

Background

Each year, the Graduate Honor System (GHS) deals with cases of plagiarism, many of which involve students who did not realize that they were in violation of the Graduate Honor Code. Some students may not be aware of the writing standards at Virginia Tech, but it is each student's personal responsibility to learn what is expected in his or her academic work. This guide is intended to increase awareness of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. It is by no means an exhaustive document. Please read over this information and consult your advisor or instructor about how to incorporate appropriate standards in your writing.

Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating, which the *GHS Constitution* defines as "copying of the language, structure, idea, and/or thoughts of another and claiming or attempting to imply that it is one's own original work." Some of the cases referred to the honor system include sentences, paragraphs, or entire sections that are copied nearly verbatim from another source. With thousands of sources available electronically, it has become increasingly easy for students to paste portions of source material directly into their own papers. For clarity, we note that the same standards apply to all source documents, whether they are published in paper, distributed electronically, or obtained in any other way. Rules regarding plagiarism also apply to drawings, laboratory reports, computer programs, and other products of academic effort.

Students found guilty of plagiarism sometimes claim that they could not find a better way to express ideas than the words chosen by the original author; therefore, they thought it appropriate to copy or only slightly modify the words used in the original source. This often happens when the students involved do not have strong English skills and/or when the topic is quite technical in nature. It is understood that many

graduate students do not have the language capability to write as well as published authors, and professors do not expect perfect writing from students.

The first step in avoiding plagiarism is to avoid directly copying any phrases, sentences, or other portions from source materials. The *only* time that it is permissible to copy directly from another source is when the material is indicated as a direct quotation by enclosing it in quotation marks and referencing its source. Student papers should use few of these direct quotations, and the majority of the paper should be written entirely by the student. When writing a literature review or a summary of other materials, you should read the material, summarize it *in your own words*, and properly reference the works discussed. The same standard applies to *all* papers, whether they are written for a class report or for a paper that is published.

However, even papers that avoid such direct copying may still contain examples of plagiarism. In some cultures that do not emphasize intellectual property, it is acceptable to include material from another source, perhaps changing very little of the original quote, as long as the writer documents the source. This is not the standard at Virginia Tech and throughout the United States.

A common form of plagiarism is a paraphrase attempt that changes only some of the words of the original, but not the sentence structure. In order to avoid plagiarism, both the wording and sentence structure must be changed, so that the paraphrase does not sound like the original material. Therefore, although the ideas come from someone else (thus requiring documentation of the source), the paraphrase should be your own work. You can avoid a sentence-by-sentence paraphrase by being selective about what to include and by rearranging the order of the ideas. Finally, use care to distinguish your own ideas from the paraphrase itself, so that the reader can tell where the paraphrase ends and where your own textual material resumes.

Paraphrasing indicates mature writing, as you demonstrate that you can integrate your

understanding of the original ideas with an ability to express them in different grammatical constructions. It takes time and effort to thoroughly understand source material, especially if the material is new to the reader.

If your attempt at paraphrasing involves just changing a few words here and there, you should instead quote the author's work directly and cite it accordingly. If a summary of the work is required, try setting the source aside and summarizing it from memory. It might take more effort to obtain such a thorough understanding of the source material, but it will be worth it to avoid committing plagiarism, which is a serious offense in the academic community. Additionally, if the source is important enough to be included in a literature review, a full comprehension of the material should be attempted in any case, not just to avoid plagiarism.

Consider the following source material

*"People sometimes regard the written word with special reverence, even going so far as to believe that something must be true if it occurs in print. Since most people do not write books or articles that get printed, there is perhaps a natural tendency to regard printed words with wonder or admiration and to forget that they carry no guarantee of truth or quality. False or stupid things can be printed as easily as anything else, and often are." (Ronald Langacker, *Language and Its Structure*, 2nd ed., NY: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1973, p. 60)*

Unacceptable paraphrase attempt = PLAGIARISM

"Ronald Langacker pointed out (1973:60) that people sometimes have faith in the written word; for this reason, they go so far as to believe that if something occurs in print, it must be true and they regard it with admiration. Since there are a few people who write books and articles that get printed, most people have a tendency to regard printed words with reverence and forget that they carry no guarantee of truth or quality. In fact, false or stupid things can be printed as easily as anything else, but people do not realize that."

