

# **Plagiarism - How to Avoid It?**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction -</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>2. Some Basic Definitions of Plagiarism-</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>3. The Purpose of Citation and Quotation-</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>4. Paraphrasing-</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>5. Reviewing - Citation and Quotation-</b>	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>6. Self-Plagiarism-</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
<b>7. Sample Cases to Help Understand the Matter-</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>8. Concluding Remarks-</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
<b>9. Useful resources to spot plagiarism-</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>References-</b>	<b>Page 20</b>

## **Glossary of Terms**

NSF- National Science Foundation

AMS-American Mathematical Society

AHA - American Historical Association

AAUP-American Association of University Professors

IEEE- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers

EURO-PAR'95- International Conference on Parallel Processing, Stockholm, Sweden, August 29-31, 1995

NSF-OIG- National Science Foundation-Office of Inspector General

## 1. Introduction

Plagiarism is a word which can freeze the blood of writers from any field who are accused of it. Why does it bring about such a chill to the mind of writers? One answer is, perhaps, that writing noteworthy material in mathematics, science, literature, poetry or music brings a kind of immortality and unfading glory. This may tempt the writer to slide into wrongdoing. The accusation of plagiarism, however, could carry severe consequences which may stretch anywhere from a letter of reprimand from a publisher or the writer's employer, to banishment from publishing, expelling the author from his/her professional society, or loss of employment. In any case, the label of plagiarism attached to anyone is a black mark, which sometimes cannot be erased in a lifetime, or even longer.

In our modern technological society, borders and barriers are becoming less and less restrictive regarding information and knowledge. As a consequence, these entities freely join together creating an enormous flow of information which touches the most remote and isolated spots on Earth. One can imagine this flow as a huge river of media, data and knowledge going through the minds and hearts of people. Everyone may contribute to the river and every one may draw from its "shine." However, because of these infinite interactions, there is a need for rules and regulations to identify who is who in the huge information flow, and what the individual contributions are to this "shine."

While copyright is well defined and protected by copyright law, the notion of plagiarism is not a legal one. An accusation of plagiarism is not considered a civil crime but could be viewed as an academic crime "usually defined by professionals or academic body" [1]. As a consequence, there is no unique definition adopted by civil and/or professional societies and agencies. Thus, many entities develop their own definitions, which evolve over time, in an effort

to become more efficient in the battle to correctly identify any wrongdoing in the field. Therefore, definitions and regulations are designed by the National Science Foundation (NSF), American Mathematical Society (AMS), Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), American Historical Association (AHA), and American Association of University Professors (AAUP) [1], among many organizations.

There are very clear cases of plagiarism where the paper of one writer is copied word for word by another person. However, there are also cases of paraphrasing which need deeper study and understanding of the issue. This then raises the questions: “How much is too much?” and “What constitutes substantially?” [1]. For example, in a very well developed and proven theoretical calculation, multiple phrases in the introduction are copied from another source, but appropriate attribution of the borrowed work is not given. Does this constitute plagiarism? The answer is “Yes” because the common axis through all the definitions of plagiarism is “the attempt to pass the ideas, research, theories or words of others as one’s own” [3]. As one may tell, the idea of a “word” exists in the definition and plays a significant role.

There is another question that can be raised from the above example: Should the professional society recognize the contributions of that author? If the copied text has nothing in common with the particular theoretical calculation results obtained, the answer is yes. The matter is getting more complicated when we consider the problem of paraphrasing, which is discussed in [2], and introduced in section 4 of the present paper.

To put all these questions in the spotlight and clarify their meaning as much as possible, the next section presents some of the basic definitions adopted by different agencies or professional societies.

## 2. Some Basic Definitions of Plagiarism

As is apparent, this section title implies multiple definitions of plagiarism due to the complexity of the problem, the assortment of different cases, and the way the various agencies, and professional societies view the problem. However, as mentioned above, there is a common thread for all definitions. This similarity will be revealed through listing and analyzing some of the basic definitions.

The **National Science Foundation (NSF)** [4]: “Plagiarism means the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit.”;

The **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)** [5]: “...the reuse of someone else's prior ideas, processes, results, or words without explicitly acknowledging the original author and source.” The society considers that “To reuse someone else’s work and make it appear to be your own denies the original author credit for his or her contributions to the research and to society. If an author neglects to properly cite the work that is borrowed, either by choice or by accident, the author is committing plagiarism.” [7]. Also, the IEEE society provides the main areas where plagiarism could occur (carriers of plagiarism): “books; Magazines; Journals and transactions; Conference Proceedings; Photos; Charts and tables; Multimedia presentations; Electronic media.” [7].

