Below are the references that I used and cited in these notes. Note that they correspond to the brief citations in the text.

**NOTE** - for each complete reference, there should be at least one brief reference in the text, so that the reader can see from where you got each idea that you cite. And for each brief reference in the text, there should be a complete reference at the end of the paper. Sometimes you will have more than one brief reference per complete reference – such as when you quote or paraphrase several different parts of that reference.

### References

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*: Fourth Edition (2000). Retrieved April 2, 2006, from <http://www.bartleby.com/61/43/P0344300.html>

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396. Retrieved April 2, 2006, from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>