

Avoiding plagiarism (MLA)

Lesson Objective

Students will learn the definition of plagiarism and how to avoid it. They will complete a short quiz on plagiarism to show mastery of the skill.

Handouts

1. “Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism”
2. “Plagiarism Quiz”

Length of Lesson

20-30 minutes

Variations for Different Disciplines

1. General (ML_plagiarism_Chicago_GEN.doc)
2. Film (ML_plagiarism_MLA_FILM.doc)

Source

“Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism” and Part 1 of the “Plagiarism Quiz” was adapted from Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, by the Brooklyn College Writing Fellows

Part 2 of the “Plagiarism Quiz” adapted for the film department by Siobhan Cooke (writing fellow 2008-2010) 11/09.

Approved

11/DD/09

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ML_plagiarism_MLA_FILM_A.doc

Lesson Instructions

1. Give students the handouts.
2. Discuss the definition of plagiarism, examples of plagiarism, and how to avoid it. It may be advisable to pair this lesson with one on correct citation in the student’s discipline. (10 minutes)
3. Give the students the “Plagiarism Quiz” and discuss the answers with them.

**** Plagiarism Quiz Versions****

There are two versions of the “Plagiarism Quiz.” The first version has the answers to Part 2 directly after the question. The second version has the answers on a separate sheet.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

Handout 1

According to Brooklyn College policy, plagiarism is representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. Examples include:

- Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and citation to attribute the words to their source.
- Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
- Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
- Submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the Internet without citing the source, and "cutting and pasting" from various sources without proper attribution.

It is easy to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism by following the guidelines outlined below. As always, if you have specific questions about whether something is plagiarism or not, ask your instructor.

Quotation: Whenever you copy something directly from another text, put it in quotation marks and document the source according to the standard documentation style in your discipline. For film MLA style is used.

Example: According to Benshoff and Griffin, "Smoke Signals explores issues of memory, history, family, identity, forgiveness, and mourning (114)."

TIP: Be especially careful to indicate a quotation with quotation marks when you are taking notes during your research, so that you don't forget and think that you wrote the passage yourself.

Paraphrase: Sometimes you want to state another person's ideas, but in your own words. You must still acknowledge the source of the information. Be sure you aren't just rearranging or replacing a few words.

Example: Benshoff and Griffin note that Smoke Signals focuses on a number of themes such as memory, forgiveness, and loss. (114)

Check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words and that the information is accurate. Remember that the source of each idea you use must be cited separately; it's not enough to simply refer to an author once if you have used his or her ideas throughout your paper.

TIP: Read over what you want to paraphrase carefully and then cover up or close the text so you aren't tempted to use the text as a "guide." Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.

Common Knowledge: You do not need to document the source of facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people.

Example: Adam Beach played the Native American character, Victor, in the 1998 film Smoke Signals.

However, you *must* document facts that are not generally known.

Example: Today Smoke Signals is one of only a few films that deal with modern Native American culture (Benshoff and Griffin 113).

You must also cite interpretations of facts made by specific people.

Example: Victor is a fully developed and complex Native American character (Benshoff and Griffin 113).

This is not a fact but an interpretation; consequently, you need to cite your source.

TIP: When in doubt, ask yourself if what you are saying is agreed on by many readily available sources. If so, it is common knowledge. If the information is disputable, then your readers will want to know where you are getting that version of the facts and therefore you need to cite your source.

Identifying Plagiarism Quiz

Handout

2

Part 1. True False

Please indicate whether each statement is true or false.

1. Plagiarism is using the ideas and words of someone else as my own work without citing the original work.
2. If I download something from the Internet and change a few words and phrases, I can use that information as my own for class assignments.
3. If I find a newspaper article on the Internet, I can use it in my work without reference because it is in an electronic form.
4. It is actually getting very easy for someone else to do an electronic search to find the sources of information I used from the Internet.
5. If someone said something in a lecture or on TV, I don't have to cite it because it is not written.
6. It is acceptable to use text from Wikipedia in my paper without citation because it is anonymously edited, and it is difficult to impossible to find the author.
7. Paraphrasing is rewording someone else's ideas or facts. It is acceptable to paraphrase in a paper as long as the source is cited.
8. If an article is anonymously written it still must be cited.
9. Paraphrasing information from the Internet and using it as my own work without citation is considered plagiarism.
10. If I am unsure about how to cite a source, I should consult a style manual to find the correct citation style.

Part 2. Identifying Plagiarism

The following are quotes from sources and excerpts from student papers that somehow employ the source quote. In each case, ask yourself: Is this plagiarism?

Example 1

Quote from Source: “Scorsese’s career has been prolific and his films varied, ranging from documentaries to historical epics set at different points in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, he has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan, presenting detailed and often intimate portraits of their streets and people. In stories set in Little Italy’s Elizabeth and Mulberry Streets, or at the Five Points’ convergence of Park, Worth, and Baxter Streets, Scorsese’s films explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and the maintenance of literal and figurative borders.”

This quote comes from page 77 of the following:

Massood, Paula J. “From Mean Streets to the Gangs of New York: Ethnicity and Urban Space in the Films of Martin Scorsese.” City that Never Sleeps: New York in the Filmic Imagination. Ed. Murray Pomerance. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007. 77-90.

Student paper: Martin Scorsese has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan, to explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and maintenance of literal and figurative borders.

