

## LUC WRITING CENTER – “HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM”

While writing undergraduate or graduate papers, students often don't realize how important it is to separate their words from those of published writers, historical figures, and other people whose words represent “proof” of some kind. When students don't cite quotes or sources, but use other people's words in their paper, this is called **plagiarism**. Basically, these students have stolen other people's ideas and language by putting them in their paper without listing the writers' or speakers' names. It's easy to remember how to avoid plagiarism. If you didn't invent certain word combinations or phrases included in your paper, make sure you give credit to the actual author!

*Example:*

**John is writing a paper on libraries throughout history, which must use MLA citation style. He wants to use a quote she found in an article by a writer named Lee Erickson to supplement his argument. This is a quote from John's paper:**

“By the 1780s, circulating libraries were common throughout Britain, frequently used by budding authors such as Jane Austen to supplement her personal library, as Lee Erickson has demonstrated. While admitting that the fiction available on loan academically ranked far below ‘institutional works,’ Lee Erickson claims, Circulating libraries, then, were an important part of the social fabric in Austen's England and materially affected the conditions in which her own novels were produced. They helped to create an audience for the ephemeral novel when books were expensive, and in particular, made reading a social activity in which women could usually properly participate (585).”

**In this paragraph, John mentioned the author's full name [Lee Erickson] and then block-quoted the quote since it was over four lines. He clearly gives credit to Erickson and separates his own thoughts from the author's. He also cites Erickson's article at the end of his paper in his Works Cited section like this:**

Erickson, Lee. “The Economy of Novel Reading: Jane Austen and the Circulating Library.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 30.4 (1990): 573-585. Web. JSTOR 18 October 2015.

**But what if John hadn't cited correctly? His paragraph would look like this instead:**

“By the 1780s, circulating libraries were common throughout Britain, frequently used by budding authors such as Jane Austen to supplement her personal library. The fiction available on loan academically ranked far below institutional works. Circulating libraries, then, were an important part of the social fabric in Austen's England and materially affected the conditions in which her own novels were produced. They helped to create an audience for the ephemeral novel when books were expensive, and in particular, made reading a social activity in which women could usually properly participate.”

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**This paragraph looks as if John invented every fact and sentence and is the author of the whole thing. The reader has no way of knowing where John got his information and John’s teacher can’t check his citations. Whether he meant to or not, John has plagiarized!**

*Plagiarizing can have very serious consequences.* Sometimes students are put on academic probation or even expelled! Though such punishments may seem severe, *stealing other people’s words means stealing their work.* How would you feel if another student took your essay, turned it in as his or her own work, and got a good grade that you deserved? Cite your sources correctly and you will not run the risk of plagiarizing and getting into trouble.

The following list will give you a few simple things to do in order to limit your chances of unintentionally taking other people’s ideas:

1. Before writing your paper, create the Works Cited section of your paper in which you list all of your sources. This ensures that you won’t run out of time or forget to make your Works Cited section and lose easy points off your final essay grade.
2. When you type out quotes from a book, newspaper article, or any other form of media in the body of your paper, make sure to surround your quotes in speech marks.
3. Go ahead and cite after each quote using parentheses or footnotes, depending on the citation style your teacher requests (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). That way you guarantee that you won’t forget that those words were not invented by you!
4. When you read your paper through during the revision process, watch for unusual word choices or phrasing that does not sound like your usual style. Those words and phrases may be quotes that you overlooked or forgot to cite.
5. If you decided not to cite a specific source, delete it from your Works Cited page. Make sure you’ve remembered to include all sources cited!