

Preventing Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of the *words* and *ideas* of another author without appropriately crediting the original source. In other words, when students take another writer’s words and ideas without crediting the source, **they are committing plagiarism.**

Plagiarism is often unintentional. However, it is nevertheless unacceptable. To avoid plagiarism, always credit your sources.

When Is Crediting a Source Unnecessary?

As Purdue University Global’s “A Guide to Plagiarism and Paraphrasing” explains, it is not necessary “to cite information that’s considered *common knowledge* in the public domain” (emphasis added). For example, if you were writing on the American Revolution, you would not need to credit any author to say the United States officially declared independence in 1776—that information is common knowledge. On the other hand, if you are dealing with more specific information, then you must give credit to your source.

Below is an example of a quote and a student’s (plagiarized) attempt at paraphrasing the quote:

Original Quote	“While the Macedonian commanders reacted to Alexander’s death by summarily canceling all his future plans, the Greeks saw this move, and the chaotic uncertainty it engendered, as a perfect occasion to revolt against Macedonian domination.” – Peter Green, <i>The Hellenistic Age: A Short History</i> , 2008, p. 25.
Inferior Paraphrasing Attempt	While the Macedonian commanders reacted to Alexander’s death by immediately calling off all his plans for the future, the Greeks saw this move, and the chaotic ambiguity it created, as a perfect occasion to revolt against the domination of the Macedonians.

Here, the student has committed plagiarism because (1) he/she failed to credit the author and (2) closely copied the language of the original quote. Compare the failed paraphrasing attempt with the following superior example.

Superior Paraphrasing Attempt	In the book <i>The Hellenistic Age: A Short History</i> , Peter Green notes that, after the death of Alexander the Great, a subsequent “chaotic uncertainty” (which was the result of the Macedonian cancellation of Alexander’s now-forsaken plans) quickly led the Greeks to decide to rebel against their Macedonian rulers (Green 25).
--------------------------------------	--

In sum, you must always credit a source unless its information is widely available. As you write, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Did I properly introduce each of my sources by including the source’s title and the author’s name (if available)?
2. Did I enclose all direct quotes with quotation marks and include in-text citations at the end of the sentences?
3. In the case of paraphrasing, did I do my best to put the quote in my own words, avoiding copying the author verbatim?
4. Did I make sure to use in-text citations even when I paraphrased the source’s original information?

If you are concerned about potential plagiarism, talk to your instructor or a tutor.