

Westmont College

For Students: Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

- ▶ *Be aware of the situations in which you may be tempted to plagiarize, some of which are described below.*

You don't have enough time to do the assignment well (Wilhoit, 1994), perhaps as the result of:

- * poor time management (Oliphant, 2001b),
- * perfectionism,
- * procrastination (Tamashiro, 1998), or
- * circumstances beyond your control.

You feel pressured to do particularly well on the assignment (Wilhoit) which may be caused by:

- * the weight assigned to a particular writing task,
- * family members who only want you to maintain a high grade-point average,
- * your own desires to perform well, or
- * competition for entrance to graduate school or for scholarships (Oliphant, 2001b).

You do not have, or are not sure that you have, the skills necessary to complete the assignment. These skills may include:

- * searching for relevant articles,
 - * evaluating internet sources (Oliphant, 2001b),
 - * understanding technical terms (Roig, 1999),
 - * knowing and being able to use a particular citation style (Oliphant, 2001b), and
 - * careful note-taking skills (Harris, 2000; Wilhoit; Williams, 1996).
- * It may also be that the professor's expectations or requirements for an assignment are not clear to you.

You don't understand:

- * the differences between plagiarizing and paraphrasing,
- * the details of citing correctly,
- * the important legal differences between common knowledge, public domain, and intellectual property.
- * that electronic and online sources are not public domain or common knowledge (Oliphant, 2001b).

- ▶ *Educate yourself about*

academic integrity and honesty. Learn about:

- * your commitments to the Westmont community, and
- * your responsibilities as a learner in this community.

plagiarism and how to avoid it. Find out:

- * what it is and how its definition might differ from discipline to discipline,
- * how to acknowledge sources properly,
- * when you might be tempted to plagiarize and what you can do to avoid being a plagiarist, and
- * what Westmont's plagiarism policy is and what the consequences are for plagiarizing (The Learning Skills Centre, 1999).

- ▶ *Use effective strategies to research and complete your assignments successfully.*

When group projects or cooperative learning activities are required or collaboration is allowed, make sure you understand clearly what is proper and improper cooperation and collaboration and how you are expected to contribute to the project (Wilhoit)

Clarify expectations or requirements for an assignment if they are originally not clear to you.

If your instructor provides additional information on the Web, check it out so you are better informed.

Pay close attention when plagiarism and its consequences are reviewed in class, so you understand how plagiarism is being defined in this discipline and what details you need to know (The Learning Skills Centre)

Attend any bibliographic instruction sessions that are offered so you learn about the resources available in the library and how to carry out your research using those resources (Oliphant, 2001b)

Learn the details of required citation styles correctly and the differences between plagiarizing and paraphrasing, and among common knowledge, public domain, and intellectual property, so you do not plagiarize inadvertently (The Learning Skills Centre).

Be aware that if bibliographic information is missing from online and electronic sources, you must work harder to find and identify the necessary bibliographic information.

Break large assignments down into a set of smaller assignments (Ehrlich, 1998; Harris; Murray, 2002; Oliphant, 2001a; Van Belle, nd). For instance, if you have a term paper due at the end of the semester, create your own deadlines for the different steps of the paper: a list of possible thesis statements; notes from your sources; a bibliography that addresses your chosen thesis; an outline; a first draft, a second draft, and a final draft.

- ▶ *Take careful, precise notes as you are researching and reading your sources* (Ehrlich; The Learning Skills Centre; Wilhoit; Williams).

Do not just highlight or underline the relevant sections.

Use 3 X 5 cards, and write down the exact words that the source used.

* Put quotation marks around this material and record the page number(s) from which the information was taken--even if just 1 or 2 words are quoted (The Learning Skills Centre).

* When you paraphrase an idea, make sure that it is completely restated in your own words rather than a mixture of your and the source's words. Record that this information is a paraphrase using the letter *P* written on this note card.

* When you record your own ideas, record this on the note card with an *MI* for "my idea" (The Learning Skills Centre; Williams).

* Record all bibliographic information of each source completely when you first take notes from that source.

- ▶ *Starting with your first draft:*

1. Properly acknowledge all ideas and words that are not your own in your text.

2. List complete bibliographic information on the Works Cited or References page for every source that is cited in your paper (Williams).

- ▶ *When writing your paper:*

1. Control the presentation of your topic and development of your arguments (The Learning Skills Centre; Williams) by using information from your sources to make your points, rather than letting the sources direct the path your argument takes.

2. Paraphrase as much as possible, using the proper citation style for the discipline in which you are writing.

3. When paraphrasing, completely restate the source's ideas and words, using your own words.

Then check your rewording against the source's wording to make sure that you successfully restated the source's ideas.

4. Acknowledge all of your sources' ideas, wording, sentence structure, and organizational pattern, using the appropriate citation style.

5. Only use a source's actual words when they are needed to "give weight to your argument" or when the source's wording is "necessary or particularly effective" (Williams).

6. When you quote a source, put quotation marks around the source's actual words and use the proper citation style for the discipline in which you are writing.

- ▶ *Before handing your assignment in, do the following last-minute checks* (Wilhoit; Writing Tutorial Services, 1998):

1. Check your citations against the original sources. Make sure that you have

* paraphrased properly,

- * acknowledged quotes properly, and
 - * acknowledged all sources where you have used their sentence structure, organizational pattern, ideas, or words.
2. Check your References or Works Cited list to make sure that you have accurately and completely recorded all the bibliographic information for each source and used the correct reference style.
 3. Compare your text citation to the sources listed on References or Works Cited page to make sure that they match each other: All sources cited must be listed in the references, and all sources listed in the references must be cited at least once in the text.

Sources

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