

## **Chapter 10**

# **Paraphrasing and Plagiarism**

### **Why is this chapter important?**

Conventions regarding exactly what constitutes plagiarism vary from country to country. Plagiarism in its simplest terms means cutting and pasting from other studies and papers. It also means taking credit for work that others have done.

Plagiarism includes plagiarizing your own work. In fact, some journals stipulate that you cannot use more than five consecutive words from another paper that you have written.

If a referee thinks you may have plagiarized other people's work or your own, then there is a very high probability that he or she will recommend rejecting your paper. If you commit plagiarism within your university or institute then you may risk expulsion.

This chapter is designed to help you understand what is and what is not plagiarism, and how to paraphrase other people's work (but always giving a reference).

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### What the experts say

*Conventions with regard to what constitutes plagiarism vary in different countries and not infrequently clash with commonly accepted practice in most international journals. It is vital that authors ensure that they credit the originator of any ideas as well as the words and figures that they use to express these ideas. Copying without proper acknowledgement of the origin of text or figures is strictly forbidden. Small amounts of text, a line or two, are usually ignored. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism, which is, in effect, publishing the same work twice.*

Robert Adams, Emeritus Professor of Applied Mechanics, University of Bristol (UK), and visiting professor at the Department of Engineering Science, University of Oxford (UK)

*Plagiarism is unacceptable under any circumstances but, despite this universal disapproval, it is one of the more common faults with student papers. In some cases, it is a case of downright dishonesty brought upon by laziness, but more often it is lack of experience as how to properly use material taken from another source. ... Plagiarism in professional work may result in dismissal from an academic position, being barred from publishing in a particular journal or from receiving funds from a particular granting agency, or even a lawsuit and criminal prosecution.*

Dr. Ronald K. Gratz, Associate Professor  
in the Department of Biological Sciences, Michigan Technological University  
(USA), author of "Using Another's Words and Ideas"

*In my work as a supervisor I occasionally come across cases of plagiarism. When I confront my students with this issue, most have absolutely no awareness that they have committed plagiarism, so I work with them to explain what is acceptable and what is not, and get them to make revisions.*

James Hitchmough, Professor of Horticultural Ecology,  
University of Sheffield (UK)

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## 10.1 Plagiarism is not difficult to spot

Plagiarism is very easy to identify, particularly in papers written by non-native speakers.

I revise a lot of research papers from my PhD students. Sometimes I read a paragraph that contains a considerable number of mistakes in the English (grammar, vocabulary, spelling etc.) and then suddenly there is a sentence written in perfect English! This immediately makes me suspicious, so I Google the sentence and very frequently discover it comes from a published paper.

## 10.2 You can copy generic phrases

It is perfectly normal to copy phrases from other people's papers. However, these phrases must be generic. In fact, such phrases should help you to improve your English - see Chap. 19.

Let's look at what you can paste from another paper.

Here is an example from the literature review of a very interesting paper entitled *International scientific English: Some thoughts on science, language and ownership* by Alistair Wood of the University of Brunei Darussalam. In the extract below Wood talks about different styles of scientific writing around the world and how non-native authors may be at a disadvantage with respect to native authors.

Let's imagine that you work in the same field of research as Wood. I have highlighted phrases in italics that would be perfectly acceptable to paste into your own paper. In fact, these phrases are completely generic.