Generally speaking, “all publicly distributed material are subjected to the same rule of plagiarism.” [7]. In order to clarify the term “Electronic Media”, it should be noted that the information carriers could include i-Pods and Mobile phones as well, because some of them have a memory to load and store information.

IEEE considers five different categories or “levels” [5, 6] of plagiarism with respect to the degree of offence.

1. “Uncredited Verbatim Copying of a Full Paper, or Uncredited Verbatim Copying of a Major Portion (more than 50%) within a Single Paper--An instance is where a large section of the original paper is copied without quotation marks, credit notice, reference, and bibliography. This case also includes instances where different portions of a paper are copied without attribution from a number of papers by other authors, and the sum of plagiarized material is more 50%” [6];
2. “Uncredited Verbatim Copying of a Large Portion (greater than 20% and up to 50%) within a Paper.--An instance is where a section of the original paper is copied from another paper without quotation marks, credit notice, reference, and bibliography. This case also includes instances where different portions of a paper are copied without attribution from a number of papers by other authors, and the sum of copying results in a large portion of plagiarized material (up to 50%) in the paper”[6];
3. “Uncredited Verbatim Copying of Individual Elements (Paragraph(s), Sentence(s), Illustration(s), etc.) Resulting in a Significant Portion (up to 20%) within a Paper--An instance could be where portions of original paper are used in another paper without quotation marks, credit notice, reference, and bibliography.” [6];
4. “Uncredited Improper Paraphrasing of Pages or Paragraphs. Instances of improper paraphrasing occur when only a few words and phrases have been changed or when the original sentence order has been rearranged; no credit notice or reference appears with the text. ” [6];
5. “Credited Verbatim Copying of a Major Portion of a Paper without Clear Delineation. Instances could include sections of an original paper copied from another paper; credit

notice is used but absence of quotation marks or offset text does not clearly reference or identify the specific, copied material.” [6].

The **American Historical Association (AHA)** in its Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct formulated in 2005 defines the idea of plagiarism as follows: “the expropriation of another author’s work and the presentation of it as one’s own.” But there is a second part of the definition, which is refining the concept: “the limited borrowing, without sufficient attribution, of another person’s distinctive and significant research findings or interpretations.” [1].

In **Latin**: In the paper [3], the author finds the roots of the definition of plagiarism in the Latin word “plagiare, to steal” [3].

The list could be extended but this is out of the scope of this paper. Interested readers can use a Google search to “define plagiarism” and would find more models and definitions of this important subject.

By reading the above definitions, one notices that the quality of the material is not significant; rather it is the quantity that matters in identifying plagiarism. Also, in case of verbatim copying, the citation of the source is not sufficient because quotation marks are needed as well.

Paraphrasing has always been a challenging matter to address. To eliminate any possible room for accusations and charges of plagiarism, the reader is advised to give the appropriate citation required by the definition of his or her society or institution. For example, the definition of plagiarism adopted by Texas A&M University-- Commerce is the one developed by the NSF as quoted above.

### **3. The Purpose of Citation and Quotation**

It is not a goal of the present paper to discuss the different citation styles, because their rules depend on the particular publisher and/or scientific society. Rather, this work will focus on the subject of citation and quotation marks: what, when and how to attribute citation and quotation marks?

The citation is an inherent part of research writing and intends to provide the reader with the correct links referring to other works. Namely, what others have developed in the field before, and on what the author is basing his or her work. In other words, the citation has to show the coherence of previous research in the current work, but nevertheless has to clearly distinguish this work from the others. In particular, the citation must reveal the ideas, formulas, equations, algorithms, data, tables, graphs, media or any other entity the author has used from other sources. Of course, the other intent of the citation is to acknowledge previous achievements reached by other authors. The main idea is that there is no material which exists outside and isolated (maybe this is a problem?) from the huge information and knowledge flow. Thus, to clearly show the line of the new work and to avoid any opportunity for allegations in plagiarism, one has to cite the source of any idea, formula, equation, data, table, graph, media or any other entity he or she has seen elsewhere (see section 2) and included in his or her writing. It is advisable to include the citation immediately after the reference rather than at the end of the sentence. As was pointed out in the beginning of this section, a potential author has to check with the particular publisher to verify the style adopted for references and citation.

The source has to be cited, even if something is not accepted or is criticized, into the new work. For example: “In the book X (paper, symphony, picture or any other carrier of

information) the authors consider the concept Y (etude of a symphony, picture, formula or a sentence) but proved (or believe) this is incorrect”. In this case, the source of “Y” must be cited.

