

# Understanding Common Knowledge

Understanding Plagiarism: Part I

# Understanding Plagiarism

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- ▶ Part I—Understanding Common Knowledge
- ▶ Part II—An Overview of Plagiarism

## Writing Proper Paraphrases

- ▶ Additional Resources
  - ▶ The Methodist University Writing Center
  - ▶ *Writing Intensive: Essentials for College Writers* from McGraw-Hill



# Academic Writing and Citation

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- ▶ Academic writing is underpinned by research and critical thought.
- ▶ All sources must be cited.



# Examples of Citable Knowledge

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**All writing, ideas, or information that are not your own must be cited.**

Examples of this material include

- ▶ Other people's research, including statistics.
- ▶ Another person's exact words must be clearly set out as such.
- ▶ Dates that are not commonly known or are disputed.



## The Exception to Citation: Common Knowledge

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- ▶ The one exception to that rule is common knowledge.
- ▶ However, what constitutes common knowledge is not always predetermined.
- ▶ Carefully consider all citations in your work.



## Common Knowledge Cautions

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- ▶ Remember to check with your professor. Some professors want students to cite all information that comes from research the students conduct.

Or

- ▶ When in doubt, cite!



# Is It Common Knowledge?

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One of the standard definitions of common knowledge: information or ideas that the average educated person would know and find credible without having to turn to references.

Examples:

- ▶ The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
- ▶ The position of the North Star has been used to navigate the ocean.



## More Examples of Common Knowledge

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- ▶ Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.
- ▶ Oil is lighter than water.
- ▶ The American system of commerce is capitalistic.





## Another Definition of Common Knowledge

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Pearson, a publisher of texts for higher education, further lists possible categories of common knowledge to include “widely known information about current events, famous people, geographical facts, or familiar history...”



# Classifying Common Knowledge

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- ▶ Lake Superior is one of the five Great Lakes of North America.
- ▶ Amelia Earhart was a lauded American aviator.
- ▶ The American Civil War began in 1861.
- ▶ Without loss of his life or any other, Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger landed a commercial airliner on the Hudson River in New York.



## Other Factors in Determining Common Knowledge: Your Knowledge Level

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- ▶ When you are new to a discipline, you need to be very cautious about citation.
- ▶ “*The Glass Menagerie* was the first successful play for playwright Tennessee Williams.”
- ▶ Cite or not?



## Test Yourself—Common Knowledge or Not?

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- ▶ The Glass Menagerie is regarded as one of several works to have supplanted European sensibilities in the American theater, communicating universal themes through a distinctly American voice.
- ▶ John F. Kennedy died in 1963.
- ▶ Indira Gandhi, the first woman prime minister of India, died in 1984.



## Test Yourself—Common Knowledge or Not?

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- ▶ An estimate of the undocumented immigrants in the United States is 11.4 million people.
- ▶ A recent study indicates that binge drinking in high school is an important predictor of binge drinking in college.



## A Caution: The Internet and The Rule of Three or Five

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- ▶ Sometimes academics and others will use the rule that if information can be found in three or five different sources—the number varies—then students do not have to cite that information.
  
- ▶ Be careful!



## The Internet and The Rule of Three or Five

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- ▶ **This rule cannot be used in a hard and fast way for two reasons.**
  - ▶ It does not consider your audience.
  - ▶ The evolution of the Internet means many versions of the same information or language (often from a scholarly article) may have been cut and pasted into various sites.



## Remember

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### When dealing with citations—

- ▶ Always check with the professor if you have doubts.
- ▶ The best policy: when in doubt, cite the source.





# Examples

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The Russian Revolution occurred in 1917.

There are 500,000 Sikhs in the United States.

*The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* won an Academy Award for Best Picture. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans became concerned with preventing another attack.

Spending more than a short time in near-freezing water can cause rapid hypothermia and death.

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# An Overview of Plagiarism



# What is Plagiarism?

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving proper credit.



# The Importance of Understanding Plagiarism

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According to Matthew Parfitt in his book *Writing In Response*, “Just as there is a certain culture that typically prevails in other American institutions such as churches or the military or high schools...so there is a culture of higher learning”(6).

Knowing the conventions and rules for academic writing is important, and academic integrity (acknowledging others’ ideas in your own work) is an integral part of producing legitimate academic work.

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# Why Plagiarism Matters

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## Who Suffers?

- ▶ The original author, who isn't getting credit for his or her own original thought, research, and work
- ▶ Your classmates, who actually did their own work.
- ▶ Your funders—those people or institutions that are paying for your education
- ▶ You, and your future, by denying yourself the opportunity to learn and develop



## Cheating Yourself

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- ▶ Plagiarism short-circuits several key areas of your development.
- ▶ Critical Thinking
- ▶ Writing Style



# Plagiarism Penalties

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- ▶ Plagiarism is taken seriously at Methodist University.
- ▶ Professors list the penalty for plagiarism on their course syllabi.
- ▶ Because plagiarism is a violation of the Honor Code, students who are suspected of plagiarism will have their names reported to the Honor Board.

Excerpted from *The Yellow Book: Writing and English at Methodist University: Programs, Policies, Procedures*.



# Plagiarism Penalties

A student's standing at Methodist University may be affected by plagiarized work.





# Appropriate Practices

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- ▶ Anything that is written in a paper, book report, or any other assignment must be in the student's own words or else the student must properly and fully cite the source(s).
- ▶ Anything that students copy word for word from another source is a direct quotation.
- ▶ All direct quotations must be shown as such and must be properly documented.

