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## **Plagiarism: What it Is and How to Avoid It**

Plagiarism occurs when you borrow another's words (or ideas) and do not acknowledge that you have done so. In this culture, we consider our words and ideas intellectual property; like a car or any other possession, we believe our words belong to us and cannot be used without our permission.

Therefore, whenever you write a paper that requires research, you must tell your reader where you obtained any ideas or assertions that are not originally your own. Whether you quote directly or summarize the information, you must acknowledge your sources by citing them. In this way, you obtain "permission" to use another's words by giving that person credit for the work s/he has done.

However, even when you summarize you can run the risk of plagiarizing. Plagiarism also occurs when you borrow words or ideas, attempt to paraphrase them so they are not like the original, but fail to do so completely. If your words and phrases are too close to those of the original source, this, too, is plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a very serious offense. If it is found that you have plagiarized -- deliberately or inadvertently -- you may face serious consequences. In some instances, plagiarism has meant that students have had to leave the institutions where they were studying.

### **How can I paraphrase so that I am sure I am not "stealing" another person's sentences?**

- a) use synonyms for all words that are not generic
- b) change active voice to passive, or passive to active
- c) change the structure of the sentence
- d) reduce clauses to phrases
- e) change parts of speech

Look at this original sentence:

1. As the United States has shifted from an industry-based economy to one that is a service or information based, there has been a decline in high-paying jobs for factory workers.

(Crandall, Joann, Maryanne Kearny Datesman and Edward N. Kearny, *The American Ways*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Regents, 1997.)

Here are some acceptable paraphrases:

The number of factory jobs that pay well has decreased since the American economy has moved away from industry and toward the providing of service and information.  
(sentence structure is changed, synonyms are used)

With the American economy becoming more information and serviced based, there are fewer and fewer well-paid factory jobs.  
(clause reduced to a phrase; synonyms used)

The point is, you cannot simply substitute synonyms for some words, or merely change the word order -- you must make a concerted effort to transform the sentence into one that retains the meaning of the original, yet is as different from it as possible.