PLAGIARISM EXERCISE

Note: Discuss with your department head, program director, or principal the range of penalties related to plagiarism, and talk to students about those penalties prior to handing out the exercise.

**Definition:** Plagiarism is defined as using someone else’s words and/or ideas as though they were one’s own.

**Guidelines:** Avoiding plagiarism is quite easy: All one has to do is provide correctly formatted documentation that properly credits the author of words and ideas used in a paper. Discipline-specific conventions govern documentation formats. The social sciences use the APA (American Psychological Association) guidelines and, in some instances, the Chicago guidelines. The humanities use the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines. And the sciences use either the scientific notation method or the Chicago guidelines.

Unfortunately, most secondary students are taught how to use only MLA documentation. As a result, they flounder when they begin college, for they lack the knowledge necessary to use proper documentation in most of their content-area courses. On this account, the importance of mastering the range of conventions cannot be overstated.

Most students do not set out to plagiarize. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why they do. Proper documentation is time consuming and requires attention to detail. Many students do not begin writing a paper until near the due date; they subsequently feel time pressure and try to take shortcuts when it comes to documentation. As a result, they do not document properly or at all and have a high degree of plagiarized material in their papers. Another factor is that many...
students do not believe that documentation is important, believing instead (and mistakenly) that only the content matters. As a result, they do not devote the necessary effort to document their papers properly. Other students are simply not used to attending to details closely and thus find it impossible to focus on formatting references correctly, which also results in plagiarism. The most extreme form of plagiarism consists of taking an entire paper that was written by someone else and representing it as one’s own.

Students should note that a software program—Turnitin®—is specifically designed to identify plagiarism. A paper is scanned into the computer and compared to a large database that not only can identify the plagiarized portions but also can provide the source of the plagiarized material.

Documentation consists of providing references for ideas and words that one obtains from sources and then uses in one’s own writing. In academic writing, one must always acknowledge any use made of other people’s written work. Failure to do so will be viewed as an intentional attempt to pass off someone else’s words and ideas as one’s own.

Many writers assume that they need to provide proper documentation only when they provide a direct quotation from another work, but this assumption is false. Documentation is necessary under three circumstances:

• When providing a direct quotation
• When using another writer’s ideas in a paper
• When paraphrasing the words or ideas of another writer

Proper documentation requires both attribution and citation. Attribution means providing the name of the source (usually the author or authors), whereas citation means providing
identifying information, such as the date of publication, the title of the work, or the page number(s) associated with the reference.

**Directions:** This exercise is designed to provide students with preliminary practice with or a review of proper documentation in three of the more common formatting conventions used in academic writing. Review the examples, and then respond to each question directly on this handout.

**EXAMPLE 1**


The idea of being open to “faith” is a powerful one; the longing to surrender the self to another who can provide certainty is an enduring part of the human psyche. However, for those who believe in the importance of using reason to define the truth, this surrender must raise concerns. . . . [Nevertheless] it became the mark of the committed Christian to be able to reject rational thought, and even the evidence of empirical experience. Christians would often pride themselves on their lack of education, associating independent philosophical thinking with the sin of pride. . . . So here are the roots of the conflict between religion and science that still pervades debates on Christianity to this day.

*Student Text*

There is a fundamental incompatibility between religion and science. Religion is based on faith, whereas science is based on close observation of the natural world, development of theories to explain those observations, and tests of those theories that can be replicated.

© 2014 Taylor & Francis
Owing to this incompatibility, followers of the world’s religions are generally hostile toward science because it threatens their faith. This hostility seems to be strongest in monotheistic religions like Islam and Christianity. As Charles Freeman notes in *The Closing of the Western Mind*, early Christians “would often pride themselves on their lack of education” (120).

**Works Cited**

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

**Answers:**

1. There is no plagiarism in the passage because the student used both attribution and citation and because the student used quotation marks appropriately to identify the material taken from the source text. The attribution consists of the author’s name (Freeman) and the title of the book; the citation consists of the page number.

2. The documentation format is MLA, as indicated by the documentation formatting and the heading “Works Cited,” which is used only in MLA.