If an entity is mentioned in a work, but its exact name itself is not listed, the source still must be cited. For example: “Using the concept X (one describes X with his own words) and applying Y (which could be one’s own work) the proof arrived in Z”. Here the original source for “X” must be cited. Another example is: “Reading data X we found out that .....”. It must be cited where this data is originally published.

The authors of this paper are aware that the above examples do not describe all possible cases. They merely provide a structure for the many instances (not all) where similar scenarios could be used to recognize what and when previous works must be cited.

In the modern world one important source for information distribution is the Internet. A main question is: Should web pages be cited and if so which of them? The answer is yes. Any web page used for obtaining anything included in the new writing, must be cited. One could argue that the web pages often change the content, or are taken off the server, or the writer of the text in this page could not be found. Regardless, the address of the web page must be given along with the last date it has been visited by the author. Thus the information could be retrieved if necessary. As for citation purposes do not classify the web pages as official or unofficial. If information has been taken from a web page, the page must be cited.

Another important item when attributing the work of others is the use of quotation marks if the text has been copied verbatim from any source. As mentioned before, the use of citation is not sufficient for this case. Both quotation marks and citation must be used. The copied text must be in the quotation marks whereas the citation should be after the text. The latter shows where the text come from and the quotation marks underline which text is not one’s own. It is wrong

for one to think that too many quotation marks will make the text cumbersome to read. If a text is used it must appear in quotation marks followed by the proper citation.

Now the question becomes “how much is too much” [1] in order to put a text in quotation marks. The answer is there is no lower boundary.

In some disciplines, such as Mathematics, there are theorems associated with a particular author(s) who developed the particular concept. In Computer Science for instance, some algorithms are associated with the names of their developers. In these cases one must cite (or give the name) of the developer/author unless the term or the entity is already in everyday use. For example, there are well known names such as Roll’s Theorem, Lipchitz condition or Dijkstra algorithm for which the citation of the original work could be skipped. The above examples come from mathematics and computer science but one could find similar ones in his or her own field of activity.

#### **4. Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing research is a very deep river to cross, should one think it easy to get to the other bank, especially taking into account the thought processes of people. It is a method which involves manipulation of models obtained by the human senses from the surrounding world, including written sources. How much paraphrasing is allowed in order to skip the citation of the original source? There is no simple answer to this question, because of the above statement about the development of human reasoning. Humans are social creatures, by any definition of the word, and there is no person who can exist as a point isolated from the entire information flow. Thus it is important to distinguish one’s own ideas from the ideas developed by others.

Since the definition of plagiarism “involves not only the unacknowledged reuse of some else’s words but also someone’s ideas, it is possible to render a properly paraphrased section of

text and still be open to a charge of plagiarism if proper credit for the *idea* has not been given. Even so, we should be able to agree that changing only a few words or phrases or only rearranging the original sentence order of another author's work will be defined as plagiarism.”[6].

An example taken from [8] would better illustrate the meaning of the quoted definition. The original sentence written by the authors S. Chandra and C.T. Avedisian is “Single-shot flash photography yields better results than fast-motion movies”. An example of paraphrasing this sentence is given in the same document posted on [8]: “A variety of high-speed ciné film and short-duration single-shot photographic techniques have been used to this end (see, for example, Worthington 1908; Savic & Boulton 1955; Watchers & Westerling 1966; Toda 1974; Akao *et al.* 1980; Inada *et al.* 1983). The method which has yielded the greatest clarity is single-shot flash photography.” The main line in the latter statement is that “the single-shot is better than the fast movies”. Therefore the authors have to acknowledge the work of S. Chandra and C.T. Avedisian, which preceded the one we are referencing.

## **5. Reviewing - Citation and Quotation**

If one is a reviewer of a material or any kind of written entity, this entity is considered confidential and it is not allowed to use anything from it. Some publishing bodies do not allow the reviewer to share materials under review with any other person. Other publishers could let the reviewer ask expert opinion from colleagues in the corresponding field, but it does not mean the reviewer could use something! It is forbidden for any reviewing parties to use anything from the subject of review. It does not matter whether the citation or quotation is correct. The same prohibition holds for paraphrasing.

## 6. Self-Plagiarism

This kind of plagiarism could be divided to two classes: “duplicate publication” and “redundant publication” [14]. The first one occurs if an author submits to more than one publisher the same or similar material. The latter means that he or she changed only the title, the abstract or possibly very few sentences or concepts. This is an unacceptable practice and most of the journals, conferences or other publishers require that the material or major parts of the material has not been published anywhere nor is under any kind of consideration or review at the time of the present submission.

