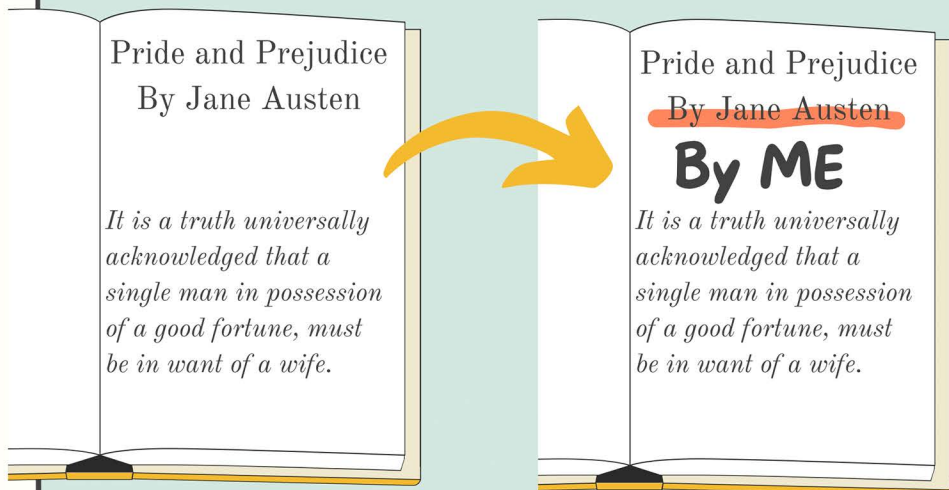


plagiarism

"For Pete's sake, please don't."

We all know what plagiarism is, right?



This is so obviously bad, I shouldn't need to tell you not to do it.

plagiarism...

...comes from the Latin "plagiarius" meaning "kidnapper"^a

When you take someone else's words or ideas and pass them off as your own, you are essentially kidnapping them.

HELP.

I would never.

Maybe not intentionally, but are you sure you know what counts as plagiarism? Remember: if you are representing someone else's work (ideas or words) as your own, without giving credit, it's plagiarism.

ASK YOURSELF:

You're good!

Are all the words and ideas my own?

YES

NO

YES

Do I use citations and quotes to clearly show what's mine and what's not?

Let's try it out

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 1813).

Own words/ideas?

NO

Citations/Quotes?

YES!

This one is fine! The copied portion is in quotes, and Austen is cited.

In the early 1800s, *it was a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife* (Austen, 1813).

Own words/ideas?

NO

Citations/Quotes?

NOT REALLY!

Yikes. Although Austen is cited, it's not clear that most of the words come from her text. PLAGIARISM. Try again.

Austen commented on societal assumptions about the degree to which rich guys were on the prowl, noting that they "*must be in want of a wife*" (Austen, 1813).

Own words/ideas?

Partly

Citations/Quotes

Yes!

The part taken directly from Austen is quoted, and there is an appropriate citation. The rest of the text is our own thoughts/words. GOOD JOB!



Challenge time...

In the early 1800s, it was a fact entirely believed *that a single* guy with a lot of money *must be* looking for a life partner (Austen, 1813).

Own words/ideas?

NO!

Citations/Quotes

NO!!!!

This is thesaurus trickery. Very few of Austen's words remain, but we have kidnapped her idea. Although we cited Austen, a reader wouldn't know that the idea is all hers.

PLAGIARISM.

But the software says it's fine!

Here's the thing. Plagiarism software (Grammarly, TurnItIn, etc.) probably won't detect this example as plagiarism. But it's still plagiarism, and it's still wrong. And it can still get you in a ton of trouble (see below).

Can we fix it? Yes, by making the idea our own:

In the early 1800s, as in the present day, the pressures on young people to couple up were intense. The discussion of "*single [men] of good fortune*" and their dating habits was a popular pastime (Austen, 1813).

These examples may feel pretty obvious--but there is genuinely some grey area. Here's an interesting one:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a hungry college student in possession of a few dollars must be in want of a taco.

Here we're using the well-known structure of this quote to say something totally different--not about marriage, but about tacos. In my view: not plagiarism, but an homage.

Wait, what do you mean "in trouble"?

Two big reasons not to plagiarize:

REASON #1: You will get caught and there will be consequences. When plagiarism shows up in published works, it has resulted in retractions, major embarrassment, and in the worst cases, ruined careers. When it shows up in student work, it can result in students getting kicked out of programs.

No kidding.

Sidebar: Ask any teacher and they will tell you that they have found MANY examples of plagiarism. It sucks, and it's SO EASY to find. Finding this stuff is one of the worst parts of the job. Nobody is happy to find plagiarism.