**EXAMPLE 2**


Our consciousness, even more than it is posted in space, unrolls in time. . . . As with every other aspect of human nature, it’s been claimed that there are cultures out there that have no conception of time. The linguist Bernard Comrie examined the claims and has noted that they are not credible. A person belonging to a culture with no conception of
time could not generalize that people invariably are born, grow up, age, and then die, and thus would be unsurprised to meet someone who started out as a corpse, came to life as a senior citizen, grew younger and younger, and eventually disappeared into his mother’s womb. Needless to say, there is no society populated by such madmen.

**Student Text**

Whorf proposed that certain American Indian tribal languages, such as Hopi, lack tense and that the people who speak these languages live in the moment of the eternal now. On this account, he argued that language affects how the mind operates—that is, the lack of tense in Hopi prevents speakers of Hopi from having concepts for past and future. The problem with this argument is that it fails to take into account the fact that the Hopi or anyone else with no conception of time would be unable to generalize that people are born, grow up, and die. Such people would not be able to plant crops, follow the track of an animal, or understand the change of the seasons (Pinker).

**References**

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

**Answers:**

1. There is plagiarism, and it exists in two parts. The student failed to provide any documentation for the paraphrase of Whorf’s study of American Indian tribal languages. There also is plagiarism with regard to Pinker. The student used Pinker’s exact phrasing without using quotation marks. Moreover, the inclusion of (Pinker) is
insufficient as documentation, for the student failed to provide the date of publication, which is necessary in this case.

2. The student attempted to use the APA format but used it incorrectly. APA requires inclusion of the date of publication for in-text citations.

**EXERCISE 1**


Research has shown that Indo-European emerged in the Transcaucus area of eastern Anatolia about 6,000 years ago. Language itself predates Indo-European by many thousands of years, but we have not been able to look sufficiently far into the past to trace its history beyond this point. Scholars generally agree that Cro-Magnon man used language 40,000 years ago, but there is significant disagreement over whether Neanderthals did. The question of when mankind began using language is important because it can help us understand human evolution. . . [S]ome scholars argue that language evolved from preexisting cognitive abilities, whereas others argue that no evidence exists for this view and that language seems to have emerged rapidly with the appearance of the Cro-Magnons. If the latter view is correct, language has a very short history.

*Student Text*

Many people may believe that humans have always had language, but this may not be the case. All the available research suggests that in the history of mankind language is fairly recent, probably emerging about 40,000 years ago among the Cro-Magnons. English, a
member of the Indo-European language group, which emerged even more recently—about 6,000 years ago in the Transcaucus area of eastern Anatolia, which is modern-day Turkey—is more recent still. In fact, the modern English that we speak today is only about 300 years old.

Works Cited

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

EXERCISE 2


I have something more universal in mind than the question of whether students should be permitted to romance their professors, or vice versa. It is something germane to all the deeply personal choices we make—namely, the rights of conscience. That is, the right we rely on when making choices relevant to personal autonomy, with the belief in God being a prime example. Outrage, no doubt, would emerge if an institution prohibited the belief in God. God is a deeply personal matter outside the reach of a university. It is my position that we should be no less indignant when a university prohibits who we can romance (presuming, of course, that the partnership involves consenting adults in a relationship void of tangible harm).
Universities nationwide have implemented policies that prohibit romantic relationships between students and faculty, and almost universally the argument for these policies is that, first and foremost, any such relationship is “asymmetrical” in that the faculty member has more “power” than the student and therefore is in a “controlling” position. Exactly what the faculty member controls is never stated explicitly, but even a half-wit can recognize the unstated implication that the issue is sex. That these policies seem specifically designed to protect young coeds from lecherous male professors should offend all reasonable adults—males who are clearly the target of sexist politics and females who by virtue of these policies are reduced to automatons who lack both reason and will. As Abramson (2007) noted, romance is a matter of conscience, the ability—and indeed the freedom—to make decisions for oneself upon becoming an adult. On this account, the freedom to choose with whom one has a romantic relationship should be as sacred as the freedom to choose one’s religion.

References

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

EXERCISE 3


New York: Viking.