*In fact there is some cross-linguistic contrastive research to suggest that the foreigner is at a disadvantage. Even where the grammar and vocabulary may be perfectly adequate, it seems to be the case that a non-native may tend to transfer the discourse patterns of her native language to English. It has been suggested, for example, that Asian languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean have different patterns of argument to English [3]. Thus one study found that those Korean academics trained in the United States wrote in an 'English' discourse style, while their colleague who had trained and worked only in Korea, with a paper published in the same anthology, wrote in a Korean style with no statement of purpose of the article and a very loose and unstructured pattern from the English point of view [4]. More generally Hinds has put forward a widely discussed position that Japanese has a different expectation as to the degree of involvement of the reader compared to English, with Japanese giving more responsibility to the reader, English to the writer [5].*

*It might be objected though that this is relevant only to languages and cultures which differ greatly to English. However, research on German has shown that German academic writing*

in the social sciences has a *much less linear structure* than English, *to the extent that* the English translation of a German textbook was criticized as haphazard or even chaotic by American reviewers, *whereas* the original had received no such reviews on the European continent [6]. Academic respectability in English *is evidenced by* the appropriate discourse structure but in German *by the appropriate level of abstraction* [7]. *Similarly*, academic Finnish texts *have been shown to* differ in the way they use connectors and previews and are much less explicit than English in their *drawing of conclusions*. Spanish also has a *similar pattern* [8]. English, *therefore*, would seem to be a more ‘writer-responsible’ language *than at least some other European languages*.

Note how none of the phrases in italics contain unique information. The phrases could be used in many other contexts.

The above extract is also a good example of how to write a literature review (Sect. 14.1).

### 10.3 How to quote directly from other papers

If you use any of the parts of Wood’s text that are not in italics without any acknowledgement you are committing plagiarism.

Let’s imagine you wanted to quote from the last line of Wood’s paper, which concludes as follows:

The owners of international scientific English should be international scientists not Englishmen or Americans.

You can cite the exact phrase or sentence used by putting it in quotations marks. Then reference the author.

As noted by Wood [1997]: “The owners of international scientific English should be international scientists not Englishmen or Americans”.

As an alternative to *As noted by Wood [1997]* you could say:

Wood [1997] concludes:

As Wood [1997] states:

As Wood states in his 1997 paper:

In his Conclusions, Wood [1997] writes:

How you make the reference to Wood’s paper will obviously depend on your journal’s style.

Putting quotation marks (“...”) around an unaltered sentence and giving the proper citation for the origin of the work does not technically constitute plagiarism. But it may indicate to supervisors and referees that you have not actually understood what you have written – it is not your own work.

The following comment comes (with his permission!) from Dr Ronald K. Gratz's online article *Using Another's Words and Ideas*. This article is essential reading and can be downloaded from the link given on page 311.

It is important that you understand the work you are using in your writing. Quoting someone's sentences does not necessarily require this understanding. On the other hand, you must understand the author's meaning if you are going to be able to paraphrase correctly. This is not to say that one should never quote a reference exactly. Exact quotes have value when it is important to give the precise wording used by the original author. It is unacceptable when it is used to make up the bulk of a paper, or of a part of a paper. It is also unacceptable when it is used to avoid the work of putting the ideas into your own words.

However, using quotation marks is acceptable when you are reporting another's author's definition or a philosopher's statement.

## 10.4 How to quote from another paper by paraphrasing

Rather than quoting directly, you can paraphrase Wood's sentence using your own words. But you must still reference Wood, otherwise it would appear that these are you own conclusions. S1 is Wood's original sentence, S2 and S3 are paraphrased versions.

- S1. The owners of international scientific English should be international scientists not Englishmen or Americans.
- S2. International scientific English belongs to everyone in science [Wood, 1997].
- S3. International scientific English does not just belong to native English speakers but to the whole scientific community [Wood, 1997].

Let us now compare the versions.

WOOD'S ORIGINAL VERSION (S1)	PARAPHRASED VERSIONS (S2 AND S3)
(1) owners	belongs
(2) International scientific English	International scientific English
(3) international scientists	everyone in science the whole scientific community
(4) not Englishmen or Americans	not just ... native English speakers

Below is an analysis of the four items in the table.

- (1) Wood uses a noun, the paraphrased version (PV) uses a verb. Switching parts of speech (e.g. noun to verb, noun to adjective) is a great way to paraphrase and 'disguise' the original.
- (2) The only item in Wood's sentence that has not been paraphrased is *international scientific English* (ISE). This is because ISE is not an expression that was coined (i.e. used for the first time) by Wood. It is a recognized expression that people in the field of teaching English as a foreign language will be aware of.

