TRiO’s Plagiarism Workshop:
How to Avoid Plagiarism
If you’re a college student, and if you’re reading this you probably are, then I’m sure you’ve wondered at some point in your academic career – what is plagiarism really and how can I make sure I’m not accused of it? This is a very good question because avoiding plagiarism is something you should become familiar with early in your college experience.

First let’s take a look at an example of accused plagiarism with which you might be familiar.
Weird Al vs. Coolio: An Example of Plagiarism in the Media

- In 1996 Weird Al Yankovic released “Amish Paradise,” a parody of Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise.” Now, Weird Al thought he had received approval to create an alternate version of Coolio’s song because he had his agency contact Coolio’s representatives who, in a casual verbal agreement, said Coolio would approve of the parody. However, whether or not Coolio himself was actually asked about the parody is in question. Coolio said he never gave his approval. Thinking he was in the clear, Weird Al created and released “Amish Paradise,” and it was a hit. But the backlash resulting from Coolio’s anger was a disaster. Coolio threatened legal action against Weird Al. Even though parodies are not usually considered “plagiarism” (since it is acknowledged and the audience is aware that a parody is inherently not an original work) Weird Al still faced the possibility of very real legal threats. In the end, Weird Al agreed to pay royalties to Coolio. Was this final resolution acceptable to Weird Al whose intentions were good and who meant to do everything legally? Yankovic has been quoted as saying, “I doubt I’ll be invited to Coolio’s next birthday party, but at least I can stop wearing that bulletproof vest to the mall” (Weird Al). The final twist to this story, however, comes from the fact that “Gangsta’s Paradise” is itself a take on Stevie Wonder’s “Pastime Paradise.” (And yes, both Weird Al and Coolio did get complete permission from Stevie Wonder to use his song.)
Right about now you may be thinking all this talk about Weird Al’s supposed plagiarism sounds crazy. Is all this hoopla and legal action just a bunch of silliness? While it may seem rather petty, the answer to the previous question is no. Plagiarism, or using someone else’s ideas without their permission, is actually an offense people take very seriously.
Plagiarism at UNR: A Definition

• To make sure all UNR students have the same explanation of plagiarism, its definition is listed in the UNR Course Catalog under the Code of Conduct and Policies - Section III:

  “Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion.”

• To see the full definition from the school’s Code of Conduct, click on the link below:

  (http://www.cis.unr.edu/ecatalog/Default.aspx?article_list_id=11076)
Bruce Ballenger, in his book “The Curious Researcher,” gives a good overview of what can be considered plagiarism as well:

1. Handing in someone else’s work – a downloaded paper from the internet or one borrowed from a friend – and claiming that it’s your own.

2. Using information or ideas that are not common knowledge from any source and failing to acknowledge that source.

3. Handing in the same paper for two different classes.

4. Using the exact language or expressions of a source and not indicating through quotation marks and citation that the language is borrowed.

5. Rewriting a passage from a source with minor substitutions or different words but retaining the same [style] and structure as the original.

As you can see, plagiarism consists of many things. Here are answers to some questions you might have about citation methods.
What is considered common knowledge?

Common knowledge is normally considered information that most of your audience would be familiar with and/or information that can be found in a variety of sources. Common knowledge information does not need to be cited.

Examples of common knowledge:
Alaska is the largest state in the U.S.
Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon.
George Washington was the first president of the U.S.

However, facts that would not be generally known by the public are not considered common knowledge.

Examples of information that are NOT common knowledge:
Over one’s entire adult life, high school graduates earn about 1.2 million dollars while those who hold a bachelor’s degree earn about 2.1 million dollars (Porter). [While this is factual data, it contains information not everyone would be familiar with and should therefore be cited.]

According to astronaut Gene Cernan, a return trip by Americans to the moon’s surface seems unlikely to happen before the year 2020 (Cray). [The idea that we won’t return to the moon until 2020 is someone’s opinion, not a fact. All opinions or interpretations should be cited.]
• **Why should I be punished for turning in my own work – even if it is for two different classes?**

Students are often surprised that they can be penalized for turning in the same paper for two different classes – even if it contains nothing but their own thoughts and ideas. The idea behind this rule is that you need to complete the full amount of work that is assigned for each class. It can be considered a form of cheating to not do the full amount of work for a class by turning in papers you have previously completed. If you have a previously written paper that you feel would apply to an assignment given in a new class, the best thing to do is ask your teacher if he or she would feel comfortable allowing you to use the paper again – possibly adding to the paper for the new class. Some teachers will allow this, others won’t.
Do I have to use both quotation marks and a citation if I am directly quoting a source?

If you are directly quoting a source (i.e. quoting the passage word for word) there are several types of citation that need to take place. The following examples use MLA citation methods.

If an author is giving their opinion, you should give some attribution to them in the sentence itself:
For example —

John Smith makes the claim that…. 

You should next put quotation marks around the words that author used:

John Smith makes the claim that, “deep fried candy bars are a delicious treat.”

Next you should put in citation information at the end of the sentence to show where the information can be located in the future, for example - a page number from a book or a paragraph number from a website:

John Smith makes the claim that, “deep fried candy bars are a delicious treat” (62).