© 2014 Taylor & Francis
It was only a matter of time before Massachusetts Bay’s economic ambitions brought the Puritans into conflict with the region’s other occupants, the Native Americans. In the lower portion of the Connecticut River valley lived the Pequots, a tribe whose economic might more than equaled that of the Puritans. When the captains of several English trading vessels were killed by Indians in the region, Massachusetts Bay seized upon the murders as a pretext for launching an attack on the Pequots. In many ways, the Pequot War of 1637 was . . . a terrifyingly brutal assault that redefined the balance of power in the region for decades to come.

**Student Text**

The conflict between the first American colonists and the American Indian tribes of the Northeast is often portrayed as either a clash of cultures or a struggle for land. Certainly there was conflict over land, especially as more and more colonists arrive from England, and there were enough cultural differences to make easy relations between the two groups difficult. But when we look more closely at the period between 1620 and 1650, we find that a large part of the problems between European settlers and Indians was based on economic competition.

**References**

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?
EXERCISE 4


In general, it is safe to say that life in a Roman town was considerably more communal than is the case among Westerners today. Study of apartment blocks at Ostia and elsewhere reveals that the living quarters of the humble often lacked amenities considered absolutely fundamental in modern residences; many had no kitchens, latrines, or baths. As a consequence, many functions performed inside in private today were conducted by the Romans outdoors, in full public view. For instance, in the absence of widespread private kitchens, Roman communities tended to have a plethora of taverns and public eating places, distributed so as to serve the populated parts of the town. Public latrines, likewise, show a degree of openness that is shocking to modern sensibilities. Many are multiple-seaters, in which patrons would attend to bodily functions, apparently in full view of others; and there is no indication of male/female segregation. There could hardly be a better illustration of the communality of living in Roman towns.

Student Text

Those who argue that people are basically the same everywhere need only look at Roman society to see how wrong they are. According to Garrett Fagan, Romans of more humble means didn’t even have kitchens, toilets, or baths in their homes. When they needed to eat, they had to go to the local tavern. When they had to take care of their biological needs, they used public toilets that didn’t even have partitions to separate people so that they used the toilet in full view of everyone else. In addition, it seems that men and women shared the same facilities, with no effort to provide privacy.
Logicians tend to consider definitions as arbitrary; but this is true only in a formal system where signs are supposed to have only the meaning which is attributed to them by convention. It is never true in ordinary language, except in the case of scholarly or scientific words that are introduced into the language with a given meaning. If a word already exists, its definition can never be considered arbitrary, for the word is bound up in the language with previous classifications, with value judgments that give it, in advance, an affective, positive or negative coloration. Indeed, if it were otherwise, we could not understand the constant discussion about the meanings of words. . . .

Student Text
In the postmodern perspective, language is completely arbitrary and ultimately meaningless. Consequently, what we have to look for in texts and in speech is not some concrete expression of surface meaning but rather what lies behind or underneath the words, which through the postmodern lens is always a political expression deeply embedded in the power relations associated with dominance and sex. Perelman, however, resisted this perspective, arguing that “definitions can never be considered arbitrary.” If individual words are “bound up” in the
psychosocial, paradigmatic dynamic of human interaction, then the entire postmodern approach to language seems fundamentally flawed.

References

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

EXERCISE 6


There are . . . new medical technologies having population-level effects as a result of millions of individual choices. One has to look no further than contemporary Asia, where a combination of cheap sonograms and easy access to abortion has led to a dramatic shifting of sex ratios. In Korea, for example, 122 boys were born in the early 1990s for every 100 girls, compared with a normal ratio of 105 to 100. The ratio in the People’s Republic of China is only somewhat lower, at 117 boys for every 100 girls, and there are parts of northern India where ratios are even more skewed. This has led to a deficit of girls in Asia that . . . economist Amartya Sen at one point estimated to be 100 million. . . . By the second decade of the twenty-first century, China will face a situation in which up to one fifth of its marriage-age male population will not be able to find brides.

