

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's words, sentences, or ideas and passing them off as your own without giving proper credit to the original source. Cutting and pasting is so easy that many people plagiarize without meaning to.

You might be plagiarizing if you:

- Submit someone else's work as your own.
- Buy a paper from a papermill, website, or other source.
- Copy sentences, phrases, paragraphs, or even ideas from someone else's work, published or unpublished, without giving the original author credit.
- Replace select words from a passage without giving the original author credit.
- Copy any type of multimedia (graphics, audio, video, Internet streams), computer programs, music compositions, graphs, or charts from someone else's work without giving the original creator credit.
- Cut and paste together phrases, ideas, and sentences from a variety of sources to write an essay.
- Build on someone else's idea or phrase to write your paper without giving the original author credit.
- Submit your own paper in more than one course without permission of the teachers.



Consequences

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. San José State University regards plagiarism as academic dishonesty. Consequences of plagiarism include failing an assignment, receiving a lower course grade, and even failing a course.



Read SJSU's Policy on Academic Dishonesty (<http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.pdf>).

Did you know? The word plagiarism comes from the Latin *plagiarius* meaning "kidnapper."



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

What isn't Plagiarism?

What *isn't* plagiarism? **Common knowledge** does not need to be cited. (**Citing** means giving basic information about the original source you used—enough that someone else could track it down.) Common knowledge includes facts that are known by a lot of people and can be found in many sources. For example, you do not need to cite the following:

- In 1865, following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson was elected as the 17th President of the United States.
- William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and he died in 1616.
- A genome is all the DNA in an organism, including its genes.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Quoting means using someone else's *exact* words. Paraphrasing is putting someone else's words or ideas into your own words. Some of the most common mistakes made when writing a research paper are paraphrasing incorrectly and failing to give the original author credit. Even you are using your own words, the ideas are still taken from someone else and must be cited.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Paraphrasing is not simply rearranging or rewording an original passage. Correct paraphrasing consists of reading the original passage, understanding what the original author is saying, synthesizing (putting together) the information, and then expressing your understanding of these ideas in your own words. Paraphrasing properly not only keeps you from plagiarizing, it helps you really learn and understand the original source material. It also can make you a more skilled writer.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Use direct quotes and paraphrasing to support your own ideas, not replace them — and be sure you always give the original author credit by using a citation. You make citations correctly by following a citation style that tells exactly what information you need to include about the original source and how to arrange it .

The following pages will give you examples of acceptable paraphrasing and unacceptable plagiarism.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

The original passage for Examples 1 and 2 are from the following article, cited in APA format below. This citation is the complete information about the original source, which usually goes into a list at the end of your paper. This list is usually called "Works Cited" or "References."

Ebersole, S. (2005). On their own: Students' academic use of the commercialized web. *Library Trends*, 53, 530-538.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Original Passage:

Despite its origin in scientific research and educational pursuits, it did not take long for marketers, advertisers, and public relations practitioners to find the Internet. What they found was an uncharted land that rivaled their wildest dreams. More than a decade later the Web remains the least regulated of all mass media. Although the dot com bust of the early 2000s slowed the commercial expansion of the Web, we are beginning to witness a strong rebound in every area, including online advertising. Today, the one feature that best defines the Web is its unrelenting commercialism.

Paraphrase:

Although it was originally used in scientific research and education, marketers, advertisers and PR people quickly found the Internet. They were happy to discover a medium that was mostly unregulated and still is more than ten years later. Although there was a slowdown a few years ago due to the dot-com bust, commercial use of the Web is increasing again; one of the most obvious aspects of today's Web is commercialism.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes. The writer of this paraphrase changed a few words and phrases, but did not synthesize the original paragraph and change it into his own words. The writer used ideas in the original paragraph with minor changes in the wording, and failed to give credit to the original source.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Original Passage:

Despite its origin in scientific research and educational pursuits, it did not take long for marketers, advertisers, and public relations practitioners to find the Internet. What they found was an uncharted land that rivaled their wildest dreams. More than a decade later the Web remains the least regulated of all mass media. Although the dot com bust of the early 2000s slowed the commercial expansion of the Web, we are beginning to witness a strong rebound in every area, including online advertising. Today, the one feature that best defines the Web is its unrelenting commercialism.

Paraphrase:

Although it began as a non-commercial medium, its relative lack of regulation quickly made the Internet attractive to business. Despite some ups and downs, commercial use of the Web is now obvious and pervasive (Ebersole, 2005, p. 537).

Is this plagiarism?

No. After consultation with his instructor and local librarian, the author wrote this non-plagiarized paraphrase. This time, the writer used his own words. The ideas presented in the original passage remain, but the words are now his. He has also given the original author credit (using APA format for “in-text citations”).

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

The original passage for Examples 3 and 4 are from the following book, cited in MLA format:

Flieger, Verlyn. *Interrupted Music: the Making of Tolkien's Mythology*.
Kent, OH : Kent State UP, 2005. Print.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Original Passage:

Frodo is no Arthur, and that, in a way, is Tolkien's point. He is a little man, not a national hero. The glorious days of epic and romance are long past, and the actions of hobbits, of ordinary people caught in extraordinary circumstances have superseded the larger-than-life heroes, their deeds, their chivalry and courtly valor. Nevertheless, the same poignance and sense of loss pervade both stories.

