Plagiarism

The UT Dean of Students Office assists faculty in dealing with cases of student scholastic dishonesty, and their website includes extensive information for both students and faculty.

For faculty: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/for_faculty.php
For students: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Faculty may wish to include the following information (download PDF version) about how to avoid plagiarism in their syllabus or discuss it with students during class:

SAMPLE PLAGIARISM ADDENDUM

Avoiding plagiarism transgressions is the responsibility of each and every student. Student Judicial Services does not discriminate between intentional or accidental plagiarism, and penalties imposed by SJS range from a failing grade for the course in which the transgression was committed to expulsion from the University.

Various citation methods exist and it is best to check with our professor to see which format he or she prefers. UT Libraries and Student Judicial Services also offer several resources both online and in person that demonstrate the proper citation methods.

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism:

1. Familiarize yourself with citation formats. MLA, APA, footnotes, endnotes – the list goes on. There are many different ways to cite information, so the first step in avoiding plagiarism is to learn how to properly cite the sources you use. Check with your professor to figure out which format he or she prefers and consider purchasing a citation guidebook. This worthwhile investment will serve you throughout your college career.

2. Don't simply copy text into your notes. If you find a quote you want to use, write it down, but otherwise paraphrase and digest the information you are taking notes on. If you do write down a direct quote, be sure to make note of it so that you do not confuse it as your own work.

3. Better to be safe than sorry. When in doubt, cite your source. Even if you do not directly quote a source, paraphrasing someone else's idea still requires a citation. Any time you do not express an idea which is completely your own, you should cite the source in which you found the idea. This includes images.

4. Cite as you go. Don't wait until you have finished your paper to go back and add citations. Insert internal citations or footnotes as you use ideas or facts in your paper.

Paraphrasing

To help you master the difference between acceptable and unacceptable paraphrase, here is a statement written by a historian followed by two examples of how a student might use it. Only the second example is not an instance of plagiarism.

Original Passage: “Revising interpretations of the past is intrinsic to the study of history. But no part of the American experience has, in the last twenty-five years, seen a broadly accepted point of view so completely overturned as Reconstruction—the violent, dramatic and still controversial era that followed the Civil War. Since the early 1960’s, a profound alteration of the place of blacks within American society, newly uncovered evidence, and changing definitions of history itself have combined to transform our understanding of race relations, politics, and economic change during reconstruction.”

Unacceptable Paraphrase: According to Eric Foner, changing interpretations of the past is intrinsic to the study of history. But he believes that no part of the American history has witnessed a widely accepted understanding so drastically overturned in the last quarter century as Reconstruction—the violent, dramatic and still controversial era that followed the Civil War. Over the last forty years a profound change in the place of blacks in society, newly discovered evidence, and new understanding of history itself have converged to alter out understanding of race relations and the political and economic changes occurred during reconstruction.


The Problem—Although this example properly cites the course, it is not acceptable to paraphrase because it tracks the structure and language of Foner’s writing too closely.

Acceptable Paraphrase—Eric Foner begins his magisterial book with the point but now something of a commonplace—that the upheaval in Reconstruction historiography in the late twentieth century was in part a result of the civil rights movement.


Acceptable—This paraphrase is acceptable because, in its own “digested” words and with its own viewpoint and purpose, it summarizes Foner’s point and it supplies a full citation.

The Bottom Line

As a research university, the University of Texas at Austin takes plagiarism very seriously. Do not risk getting involved in plagiarism infraction—the consequences simply aren’t worth it. Always cite your sources, and when in doubt consult a professor or librarian. You may also read more about plagiarism at the Student Judicial Services website: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/academicintegrity.html.