The second (“redundant publication” [14]) occurs if the major data, ideas, or equations are used in more than one paper. In these cases, only textual changes or different interpretations are given, but the main results and conclusions are the same.

The damages that come from self-plagiarism became so big “that many biomedical journals have begun to publish policies clarifying their opposition to multiple submissions of the same paper. ...For example, in a recent editorial, Schein (2001) describes the results of a study he and a colleague carried out in which the authors found that 92 out of 660 studies taken from 3 major surgical journals were actual cases of redundant publication.” [14].

In order to avoid any misunderstanding or accusation of self-plagiarism, the following is recommended: one may submit material for review or publication if and only if these materials and/or the major data, results, formulas or conclusions are not yet published, and are not under consideration or review for publication anywhere else. If a paper has been submitted before, it may be resubmitted if and only if the publication of the manuscript has been rejected or the manuscript has been withdrawn from the previous publisher.

## **7. Sample Cases to Help Understand the Matter**

Working on this material, the author encountered an enormous number of cases and publications presenting and discussing plagiarism. It shows the subject is hot and attracts the interest of many reviewers, researchers, writers and agencies. Modern technology (conventional books, magazines, journals, the TV, Radio, Internet, mobile phones, i-Pods, etc.) is the carrier of a huge information and knowledge flow, and this technology simplifies the interactions between humans and the flow. Therefore, to keep the flow useful and effective it must be uncontaminated. Unfortunately, this great information flow could bring glory, immortality and money thus raising the temptation for one to try .....

The present section lists a set of examples to help the reader grasp the roots of the problem and improve his understanding of this important subject. This work is far from claiming that these examples are the best (this quality depends on the personality and the particular area) or exhaustive. The interested reader can visit any of the following sites where he or she will find some of the most “Famous Cases of Plagiarism and Fraud in academia, athletics, government, journalism, politics, etc” [9]. Interesting cases are also reported by Wikipedia on their Web page [10]. For those readers interested to learn right now we are providing some examples from across the world.

During its meeting, the Program Committee of EURO-PAR'95 found “that plagiarized papers had been submitted to the conference. The case was brought to the attention of the Steering Committee (SC) of EURO-PAR, which decided to further pursue the issue, by conducting an investigation. The investigation has reached some conclusive results, which point to a single name behind these plagiarisms:” [11]. They spotted a scientist who had been a registered Ph.D. student in Greece, and had “managed to publish several plagiarized papers to

international journals and conferences” [11]. “The conclusions are based on (a) copies of 'his' papers compared against papers/reports received from his victims, (b) on e-mails and correspondence received from his victims and (c) on copies of correspondence exchanged”. [11].

As a matter of fact the authors of the present work counted six plagiarized papers. This story says that no matter how clever one is, they will catch him if he decides to steal the intellectual work of somebody else.

Another example is given in [2] where a paper “written by two well known mathematicians had been accepted for publication when another colleague familiar with that paper received a manuscript to referee. This manuscript, bearing the names of two mathematicians at an obscure university, was word-for-word exactly the same as the original paper; only the authors’ names and one sentence in the introduction had been changed. The journal followed the referee’s recommendation to reject the manuscript”. [2]

The same paper [2] is given an example of plagiarizing ideas. A Ph.D. student successfully defended his thesis and visited another University where he presented and discussed his results. Later when he submitted his results to a journal he discovered that a manuscript containing his results was submitted by two scientists to whom he presented his thesis.

In [10] is posted a case of a Romanian mathematician and computer scientist who claimed that he published about 383 papers in the field. “A number of his recent papers have been proven to be exact copies of papers published earlier by other people.” [10]. For this reason he was banned from publications by the journal Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Informatica.

In the same source [10] is listed a case of plagiarizing in a Ph.D. thesis. A professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, copied verbatim a work written by Kimberly Lanegran, faculty member at the University of Florida, and incorporated it in his own thesis.

“When Lanegran discovered this, she launched an investigation”. The professor was “fired from his professorship”, and the university revoked his Ph.D.

The next example shows a case of accusation and its dismissal. “Shortly after the publication of the book The Case for Israel, by Alan Dershowitz, Norman Finkelstein alleged that it was "a collection of fraud, falsification, plagiarism and nonsense". Finkelstein charged that Dershowitz had engaged in plagiarism in his use of Joan Peters' controversial book From Time Immemorial.<sup>[2]</sup> Finkelstein expanded his claims in a book entitled Beyond Chutzpah, and has received support from some other academics. Dershowitz has denied the charges. Former Harvard president Derek Bok, following a review requested by Harvard Law School Dean Elena Kagan, determined that no plagiarism had occurred.<sup>[3][4]</sup> [10].