Acceptable paraphrase

"According to Langacker (1973:60), owing to a lack of experience in publishing, many people have such high regard for printed material that they automatically believe what they read.

However, the form in which an idea is presented, whether in print or not, does not determine its validity. Langacker's remarks serve as a caution to readers who..."

Guidelines for Quotations and Paraphrases

For Direct Quotations

- Enclose all copied material in quotation marks and indicate its source with page number.
- Use direct quotations sparingly. The vast majority of the paper should be original work.

For Paraphrases

- Change the form of the original, including sentence structure and vocabulary (if possible).
- Reference the original source material.
- Avoid paraphrasing sentence by sentence. A good practice is to write the paraphrase without looking at the source.
- Be selective in what you decide to paraphrase. Be as concise as you can.
- Remember that although the ideas come from someone else, thus requiring your documentation of the source, the paraphrase is your own work.

Paraphrases must meet the following criteria:

- Accurately represent the original meaning and emphasis.
- Sound different from the original source material.
- Properly documented (i.e. the source of the material is referenced).

The Center for Academic Integrity

<http://www.academicintegrity.org>

Virginia Tech is one of over 300 member institutions of the Center for Academic Integrity. As a member institution, access to the Center's forums, listserv and research projects are available to students, faculty and administrators who value and wish to explore issues related to academic integrity. The site includes a searchable database of over 700 articles related to honor violations.

Download. Steal. Copy. Cheating at the University

The following is an excerpt from an article that appeared in the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, "Download. Steal. Copy. Cheating at the University," By Mary Clarke-Pearson (November 27, 2001) that deals with the complexity of the honor system and plagiarism:

"Students are growing up with technology that makes Internet plagiarism simple. It is easy to use, and almost all written sources are available on the Internet," McCabe said (Dr. Donald McCabe, founder of the Center for Academic Integrity). "The numbers are creeping up, and I would expect them to increase significantly as time goes by."

To top it off, many students do not consider what they are doing unethical. "Some students actually believe that they're not doing anything wrong," McCabe said.

"They have this attitude that they are doing research. They don't think that they need to cite because everything on the Internet is public information."

These days, universities across the nation are struggling to confront and combat this new form of plagiarism. While part of the solution lies in redefining the concept of academic integrity, a lot of it involves preventing "cut and paste plagiarism" before it occurs.

Developing an honor code that clearly lays out a university's standards for honesty and the consequences for violating these rules has been a good starting point, according to McCabe. His research shows that academic honor codes effectively reduce cheating. In several university surveys over the past decade, McCabe concluded that serious test cheating on campuses with honor codes is typically one-third to one-half lower than on campuses that do not have honor codes.

"I really think it matters what sort of community you create on your campus and how students perceive the issue," McCabe said. "What an honor code does is to transfer the issue of the responsibility to the students. Honor codes have students thinking about the issue and struggling with the issue. They get some moral education."

For questions about plagiarism, contact the Graduate Honor System
(540) 231-4558 | ghs@vt.edu

Learn more about plagiarism:
<http://www.plagiarism.org>

Virginia Tech Writing Center
Newman Library
<http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/writing-center/>

For more information on two popular citation conventions, visit:

Modern Language Association (MLA):
<http://www.mla.org/>

American Psychological Association (APA): www.apastyle.org

Take advantage of iThenticate to review your own writing for potential plagiarism:

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/what-you-need-to-graduate/ithenticate-for-students.html>

Consult your advisor or instructor with regard to which citation method you should use.

Citation help is also available at:
<http://citationmachine.net/>

Avoiding Plagiarism

A Guide for Graduate Students



**It's Your Honor
It's Your System!**

The Graduate Honor System

 **VirginiaTech**
Graduate School