Paraphrase:

The character of Frodo is not much like King Arthur, because Tolkien is making that a point. As a hobbit Frodo is an ordinary person who lives long after the days of romantic, epic heroes. Although he lives through amazing events, Frodo is still ordinary, not larger-than-life. Nonetheless, both Tolkien's writings and the stories of Arthur share a sense of loss.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes. The writer of this paraphrase changed a few words and phrases, but did not synthesize the original paragraph and change it into her own words. The writer used the original paragraph with minor changes, and failed to cite the original source.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Original Passage:

If we are to take Tolkien's work as he wrote it and as he clearly wanted his audience to read it—as a true mythology, with all the layering and multiple narrators and overlapping texts and variant versions that characterize mythologies in the real world—then we must allow that, like those real-world mythologies, all the parts, even the apparently inconsequential ones, are in the greater service of the whole. To read his work as anything less is to do a disservice, perhaps even a violence, to it.

Paraphrase:

Tolkien wanted his many writings to be viewed like a real mythology, including different versions of the same stories written by different people. All his works, both famous and less-known, are important as part of the same overall mythology. A reader who treats Tolkien's work otherwise is not doing it justice (Flieger 84).

Is this plagiarism?

No. This time, the author has written the paraphrase in her own words, changing it significantly from the original passage. The ideas presented in the original passage remain, but the words are now hers. She has also given the original author credit.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

When you use an exact key phrase from the original passage, but paraphrase the rest, the key phrase, or original words, needs to be in quotation marks. For example, the original passage below is from the following book (cited in MLA format):

Wells, Paul. *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch*.
London: Wallflower, 2000. Print.

Original Passage:

The horror genre has become increasingly concerned with the relative and fragile nature of existence.

Acceptable Paraphrase (with in-text citation to the exact page of the book):

Horror films often examine the "relative and fragile nature" of humanity and what it means to exist (Wells 9).

[Back](#)

[Next](#)



How to avoid plagiarism

- Get to know your citation style guide.
- Quote and cite phrases, sentences, and paragraphs taken directly from the original source.
- Quote and cite statistics, charts, graphs, and drawings taken directly from the original source.
- When you paraphrase or summarize, give credit to the original author.



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Different disciplines use different citation styles. Here are the 5 most commonly used styles:

- **MLA:** Modern Language Association. Frequently used in the humanities, literature, and arts. Consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (for undergraduates) or *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (for grad students).
- **APA:** American Psychological Association. Frequently used in the sciences and social sciences. Consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.
- **Turabian:** Multidisciplinary; frequently used in history. Consult *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian.
- **Chicago:** Multidisciplinary; frequently used in history. Consult the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- **AMA:** American Medical Association. Frequently used in health, medicine and biology. Consult the *American Medical Association Manual of Style*.



Understanding how to credit your sources using short in-text citations (or footnotes) can help you avoid plagiarism. The longer citation in your “References” or “Works Cited” list (at the end of your paper) includes, at least, the author, title, and source information.

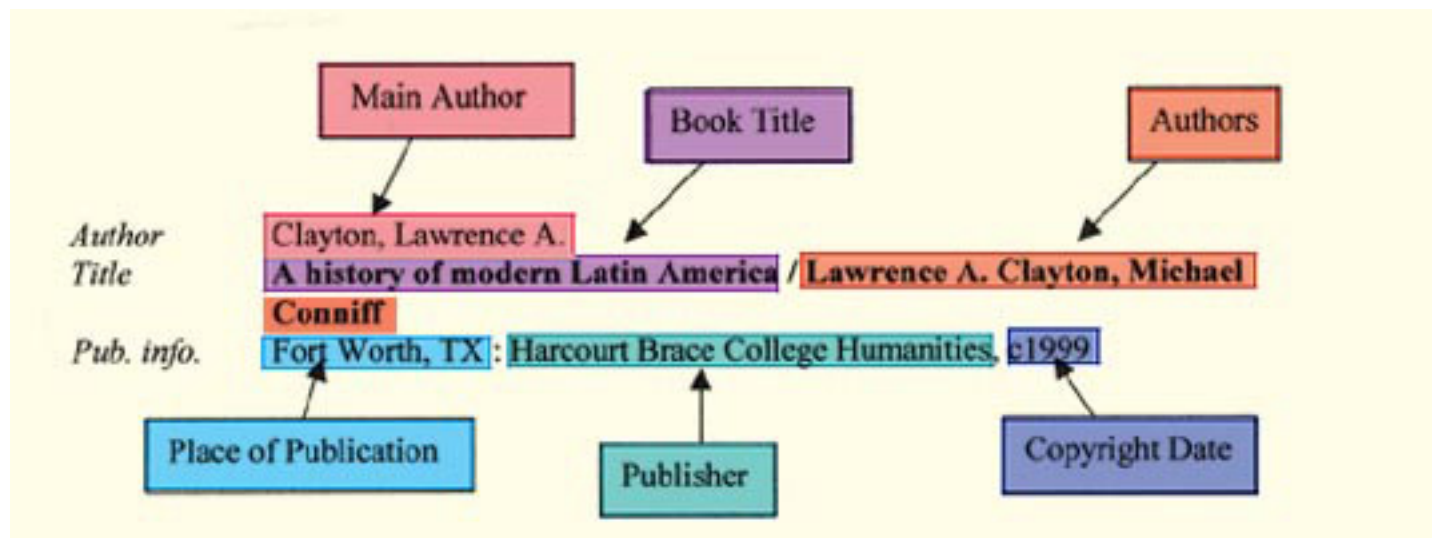
The next two pages will help you with reading the parts of a citation and translating the parts into either the MLA or APA citation style formats.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Here is the publication information for a book found in the Library Catalog:

Clayton, Lawrence A. A history of modern Latin America / Lawrence A. Clayton, Michael Conniff. Fort Worth, TX : Harcourt Brace College Humanities, c1999



MLA Format—as it would look in your "Works Cited" list:

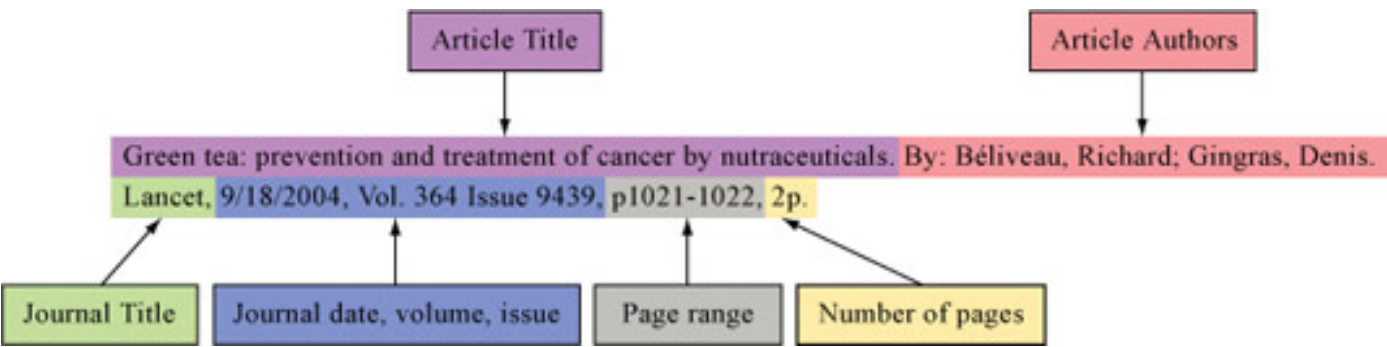
Clayton, Lawrence A. and Michael Conniff. *A History of Modern Latin America*.
Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Humanities, 1999. Print.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Here is the publication information for a journal article retrieved online from the *Academic Search Premier* database on 17 July, 2008:

Green tea: prevention and treatment of cancer by nutraceuticals. By: Béliveau, Richard; Gingras, Denis. *Lancet*, 9/18/2004, Vol. 364 Issue 9439, p1021-1022, 2p.



Here is how the article would look in MLA format in your "Works Cited" list:
Béliveau, Richard, and Denis Gingras. "Green Tea: Prevention and Treatment of Cancer by Nutraceuticals." *Lancet* 364 (2004): 1021-22. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 17 July 2008.

Note that for online articles you have to give information not just about the original journal where the article was published, but also what online database you got it from, the medium of publication, and when you accessed it. (The same article might be available in more than one online database.)

Now, here is the same online article cited using the APA format:

Béliveau, R., & Gingras, D. (2004). Green tea: Prevention and treatment of cancer by nutraceuticals. *Lancet*, 364, 1021-1022. Retrieved from <http://www.thelancet.com>

As you can see, in the APA format you provide a direct link to the article—its address or URL. In most databases, however, you'll find a designation called DOI.

DOI stands for “Digital Object Identifier.” This is “a means of persistently identifying a piece of intellectual property (a creation) on a digital network, irrespective of its current location.” (Source: [International DOI Foundation](#)) In short, a DOI means always being able to find your article on the Internet.

If you were to find this same article in a database that provided a DOI (often found at the bottom of the article information), the citation would look like this:

Béliveau, R., & Gingras, D. (2004). Green tea: Prevention and treatment of cancer by nutraceuticals. *Lancet*, 364, 1021-1022. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(04)17076-1

So when citing in the APA format, it's not important to have the name of the database, but you must always provide some type of address. And depending on whether it's a DOI or URL, the format of your citation is going to be slightly different.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

What is a plagiarism detection service?

Plagiarism detection services, such as Turnitin.com, use specialized technology to compare student papers with information found on the Internet as well as their own databases of previously submitted papers. Your professor may ask you to submit your papers electronically through Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com will create an "originality report" that shows how much of your paper is original and how much, if any, is plagiarized



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

The final section of "Plagiarism: The Crime of Intellectual Kidnapping" is a 13 question quiz that will test your ability to detect and avoid plagiarism.

You need Acrobat Reader to read this quiz.

[Download the quiz here](#)



[Back](#)