A professor in Physics and Vice Chancellor of Kumaon University, in India, was found guilty in that, together with his student, he plagiarized a paper which was incorporated into the student’s thesis. The professor resigned in 2003 after the case came to light [10].

A case of plagiarizing passages from the work of others is posted in [10]. “Historian (the name is deleted) has been criticized for incorporating passages from the works of other authors into many of his books. He was first accused in 2002 by two writers for copying portions about World War II bomber pilots from Thomas Childers's The Wings of Morning in his book The Wild Blue.<sup>[6]</sup> After (the name is deleted)” the historian “admitted to the errors, the New York Times found further unattributed passages,”[10]. The accused author once again acknowledged his errors.

An interesting case of plagiarism is given in the NSF-OIG Semiannual Report [13]. There a bioengineering professor copied verbatim the Master’s thesis of one of his students. The professor incorporated the thesis into his “final report for an NSF Small Business Innovation

Research (SBIR) Phase I grant to his wife's private company" [13]. In fact NSF discovered that "no work was done under the award"[13], and only the student's thesis was used in the report.

## **8. Concluding Remarks**

There are three different classifications of the concept of plagiarism. First, with respect to the subject itself such as Journalism, Music, Higher Education, or Politics, among others; second, with respect to the harm inflicted, such as mild or severe, intentional or unintentional; and third, on-line or self plagiarism. This study provides the basic definitions and knowledge one should have about the importance of this subject and how to avoid unnecessary risk. The present work does not pretend to be an exhaustive manual, as the subject is so complex that it cannot be encompassed in a single paper. Most of the journals, conferences, educational/research bodies, and societies develop their own policies and regulations and one should refer to them before writing their research. Also, there are agencies such as the Office of Inspector General – NSF, which are created to search for cases of plagiarism and intellectual fraud. Their reports are also a good source to study and understand plagiarism [13].

Every year millions of people who live and spend a part of their life in one country, move to another country or even to another continent. This process can provide enormous contributions to the world's economy and culture, but can also carry significant problems as it puts people with different attitudes regarding work and research ethics together.

Texas A&M University -- Commerce is not an exception from these processes. Moreover, the University brought a "great amount of socio-cultural diversity among the students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty administrators and others involved in many fields of academic research" [15] and teaching. "People from different societies and cultural traditions" [15] have different attitudes, beliefs and understanding of research and teaching ethics.

Diversity is a positive component of any society, but everyone who grows up under a different culture and ethics must know that the new place he or she arrives at has its own teaching and research culture and ethics. Thus, everyone must learn the rules and regulations of the institution (Texas A&M University -- Commerce) and the country (the US) where he or she is working and living. The goal of this work is to sharpen the reader's attention and to provide basic steps which can lead to a correct understanding and application of teaching, research and collegial behavior of one's own University, University System and country.

The interested reader can find useful guidelines to help him or her move toward good research ethics and correct behavior in the collection of papers given [15]. This presentation focused on an important part of research and teaching ethics, namely plagiarism.

As a summary, the present work would like to stress once again:

- If one uses any idea, data, pictures or any other entity from another source, he or she must cite this source properly using the definitions and the regulations of their working body, publisher or society;
- If one copies verbatim text or words from another source, he or she must put the copied entity in quotation marks and cite the source properly;
- If one paraphrases any text, proper attribution and citation of this text must be given in order to show the original source;
- One should always acknowledge the work of others used in writings;
- For the definition of plagiarism one has to consider the list given in section 2 and beyond;
- If one uses portions from their own previous work, he or she has to attribute these portions and give a proper citation in order to show the origin of the contributions.

## **9. Useful resources to spot plagiarism**

A tool for students and teachers to help them identify plagiarized text is Turnitin.com. Turnitin is a “web-based solution for managing writing assignments” [17]. Its features include “over 10 billions of Web-pages crawled and archived”, “over 70 Million students papers and works”, and “over 10,000 Magazines, Newspapers and Scholarly Journals” [17].

The Turnitin software service is available at Texas A&M University -- Commerce and faculty who would like to monitor the originality of the work of their students can sign up for an account. The instructions how to do so are given in Appendix 1. For more information one can contact the responsible expert through the University library.

iTenticate is a useful software aid which helps the user identify the originality of a published work [16]. The tool is completely web based, does not need any additional installations and can be found in [16].

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