

PLAGIARISM— Sometimes a Quiet Crime

■ Famous (Alleged) Plagiarists

- Jayson Blair at the New York Times: 40 articles from 2002-2003
- Ann Coulter: various columns and her book, *Godless* (use quote)
- Osama Bin Laden's poetry used for eulogies
- Multiple singer-songwriters and other writers

■ Plagiarism is not always as obvious as you might think

- The most famous cases may have indeed been blatant and intentional, but most are not quite as clear-cut
- Challenges for a research paper
 - The need to rely on the expertise of others
 - Straddling that fine line between over-citing and under-citing

■ When and how do we cite?

- Cite, or give credit, *anytime* you are taking words or ideas from another specific medium that you have not created
- Use in-text citations and works cited
- Remember that changing a few words doesn't make the idea your own!
- Use quotation marks for direct quotes
 - Simply giving credit doesn't allow you to ignore quotation marks (Version B on p. 623 in RR)
 - Play with different types of quotations—also, don't overuse direct quotes
- Try paraphrasing—but remember, again, just because you are paraphrasing, it doesn't make the ideas your own!
 - You still need to name your source
 - Watch that you are varying sentence and paragraph structure—if you are not, this is still plagiarism, even if you are giving credit

■ What is “common knowledge”?

- It is sometimes a judgment call
- Some say you need at least five sources saying the same thing before it becomes common knowledge
- Others say to base it on what you expect your audience to know

Tip: When in doubt, cite! Your teacher will tell you if you don't need to.

Safe Practices: An Exercise (Stolley)

Read over each the following passages, and respond on your own or as a class as to whether or not it uses citations accurately. If it doesn't, what would you do to improve the passage so it's properly cited?

1. Last summer, my family and I traveled to Chicago, which was quite different from the rural area I grew up in. We saw the dinosaur Sue at the Field Museum, and ate pizza at Gino's East.
2. Americans want to create a more perfect union; they also want to establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for everybody.
3. I find it ridiculous that 57% of high school students think their teachers assign too much homework.

Numbers 4, 5, and 6 all refer to the following passage from Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail":

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

4. Martin Luther King was certain that nobody would want to be contented with a surfacy type of social analysis that concerns itself only with effects and doesn't deal with root causes.
5. Martin Luther King wrote that the city of Birmingham's "white power structure" left African-Americans there "no alternative" but to demonstrate ("Letter from the Birmingham Jail" para. 5).
6. In "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," King writes to fellow clergy saying that although they "deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham, your statement fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations."

Works cited:

Stoley, Karl and the Purdue Owl. "Avoiding Plagiarism." *The Owl at Purdue*. 18 Sept. 2007
< <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/04/> >

"Plagiarism and Fabrication at *The New York Times*, *The USA Today*, *The Washington Post* . . ." *Famous Plagiarists.com*. 2006 < <http://www.famousplagiarists.com/journalism.htm> >.