

When to footnote or cite can be confusing. This handout is designed to help you decide when you should be citing the works you used so you are not plagiarizing or cheating.

“Derived from the Latin work *plagiarius* (“kidnapper”), plagiarism refers to a form of cheating that has been defined as “the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own” (Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* [New York: Harper, 1952] 2 ).

This and other quotations used below are all taken from Chapter 2 (pages 65-75) of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi , 6th. ed. New York: The Modern Language Association, 2003.

### DO I HAVE TO FOOTNOTE EVERY FACT?

"If you have any doubt about whether or not you are committing plagiarism, cite your source or sources."

### WHAT IF I PUT SOMEONE ELSE'S IDEAS IN MY OWN WORDS?

"Plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person’s ideas, information or expressions without acknowledging that person’s work constitutes intellectual theft. Passing off another person’s ideas, information or expressions to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud."

### WHY DOES PLAGIARISM MATTER?

Careers and reputations have been damaged by findings of plagiarism. Journalists have been fired recently from the *Sun-Times*<sup>1</sup>, the *Wall Street Journal*<sup>2</sup>, and the *Nashville Tennessean*<sup>3</sup>. A Harvard psychiatrist resigned after a finding of plagiarism against him<sup>4</sup>. Art Buchwald sued Paramount Pictures (and won) over the *idea* for the plot of *Coming to America*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Fitzgerald, "Sun-Times Drops Columnist over Plagiarism" *Editor & Publisher* June 23, 1990:17.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Lazare, "The Kandell Case: Plagiarism at *The Wall Street Journal*?" *Columbia Journalism Review* January-February, 1991: 6.

<sup>3</sup>Mark Fitzgerald, "Rash of Plagiarism: *Nashville Tennessean* Fires an Editor, Reprimands Another." *Editor & Publisher* September 16, 1989: 15.

<sup>4</sup>Kim A. McDonald, "Noted Harvard Psychiatrist Resigns after Faculty Group Finds He Plagiarized." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* December 7, 1988: A1.

<sup>5</sup>Jeanne McDowell, "He's Got Their Number, Almost; a Writer Scores Against a Studio But Where's the Money?" *Time* January 22, 1990: 50.

## HOW DOES THE INTERNET IMPACT PLAGIARISM?

The Internet makes it much easier to plagiarize. So much is available online and material can be easily cut and pasted into documents; however, this easy access does not minimize the responsibility to cite sources.

## IS THIS PLAGIARISM?

Read this passage from the article on Malcolm X by Peter Goldman in Dictionary of American Negro Biography, page 422, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982.

"In prison Malcolm was introduced by his younger brother Reginald to the teachings of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, the sect led until 1975 by Elijah Muhammad and known popularly as the Black Muslims. Malcolm quickly became a convert, took the Muslim "X" in place of the "slave name" Little, shed his past and entered upon his own reeducation, beginning by copying words out of a dictionary from A to Z. He was ordained a minister upon his release, and over the next twelve years he became the best known and most effective evangelist of the Nation of Islam, heading its Harlem mosque, organizing dozens more temples from Connecticut to California, building its following from 400 to perhaps 10,000 registered members and countless additional sympathizers."

## Are the following paragraphs correctly done or has some plagiarism taken place?

- Malcolm was introduced by his younger brother to the teachings of the Nation of Islam while he was in prison; he became a convert, exchanged the Muslim "X" for the "slave name" Little and eventually became an ordained minister.

*Loose paraphrasing of the author's words with no credit given for the ideas is plagiarism.*

- As the Nation of Islam's most famous evangelist, Malcolm built its membership from 400 to as many as 10,000.

*The statistics given are not common knowledge and are not credited. Plagiarism!*

- Malcolm quickly became a convert, took the Muslim "X" in place of the "slave name" Little, shed his past and entered upon his own reeducation, beginning by copying words out of a dictionary from A to Z.<sup>1</sup>

*Still plagiarized! While the writer used a footnote to indicate the source, he does not use quotation marks to indicate that the sentence was quoted word for word. Chances are that an abrupt change in writing style will be noticeable to your instructor.*

- The "best known and most effective evangelist of the Nation of Islam" Malcolm had been introduced to the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, known as the Black Muslims, by his younger brother while he was in prison; later ordained as a minister, he was instrumental in the growth of the Nation of Islam over the next 12 years.<sup>2</sup>

*The direct quote is in quotation marks, but the footnote number does not appear until the end of the sentence, indicating that both those specific words and the other facts are Goldman's.*

*There are various style manuals in the reference shelves at the 808 call number that can help you with how to do bibliographies and footnotes, as well as writing manuals that can help with research, grammar and writing skills. You can also look at the Citation Styles Handout.*

**DON'T GO AWAY EMPTY HANDED!!!** *If you are having trouble finding what you need, just ask a reference librarian. We are here to help!*