USE OF SECONDARY SOURCES AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN PAPERS AT REGIS COLLEGE

Acknowledgement of Indebtedness, Avoidance of Plagiarism, and Some Advice on Research Writing

Academic Center for Excellence
Office of Academic Affairs
Academic dishonesty includes:
• Inventing data, quotes, or citations for reports
• Lying about reasons for absences or requests for extensions or rescheduling of exams
• Copying or sharing answers on exams or bringing “cheat sheets” to closed-book examinations, or using any electronic device in an exam for unapproved purposes, especially to access or transmit assistance on the exam.
• Discussing what is/was on a specific examination with someone who has not yet taken it
• Copying or sharing answers on homework [on assignments where group work is encouraged or allowed, you may be called upon to individually justify your answer to the instructor]
• Falsifying records, transcripts, recommendations, or other documents indicative of student qualifications
• Submitting the same paper in more than one class without prior permission
• Presenting someone else’s ideas or words (including Internet sources) as your own in written work, PowerPoint presentations, or other assignments

This list includes plagiarism. Because it can be confusing for new students to understand how to build on others’ ideas in making their own arguments, Regis provides all incoming students with a handbook on academic integrity. Students sign a contract agreeing that they are responsible for learning how to properly cite information. The library and Academic Center for Excellence have additional resources for learning about proper citations of sources.

The initial responsibility for resolving situations of academic dishonesty lies with the faculty member and student, in conjunction with information available from the Office...
of Academic Affairs. Faculty members are responsible for reporting instances of academic dishonesty to the Office of Academic Affairs and for consulting with that office about whether the student has a documented history of such behavior before deciding on the proper penalty. Should there be a need, the department chairperson should be contacted. If the issue is not resolved at those levels or is unusually serious, the matter is referred to the dean of the school.

All students enrolled in classes at Regis College are expected to maintain integrity in all academic pursuits. There’s an old and persistent myth, which says that a writer works alone. According to this myth, whether writing is a struggle or comes easily, as if from some divine inspiration, it’s an activity each of us is supposed to accomplish without any assistance from others. Only when a writer is finished does she share her work with the rest of the world.

Anyone who has actually attempted to write realizes that there’s something wrong with this picture. The more one writes, in fact, the more one understands that writing is rarely a completely solitary act and that we regularly receive feedback from others during the process. And in academic writing, we regularly incorporate existing knowledge—words and ideas of others—into our own essays. Getting help on a paper and using others’ words and ideas, then, are accepted practices in college. There are, however, general ethical principals that guide these practices: one must acknowledge assistance on a paper, and one must acknowledge words and ideas that are not one’s own. To do otherwise is to commit intellectual theft, which is considered an offense against the academic community as a whole.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you recognize—and properly acknowledge—the various forms of collaborative work and secondary sources you will encounter in the course of your academic research and writing.

What is Collaborative Learning?

Collaborative learning—for example, working in small groups in a writing class—raises questions about the ownership of ideas and writing. Certainly a professor who sets up writing groups space assumes that students will share not only ways of clarifying ideas but ideas themselves. But because a student is expected to make use of this work with her peers, she does not need to state that she received help from her group; the professor will assume that collaboration is happening.

Of course, if you have a question about the extent of your use of someone else’s feedback, you should discuss the matter with your professor. You may want to give an informal citation indicating the extent of your borrowing, such as an acknowledgement at the beginning or a note at the end:

“I wish to thank the members of my writing group (list names) for helping me improve my argument by pointing out…”

The same sort of rule applies to work with a tutor. Writing tutors are trained to ask questions, not to give their own opinions. They know that they must refrain from giving information the student should be developing on her own. Professors often assume that students will work with tutors, and sometimes explicitly ask them to do so; therefore a student does not ordinarily need to indicate that she has received such help. If, however, a student has any doubt about the extent of a tutor’s influence on the paper, she should discuss it with her professor or offer a general citation at the head of her paper. In short, when in doubt, it’s better for a student to acknowledge that she has received help.