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected? Yes, this is plagiarism. The student has directly quoted from a source without quotation marks or an in-text citation of the source. One corrected version of this passage might read:

According to Massood, Martin Scorsese “has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan... to explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and maintenance of literal and figurative borders” (77).

Example 2

Quote from Source: “Naturalism depicts human behavior as animalistic; the link intends to startle apathy and attack poverty and social injustice, making the assumption that human beings are driven to animal behavior by their living conditions. It was a way of confronting middle- and upper-class audiences in the filth and degradation of poverty and the brutal living conditions of the lower classes.”

This quote comes from page 233 of the following:

Carr, Steven Alan. “Wretched Refuse: Watching New York Ethnic Slum Film in the Aftermath of 9/11.” City that Never Sleeps: New York in the Filmic Imagination. Ed. Murray Pomerance. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007. 229-242.

Student paper: Naturalism has been used by filmmakers to confront middle- and upper-class audiences with images of poverty that shock them out of apathy (Google Books, 233).

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected? Yes, this is plagiarism. The student has taken the ideas of the author and has not correctly attributed them to a source. While Google Books might be the location of the material, it is not the author. One corrected version of this passage might read:

Naturalism has been used by filmmakers to confront middle- and upper-class audiences with images of poverty that shock them out of apathy (Carr 233).

Example 3

Quote from Source: “Later in 1930, Hitchcock filmed another adaptation, *Murder*, which was based on the play *Enter Sir John* adapted from the novel of the same name by Clemence Dane.

This quote comes from page 34 of the following:

Weis, Elisabeth. *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock’s Sound Track*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982.

Student paper: Hitchcock’s 1930 film Murder was an adaptation of the play Enter Sir John.

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected? No, this is not plagiarism. The student is using a fact that is common knowledge and can be found in many different sources. No citation is needed.

Example 4

Quote from Source: “...the *noir* thriller established its conventions quickly. The low angles and theatrical lighting that embellish *The Maltese Falcon* soon became the common currency of the new genre. Because many *films noirs* have a similar look and sound...critics have suggested that the genre offered a ready-made style to which any competent director could easily adapt himself.”

This quote comes from page 113 of the following:

Hirsch, Foster. *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2001.

Student paper: Critics argue that the lighting and sound used in many noir films including The Maltese Falcon is a ready-made style; however, there are many different ways that a director can express creativity within this genre.

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected? Yes, this is plagiarism. The student paraphrased from the quote but did not cite the source. A correct citation might read:

Critics argue that the lighting and sound used in many noir films including The Maltese Falcon is a ready-made style (Hirsch 113); however, there are many different ways that a director can express creativity within this genre.

An alternate Part 2 of the “Plagiarism Quiz” follows this page. In this version the answers are separated into a separate handout labeled “Part 2 Answers.”

Part 2. Identifying Plagiarism

The following are quotes from sources and excerpts from student papers that somehow employ the source quote. In each case, ask yourself: Is this plagiarism?

Example 1

Quote from Source: “Scorsese’s career has been prolific and his films varied, ranging from documentaries to historical epics set at different points in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, he has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan, presenting detailed and often intimate portraits of their streets and people. In stories set in Little Italy’s Elizabeth and Mulberry Streets, or at the Five Points’ convergence of Park, Worth, and Baxter Streets, Scorsese’s films explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and the maintenance of literal and figurative borders.”

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Student paper: Martin Scorsese has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan, to explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and maintenance of literal and figurative borders.

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected?

Example 2

Quote from Source: “Naturalism depicts human behavior as animalistic; the link intends to startle apathy and attack poverty and social injustice, making the assumption that human beings are driven to animal behavior by their living conditions. It was a way of confronting middle- and upper-class audiences in the filth and degradation of poverty and the brutal living conditions of the lower classes.”

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Quote from Source: “...the *noir* thriller established its conventions quickly. The low angles and theatrical lighting that embellish *The Maltese Falcon* soon became the common currency of the new genre. Because many *films noirs* have a similar look and sound...critics have suggested that the genre offered a ready-made style to which any competent director could easily adapt himself.”

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Student paper: Critics argue that the lighting and sound used in many noir films including The Maltese Falcon is a ready-made style; however, there are many different ways that a director can express creativity within this genre.

Is this plagiarism? If so, how might it be corrected?

Part 2 Answers

Below are some of the possible ways to correct the examples of plagiarism in the Identifying Plagiarism Quiz.

Example 1

Yes, this is plagiarism. The student has directly quoted from a source without quotation marks or an in-text citation of the source. One corrected version of this passage might read:

According to Massood, Martin Scorsese “has consistently turned his sights on the city’s neighborhoods, especially Little Italy and Lower Manhattan... to explore the interconnected themes of ethnicity and maintenance of literal and figurative borders” (77).

Example 2

Yes, this is plagiarism. The student has taken the ideas of the author and has not correctly attributed them to a source. While Google Books might be the location of the material, it is not the author. One corrected version of this passage might read:

Naturalism has been used by filmmakers to confront middle- and upper-class audiences with images of poverty that shock them out of apathy (Carr 233).

Example 3

No, this is not plagiarism. The student is using a fact that is common knowledge and can be found in many different sources. No citation is needed.

Example 4

Yes, this is plagiarism. The student paraphrased from the quote, but did not cite the source. A correct citation might read:

Critics argue that the lighting and sound used in many noir films including The Maltese Falcon is a ready-made style (Hirsch 113); however, there are many different ways that a director can express creativity within this genre.