You can also directly quote without including the author’s name in the sentence. However if you do this, you must put the author’s name in the parenthetical citation:
For example —

“Sing to me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending” (Homer 1).

In general, you want to keep your direct quotations to a minimum. Only quote what is truly needed to accurately convey the author’s ideas.
• If I paraphrase a passage, do I still need to cite the source?

Yes. Even if you paraphrase an author’s wording, you MUST still give the author credit for their idea. Just because you are summarizing or paraphrasing someone’s work, does not give you the right to claim their ideas as your own.
What does it mean to rewrite a passage with minor substitutions?

If you paraphrase a passage, that paraphrasing must be in your own words and your own style. You can be accused of plagiarism if you present a passage as a paraphrase or summary when, in fact, it exhibits much of the same style and structure as the original author’s work.

Here are some examples of acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing of Deborah Tannen’s writing as seen in Bruce Ballenger’s book “The Curious Researcher”:

Original Passage
*Distinguishing the message from the metamessage (terms I have adopted from anthropologist Gregory Bateson) is necessary to ensure that family members work things out rather than working each other over. It's frustrating to have the same arguments again and again. But some arguments can be constructive – if family members use them to articulate and understand the metamessages they are intending and hearing.*

Unacceptable Paraphrase
Sometimes family members can have the same argument over and over and not realize that they’re arguing about two different things. Linguist Deborah Tannen writes that it’s important to distinguish between the message and the metamessage; a message may have a simple intention but it is heard as something quite different, something the speaker didn’t intend at all. By articulating what was said and what was heard, arguments can be constructive rather than frustrating.
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Ballenger lists several reasons why the paraphrase above is unacceptable:

The line “the same argument over and over” is used in the first sentence of the paraphrase. This is very similar to the style of Tannen's wording “the same arguments again and again.”

There are no quotation marks around the phrase “the message and the metamessage”

The paraphrase uses the same term “constructive” that was in the original but doesn’t put quotation marks around it.

The word “articulating” was used in the paraphrase without quotation marks. This is too close to the word “articulate” which was used in the original.

Finally, there is no end citation listing the author’s name and the page number the information came from.

(This work adapted from Bruce Ballenger’s book, The Curious Researcher. New York: Pearson, 2004.)
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Acceptable Paraphrase
Old family arguments may not really be about what family members have always thought they were about. Linguist Deborah Tannen writes that it’s important to distinguish between “the message and the metamessage”; a message may have a simple intention but is heard as something quite different, something the speaker didn’t intend at all. Even old family arguments can be “constructive,” says Tannen, if family members are careful to talk openly about this difference (Tannen 2).

When you are paraphrasing, it is always a good idea to read the author's original work, and then mentally process what they mean. Try and put the passage into your own words without looking back at the original. If you don’t look back at the original until after your paraphrase is complete, you are less likely to use the same words and phrases.
Plagiarism at UNR: Consequences

Plagiarism is a very serious offense on a University campus and whether intentional or accidental, it can result in a multitude of punishments. The UNR Course Catalog lists some of the punishments for plagiarism as:

(1) canceling the student's enrollment in the class without a grade
(2) filing a final grade of “F”
(3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question
(4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper. A student may also be subject to discipline for academic dishonesty pursuant to the provisions of the Board of Regents.

To see a full list of UNR’s procedures for dealing with plagiarism, click on the link below: (http://www.cis.unr.edu/ecatalog/Default.aspx?article_list_id=11076)
Methods of Citation:

There are several formats used to cite information. A few of the most common are listed below:

APA (American Psychological Association) : commonly used in psychology, education, and nursing
MLA (Modern Language Association): commonly used in literature and the humanities
Chicago Style: commonly used in history

It is always best to ask your teacher which method of citation they prefer.
Good Sources to Help with Citation

It is a very good idea to invest some money in buying a good citation manual to use as a reference. You’ll save yourself a lot of panic and worry by having a citation manual on hand. Some manuals you might want to consider include:

The Everyday Writer by Andrea A. Lunsford. Published by Bedford / St. Martin’s.
Cite Right: A Quick Guide to Citation Styles by Charles Lipson. Published by University of Chicago Press.

The TRiO office has some of the books listed above, and you can use them in the offices or check them out for free. The UNR Library also has citation manuals for students to use, and you can normally find a couple versions of citation manuals in the UNR bookstore.

The UNR Library also has a link on their home page that connects the user to several electronic citation processors and guides. The link is titled, “style guides for research papers.” Some of these cites allow you to plug in citation information to create citations for you (see the link below). Noodle Tools Express is a pretty good citation creator.

http://www.library.unr.edu/depts/reference/webref/style.html

However, you should be warned – electronic cites that allow you to plug in information to create citations for you are only as good as the person using them. If you are unfamiliar with the information the processor asks for or where that information can be found, your citations can turn out incorrect.
Works Cited

(Here I am including a list of works I referenced in order to create this presentation. You should always include a works cited list if you borrowed any information to use in your paper.)


By now you should know a little bit about the basics of avoiding plagiarism – what plagiarism is, what does and does not need to be cited, how to give credit to a source in the body of your text, how to paraphrase properly, and the location of information that can help you create citations.

You may now be directed to the surveymonkey link to take a quiz on what you have learned about plagiarism.

Good luck with your writing endeavors!!