Excerpted from *The Yellow Book: Writing and English at Methodist University: Programs, Policies, Procedures* and the *Methodist University Student Handbook*.

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# Appropriate Practices

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- ▶ Students must also rewrite paraphrased material in a style and language that are distinctively their own; merely rearranging the words found in a scholarly source is plagiarism.
- ▶ Material that is paraphrased must be documented.
- ▶ Students may not submit as their own or copy any part of their papers from another student's paper, a paper they have bought, or anything written by a friend or relative. Students may not use an outline written by somebody else.

Excerpted from *The Yellow Book: Writing and English at Methodist University: Programs, Policies, Procedures* and the *Methodist University Student Handbook*.

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# More Appropriate Practices

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- ▶ Students may not submit work previously submitted to another class either at Methodist or any other institution without permission of the instructor.
- ▶ Students may not knowingly permit another student to copy their papers.

Excerpted from *The Yellow Book: Writing and English at Methodist University: Programs, Policies, Procedures*

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# The Limits of Collaborative Work

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- ▶ Your discussion of a subject with other students is usually acceptable when writing papers.
- ▶ However, once you begin writing, the work must be your own. If you borrow an idea from another student's paper, that is plagiarism.
- ▶ A clear authorization of group work is usually given in assignment guidelines. However, if you have any questions, always check with your instructor to see how much collaboration is allowed on any given project.

Excerpted in part from *The Methodist University Student Handbook*

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# Strategies to Avoid Plagiarism

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- ▶ Start early.
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- ▶ Cite your sources.
- ▶ Think of yourself as entering into the scholarly conversation.



# Strategies to Avoid Plagiarism

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- ▶ Review and revise your paper.
  - ▶ Remember unintentional plagiarism is still unacceptable.
- ▶ Have your own ideas.
  - ▶ What is **your** response to what you've read?
- ▶ Always introduce material from a source (whether it is quotation, paraphrase, or summary), and always discuss it afterwards, demonstrating how it supports your points.



# Three Keys to Prevent Plagiarism

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- ▶ Understand the concept of common knowledge (or what not to cite).
- ▶ Practice responsible paraphrasing.
- ▶ Know the rules of citation and quotation.



# Want to Make Sure You Understand?

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- ▶ Evaluate each of the following writing samples or scenarios to determine if those involved have plagiarized.





# Avoid Cut-and-Paste Work

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## Student work:

### Plagiarized or not?

From “Stem Cell Basics” A publication of the National Institute of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services (Updated 2015)

- ▶ **Stem cells have two characteristics, firstly the unspecialized cells that renew themselves through cell division, and secondly under certain conditions they can become specific types of cells (NIH, 1-2, 2015).**
  - ▶ “Stem cells are distinguished from other cell types by two important characteristics. First, they are unspecialized cells capable of renewing themselves through cell division, sometimes after long periods of inactivity. Second, under certain physiologic or experimental conditions, they can be induced to become tissue- or organ-specific cells with special functions.”(1-2)
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# Plagiarism—Proper Paraphrase or Not?

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From page 21 of “The Missing Patriot Debate”

So the Patriot Act debate will focus on at most a handful of provisions in a sweeping law. It will not address many of the most troubling provisions of that law....And even with respect to the few provisions that will be addressed, the most fundamental issues will be skirted. This is attributable to two factors. First, many of the most pernicious aspects of the Patriot Act, and of the "war on terror" generally, affect foreign nationals exclusively, or nearly exclusively. The act's immigration provisions haven't generated the same concern as the surveillance provisions, not because they are less problematic but because they apply only to "them," not "us."

Cole, David. "The Missing Patriot Debate." *Nation* 280.21 (30 May 2005): 18-21. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 3 Nov. 2008.

Several paraphrases from a student paper. In each case, has the student properly paraphrased?

## Example I

According to Cole, there are two reasons why the debate will skirt important issues. The first is that a lot of the most pernicious elements of the Patriot Act, and of the “war on terror,” usually impact foreign nationals entirely (21).

## Example II

Foreign nationals bear the brunt of the Patriot Act’s harmful provisions, so most of the debate ignores those provisions (Cole 21).



# Too Much Information?

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Mark, Rasheed, and Diana are working on a research paper for English. Diana and Mark don't start the paper as soon as they should. A week before the paper is due, the three students get into a discussion in the café.

Rasheed's topic sounds perfect to Diana and Mark, so they review his notes, read his rough draft, and get links to his database sources. Diana and Mark each add one source of their own. Have they plagiarized?



# Acceptable Assistance?

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Rasheed asks Lisa to read his first essay in his history class. He's had to cite three sources for the paper.

The discussion question—

Does Lisa's feedback (as outlined to the right) impact the academic integrity of Rasheed's paper?

Lisa makes several comments about Rasheed's paper.

1. His first paragraph is too long.
2. She thinks he should consider switching his second and third paragraphs.
3. Two of his sources are not going to be acceptable to the professor. Lisa had Rasheed's professor last semester and knows that book reviews are not acceptable sources.



# What To Cite

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- ▶ Remember, when you employ others' words or ideas, you should cite that material—no matter if those words or ideas come from
  - ▶ Scholarly journals
  - ▶ Magazines
  - ▶ Web sites
  - ▶ Letters
  - ▶ Handouts
  - ▶ Films—DVD or Web based
  - ▶ Newspapers
  - ▶ Email correspondence
  - ▶ One-on-one interviews
  - ▶ Pictures, diagrams, or charts—reprinted or paraphrased
- ▶ In short, if the work comes from anyone else's ideas or words, any medium matters. Cite the source.



# Works Cited

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