- (3) Wood uses a noun that refers to a person (*scientist*), the PV uses the root word (*science*) and the adjective (*scientific*). This method of using the same root, but changing the part of speech is very common. A similar combination would be: *photographer*, *photography*, *photographic*.
- (4) Wood made a contrast between two groups of people – all those involved in science (*international scientists*), and just the English and Americans (and by implication, Canada, Australia etc.). The PV changes the focus slightly and interprets this contrast as being between non-native speakers (*international scientists*) and native speakers of English.

Now let's look at another example. This time let's imagine you wanted to paraphrase the first line (S4) of Dr Gratz's comments in Sect. 10.3. S5–S8 are possible paraphrased versions, which are in order of increasing difference.

- S4. It is important that you understand the work you are using in your writing.
- S5. \*It is crucial that you completely understand the works you use in your paper [Gratz 2006].
- S6. You must have a clear understanding of the reference papers that you quote from in your own manuscript [Gratz 2006].
- S7. If you cite any works by other authors in your own paper, it is vital that you really understand the full meaning of what the other authors have written [Gratz 2006].
- S8. Researchers should ensure that they fully grasp the meaning of any of the literature that they cite in their papers [Gratz 2006].

Here is an analysis of the types of changes made in each PV. This should help you see the many devices that can be used in paraphrasing.

S5: *crucial* is a synonym for *important*; *completely* is redundant but is a modification of the original; *work* (singular) vs *works* (plural); the present continuous (*are using*) vs present simple (*use*); *writing* (an – ing form used to indicate an activity) vs *your paper* (a noun). S5 is an example of what Gratz would define as 'unacceptable' (Sect. 8.5) because it is essentially identical to the original. Nevertheless, the devices used (synonyms, change of tense etc.) are very useful when paraphrasing.

S6: the concept of *important* (adjective) has been replaced by *must* (a modal verb); *understand* (verb) vs *understanding* (noun); *works you use in your paper* vs *reference papers that you quote from in your own manuscript* (three synonyms for three nouns). S6 might still be considered unacceptable by some experts.

S7: the order in which the information is presented in the original is reversed in the PV. Similar devices to those used in S5 and S6 have also been exploited. S7 is, in my opinion, an acceptable paraphrase.

S8: the major change here is in the way readers are addressed (*you* vs *researchers*), this factor along with the other changes make the sentences almost unrecognizable

compared to Gratz's original sentence. However, Gratz is still referenced at the end of the sentence. This is because the concept contained in the sentence still 'belongs' to Gratz. S8 is certainly an acceptable paraphrase.

You may be thinking that paraphrasing is a pointless exercise particularly if you quote the original reference to indicate that the concepts contained are not yours. However what I have outlined above is generally considered to be good practice in the international community. In addition, to be able to paraphrase as in S7 and S8 means that you really have to understand the original sentence, which is clearly beneficial for you.

Note also that you may wish to paraphrase your own writing within the same paper, i.e. to not repeat in the Conclusions the same phrases you have used in the Abstract (Sect. 18.3).

## 10.5 Examples of how and how not to paraphrase

The following examples and explanations are taken from Dr Gratz's article *Using Another's Words and Ideas*. They are more technical than the examples given in Sect. 10.4 and also highlight unacceptable paraphrasing.

S1 is the original version of a sentence from one of Gratz's works, published in 1982.

- S1. Bilateral vagotomy resulted in an increase in tidal volume but a depression in respiratory frequency such that total ventilation did not change.

A *vagotomy* is a surgical procedure, and *tidal volume* is the lung volume representing the normal volume of air displaced when breathing in and out. Here are three examples of unacceptable attempts to rewrite S1.