Student Text

The evidence that American government and business are willing to abandon even the pretense of ethical and moral behavior is nowhere more evident than in China. The
Clinton administration succeeded in gaining China’s admission to the World Trade Organization and then bestowed preferred trade status on China to make it easier to import goods produced by Chinese workers for American companies. The Bush administration then took the remarkable step of granting huge tax incentives to American companies willing to set up plants and offices in China, which led to the outsourcing of approximately 3.7 million American jobs between 2002 and 2006. At no point during the establishment of these business and trade arrangements did politicians or business leaders mention the Chinese practice of female infanticide. Fukuyama sanitized the practice, limiting his reference to the selective abortions that in the early 1990s produced a sex ratio of 117 boys for every 100 girls. Ignored is the fact that selective abortions occur only in the cities. In the countryside, where medical care is harder to get and beyond the means of most peasants, the Chinese exercise a different form of selection—tossing the newborn female into the nearest stream, if one is handy, the nearest pig sty if one is not. Can a country preserve its claim to moral integrity when it turns a blind eye toward countries like China that allow the most inhuman abuses?

References

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

**EXERCISE 7**

As in good fiction, the characters of *In Cold Blood* are well-drawn; the Clutters themselves are almost too good to be true, seemingly perfect in their roles as undeserving victims. The lawmen who pursue justice are driven by their grim determination and resolve. The fearful townspeople want justice, and when the time comes to enact it, they rise to the challenge. The killers are consummate no-accounts, and their characterizations show Capote’s gothic pen to definite advantage, portraying them as grotesque, even monstrous.

**Student Text**

Although the book is a work of nonfiction, it is full of fictional elements. The characters, for example, are well-drawn. The Clutter family are described perfectly as undeserving victims whose deaths tug at the heart strings. The killers, Hickock and Smith, are worthless no-accounts, but Capote takes them beyond this everyday status, portraying them as grotesque monsters.

**Works Cited**

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

**EXERCISE 8**


© 2014 Taylor & Francis
To make matters worse, Mao fell out with Krushchev. Cut off from Soviet aid, he tried to match Western steel production by pulling 40 million peasants off the land to build backyard foundries, smelting whatever ores they could find locally and even melting their pots and pans to forge homemade steel. Little of what they produced was usable, but no one dared say so . . . . “Communism is paradise,” the peasants were expected to sing; “the People’s Communes are the bridge to it.” But there was trouble in paradise. When not singing, the people were starving. . . . According to . . . [an] informant, “The worst thing that happened during the famine was this: parents would decide to allow the old and the young to die first . . . a mother would say to her daughter, ‘You have to go and see your granny in heaven.’ They stopped giving the girl-children food. They just gave them water.”

**Student Text**

Chairman Mao no doubt had charisma—otherwise, he could not have successfully led the army in its fight against the nationalists during the civil war of 1945–1949. Whether he was an effective administrator, however, is doubtful. Many, if not most, of his executive decisions appear to have been based on ideology rather than knowledge of the issues. Morris provided a representative example: Mao’s decision to increase steel production after Soviet supplies were cut off owing to a rift with Krushchev. According to Morris, Mao moved “40 million peasants off the land to build backyard foundries,” which crippled food production and resulted in large-scale famine. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Mao knew little about agriculture, the nutritional needs of the people, or steel production. More damning is that he seemed unconcerned when his efforts to produce steel in backyards caused millions of Chinese to die of starvation.

© 2014 Taylor & Francis
Bibliography

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

EXERCISE 9


The predictable behavior of the River Nile made Amenhotep’s own country the most prosperous and fertile in the ancient world. The annual inundation, or flooding, ensured that the Egyptian farmers could, with relatively little effort, grow crops which were the envy of their neighbours, and while the agriculture was under water, provided a vast labour force available for work on state projects. If the Nile failed to flood, or if the waters rose too high, there could be grave problems, but Amenhotep was truly blessed by Amen, and the Nile behaved impeccably throughout his lengthy reign. Grain was grown in vast quantities; it was used to pay the wages and to make the bread and beer which were staples of the Egyptian diet, while any surplus was stored in vast warehouses to provide against future lean times.