REASON #2: It is the wrong thing to do. But you know that, right?

OH NO.

At this point some of you are probably panicking. Have you been plagiarizing? Maybe.

Everybody probably does a tiny bit of it unintentionally. Some people do a lot of it, intentionally. Let's prevent it from happening in your writing again. If you follow these tips and your heart is pure, you have little to fear.

Tip #1: Take notes in your own words. Resist the temptation to cut and paste great sentences from papers into your notes. If you paraphrase in your own words at the note-taking stage, you are pretty safe when you go to write the paper.

Pride and Prejudice
By Jane Austen

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

NOTES: JA has some HOT TAKES on page 1: everybody wonders who the rich guys will marry.

Tip #2: So perfect? Quote it.

Sometimes an author has said something so perfectly that we can't improve upon it. Here's a great place for a direct quote, with the source of the quote clearly indicated.

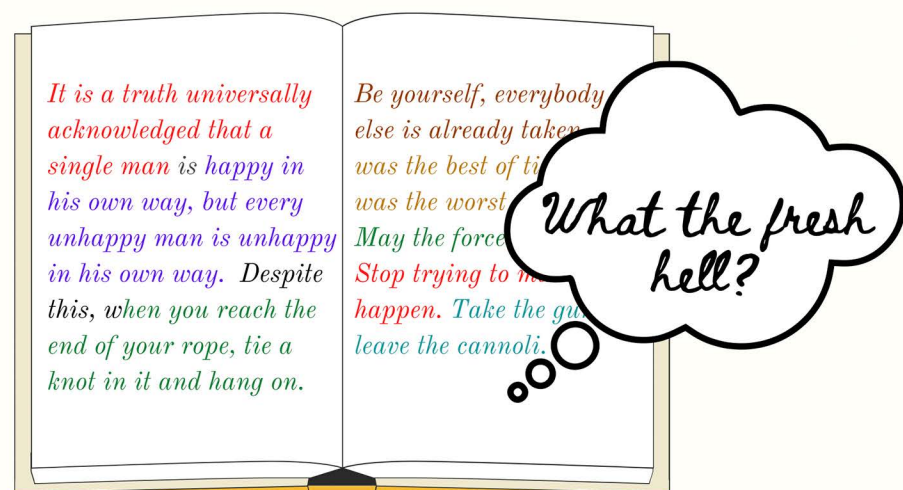
Why do we enjoy reading advice columns? A compelling text needs tension. And as Tolstoy put it, "...every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (1878).

Tip #3: If you say something, cite something^b

Be sure that you are citing sources for not just words, but ideas, and that claims (unless they are fresh from your brain or truly common knowledge--e.g. "water is wet") have a citation attached to them. (Bonus Rule: Don't cite sources you haven't read.)

In this paper I will argue {*compelling new point of view*}. This argument is consistent with the data showing {*supporting fact #1*} (Ngyuen et al., 2004), {*supporting fact #2*} (Martinez, et al., 2010), and {*supporting fact #3*} (Thompson et al., 2020).

Tip #4: Don't worry so much about sounding smart. This one is hard. One reason writers find themselves plagiarizing is out of despair that their style won't be fancy enough, or as eloquent as their sources. Trust me when I say people would far rather know what you think, in your own words, than read a Frankensteined paper stitched together from other writers' words.



I think I might need a bit more practice.

These examples are pretty cartoonish. There are great online resources for testing your plagiarism detection skills. Start here:

<https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/>

And if you are worried that your writing has crossed the line, consult a teacher or trusted colleague. They would be **THRILLED** to help you avoid plagiarism. Sometimes there is a judgment call. More complicated issues not discussed here:

Q. What if I take my own words from a different source? Can I do that?

A: Really you still can't. It's called "self-plagiarism" If you need to refer to your own argument elsewhere, you can do it in just the same way you might refer to someone else's work. "As we have argued previously (My old paper, 2003)..."

Q. What about situations where it's hard to find a new way to say something?

A: Here people are pretty forgiving. I just put "The capital of Iowa is Des Moines" into Google and got 1,930 hits. Does that mean that we are all plagiarizing each other? Not really--there just aren't that many ways to say something so straightforward.

Q. More of a comment than a question. Writing is already so hard. Why are you trying to make it harder?

A: We get it. Writing IS hard. But you may find that it gets a lot easier when you stop trying to sound just like the sources you are reading, and write in your own voice, with your own ideas. And when you plagiarize, you cheat yourself out of the chance to practice writing for real. This is one of those situations where if you eat your vegetables, you might actually start to like vegetables.

Emily Myers, University of Connecticut, 2022



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