- S2. \*Gratz (1982) showed that bilateral vagotomy resulted in an increase in tidal volume but a depression in respiratory frequency such that total ventilation did not change.  
S3. \*Gratz (1982) showed that bilateral vagotomy produced an increase in tidal volume and a depression in respiratory frequency so that total ventilation did not change.  
S4. \*Gratz (1982) showed that following vagotomy the snakes' lung volume increased but their respiratory rate was lowered. As a result, their breathing was unchanged.

S2 is identical to S1 except that the author is attributed. A couple of words have been changed in S3, but this does not alter the fact that S3 is still substantially the same as S1.

S4 is more serious because the paraphrased version has attempted to find synonyms for key technical words: *lung volume* is not the same as *tidal volume*, and *breathing*

is not the same as *total ventilation*. Moreover, dropping the adjective “bilateral” alters the sense of the experimental technique.

S5 is what Dr Gratz would consider as an acceptable paraphrase of his sentence. Although the same information is presented, the sentence structure and word order have been substantially altered.

- S5 Gratz (1982) showed that following bilateral vagotomy the snakes’ tidal volume increased but their respiratory frequency was lowered. As a result, their total ventilation was unchanged.

## 10.6 Paraphrasing the work of a third author

Another case is where you want say the same thing as another author (Wood, in S1), regarding a finding that does not belong to Wood but to a third author’s work (Hinds, in S1) which Wood refers to. In this case Wood is discussing the literature, rather than his own personal ideas.

- S1. More generally Hinds has put forward a widely discussed position that Japanese has a different expectation as to the degree of involvement of the reader compared to English, with Japanese giving more responsibility to the reader, English to the writer [Ref 5].

You could paraphrase S1 as follows:

- S2. Many authors, for example Hinds [Ref 5], have proposed that the level of expected reader involvement in Japanese writing is higher than in English.
- S3. It is generally accepted that Japanese writers expect their readers to be more involved than do English writers [Ref 5].

S2 retains the name of the author mentioned by Wood. S3 is stronger and suggests that what Hinds originally proposed has now become generally accepted (an alternative expression is *it is well known that*). This is commonly the case. In fact, Wood’s article was published in 1997, since then several other papers and books have been published on the topic, which have reinforced what Hinds proposed.

## 10.7 How to check whether you have inadvertently committed plagiarism

To check whether you have inadvertently plagiarized your own or other people’s work, see if your journal offers CrossCheck. This is a service offered by Cross Ref ([www.crossref.org](http://www.crossref.org)). It checks your paper against thousands of others to see whether the same phrase appears in someone else’s work.



## 10.8 Summary

- Plagiarism is a serious issue in international science, even though it may not be considered so in your country of origin. It is easy for native speakers to spot it in the work of non native speakers. If you commit plagiarism your credibility and reputation will be seriously compromised. If you not sure whether you have plagiarized your own or someone else's work, use CrossCheck
- Copying phrases from other people's work is perfectly acceptable and is a good way to learn useful phrases in English that you can then use in your own work. However, such phrases must be 100% generic in the sense that they hold absolutely no hard information
- Use direct quotations sparingly. The problem is that the referee (or your professor) cannot be sure that you have fully understood the quotation
- Typical ways to paraphrase:
  - use of synonyms for non key words (especially verbs, adverbs and adjectives)
  - change of part of speech, for example: from noun to verb, from noun to adjective, from one category of noun to another category of noun (e.g. *science* to *scientist*)
  - change of nouns and pronouns from singular to plural and vice versa
  - change of verb form, for example: from *-ing* form to infinitive, from simple to continuous, from active to passive
  - change of style from personal to impersonal
  - reversal of the order in which information is presented
- Never paraphrase technical words
- If the original contains ideas that in some sense 'belonged' to the original author, then this author should be acknowledged. This is true even if you have radically changed the original so that it is now unrecognizable
- When quoting the work of a 'third' author, cite the reference to that third author's paper