Student Text

The ability to produce food for the people was central to the success of ancient societies. The Sumerian and the Babylonian societies, for example, collapsed when drought brought on by climate change made it impossible to feed the people (Roberts, 2001). Egypt, more than most other Mediterranean societies, benefitted from a geography—i.e., the Nile River—that to a certain extent protected it from drought. Although Egypt was a desert country even in ancient times, the Nile provided ample water for farming, for its...
source, Lake Victoria, is more than 4000 miles to the South. So when drought struck Egypt, the river was unaffected. As a result, grain was gown in vast quantities and often was used as payment for work on temples and pyramids. Surplus grain was stored in warehouses and temples to provide food for the people when annual harvests were below expectations and needs.

References

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?

**EXERCISE 10**


Adams and Rush were of the same mind on slavery. Adams was utterly opposed to slavery and the slave trade and, like Rush, favored a gradual emancipation of all slaves. That it was, at the least, inconsistent for slave owners to be espousing freedom and equality was not lost on Adams, any more than on others on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In London, Samuel Johnson, who had no sympathy for the American cause, had asked, “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of Negros?” Abigail [Adams], in her letters that spring, had questioned whether the passion for liberty could be “equally strong in the breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow creatures of theirs,” and had earlier pondered whether the agonies of pestilence and war could be God’s punishment for the sin of slavery.
Critics of the Founding Fathers often describe them as hypocrites who were ready to fight Britain in the name of “liberty” but who nevertheless kept slaves, with Jefferson and Washington being two of the largest slaveholders in the colonies. What the critics fail to recognize is that sentiments against slavery were strong among most of the Founding Fathers. David McCullough, in his book *John Adams*, notes that “Adams was utterly opposed to slavery and the slave trade” (133). The issue was whether those sentiments could be expressed in any document of independence, given the unyielding opposition from two Southern states, North and South Carolina.

**Works Cited**

***

1. Is there plagiarism in this passage? Explain why or why not.

2. What documentation format is used?
PLAGIARISM ANSWER SHEET

Exercise 1

1. Yes, there is plagiarism here because the student used information directly from the sourced text without providing citation and attribution.

2. The documentation format is MLA. We know this from the heading “Works Cited.”

Exercise 2

1. No, there is no plagiarism here because the student properly documented the source text using correct attribution and citation.

2. The documentation format is APA. We know this from the heading “References.”

Exercise 3

1. Technically, there is no plagiarism here because the student did not draw directly on the source passage for ideas or statements. It is the case, however, that Philbrick’s book makes the argument that the underlying issue was economic competition. A broader perspective indicates that the student did appropriate Philbrick’s idea, which would constitute plagiarism. But for this exercise, we must work only with the sample texts in hand.

2. The documentation format is APA.

Exercise 4

1. Yes, there is plagiarism in this passage. The student paraphrased the original text. Although the student provided attribution (the author’s name), he or she failed to provide the appropriate citation or page number for the paraphrase. The
documentation format is MLA, and this format requires that a writer provide page numbers of summaries and paraphrases.

**Exercise 5**

1. Yes, there is plagiarism in this passage. Although the student provided attribution for the Perelman quotation, he or she failed to provide the date of publication and the page number, both of which are required in the APA format that the student was using.

**Exercise 6**

1. Yes, there is plagiarism in this passage. The student took words directly from Fukuyama’s text. He or she provided attribution but failed to provide appropriate citation.

2. The documentation format is APA.

**Exercise 7**

1. Yes, there is plagiarism in this passage. The student took words directly from the Voss text without providing attribution and citation.

2. The documentation format is MLA.

**Exercise 8**

1. No, there is not any plagiarism in this passage. The student used appropriate documentation where required.

2. The documentation format is the Chicago Manual of Style. We know this from the use of reference notes and the heading “Bibliography.”
Exercise 9

1. Yes, there is plagiarism in the student’s passage. The last two lines of the student’s text use some of the same words as the original, yet the student failed to provide any attribution or citation.

2. The documentation format is APA.

Exercise 10

1. There is no plagiarism in the student’s passage. The student provided correct attribution and citation for referencing the McCullough text.

2. The documentation format is MLA.