What about collaboration between a student and someone who is not officially involved in her classwork, such as a roommate? Again, common sense offers the best guide. Many ideas are born or refined in conversation, and we hope that students will get ideas every day from talking to each other; this kind of interaction is as important a part of college as classroom learning. But if you feel that a conversation has done more than stimulate or clarify your thoughts, and you sense that you’ve borrowed an idea you wouldn’t have come up with on your own, then that indebtedness should be acknowledged just as you would acknowledge the source of an idea you found through library research. A simple citation is as follows:

“The basic inspiration for this paper came from_______, who suggested to me in conversation that…”

Secondary Sources: What Needs to Be Documented?

Writing in most college courses requires the presentation and analysis of words and ideas that are not one’s own. Each of us grows as a thinker by learning what others have discovered, argued, interpreted, and synthesized. A paper in history requires research, as does a case study in psychology or sociology. A clinical report in nursing or nutrition will commonly call for a review of the literature on the subject, and a critical analysis of a novel or poem may involve considering what literary critics have said. Using these sources is expected; this is the way each author builds her knowledge. But because it’s easy to make yourself look more learned than you are by presenting someone else’s research as your own, and because the reader takes your argument seriously and may want to examine the sources you use, academic papers must include citations of secondary sources. This booklet will not attempt to cover all the rules and technicalities of documentation, which can be found in any comprehensive writing handbook such as those used in EN 105. Instead we wish to explore basic principles relating to the use of sources.

Direct quotations

Any and all direct quotations must be put in quotation marks and a source must be indicated. (Methods of citing sources vary from discipline to discipline.)

Ideas, concepts, and arguments, which are not your own

The value of an academic paper derives from concepts, trains of thought, the way you make one idea relate to another: the way you frame, categorize, abstract, and
explain the raw data you are using. It is crucial to maintain the distinction between
your insights and someone else’s and to document the sources of those which are
not yours.

**Statements of fact other than common knowledge**
Whether or not one can plagiarize a fact is an arguable question; however, assertions
of fact that are not taken for granted by your reader should be supported by
attribution to some authoritative source. The similarity of the phrases “common
knowledge” and “common sense” suggests a way to decide what are generally
known facts and what are not. As a rule of thumb, if you can’t decide whether a
certain piece of information is common knowledge or not, err on the side of caution
and give a source for it. Here are some examples of the kinds of things regarded as
common knowledge:

**Basic historical facts**
The United States Supreme Court decided Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

**Well-known information about famous authors**
George Eliot was the pen name of British writer Mary Ann Evans.

**General scientific laws**
f=ma

**Basic scientific data**
The speed of light is 186,282 miles per second.

**Facts about recent local, national, and world events**
July 1, 1997, Hong Kong reverted from British to Chinese rule. What can be defined
as “common knowledge” varies with the context in which you are working. A course
beyond the introductory level in any discipline will probably assume a great deal of
information about the field, which may not be known to those who haven’t taken
the introductory course. You, too, should make these assumptions. In writing an
English paper, for example, you don’t need to cite a source to defend the assertion
that The Tempest is the last play Shakespeare wrote. That knowledge is assumed
within the context in which you are writing the paper.

**What Is Plagiarism?**
- Plagiarism, or presenting other people’s words and ideas as if they were one’s
  own, is a fundamental form of deception which undermines the sense of com-
  munity in an environment where ideas and writing are crucial. In some cultures,
  quoting, copying, and appropriating the work of another person may be consid-
  ered a way to respect or honor that person. However, in the United States, and
  especially in the academic culture, such actions are not acceptable. Plagiarism
  is punished severely because a counterfeiter undermines everyone’s trust in the
  way society works. Imagine if students had to wonder constantly whether oth-
  ers were gaining an unfair advantage by turning in work not their own, and if
  professors had to read every paper with suspicion of dishonesty on their minds.
  The process of education would be rendered adversarial and thereby soured for
everyone. Therefore, at Regis College, where a spirit of unity and reconciliation
is essential to its mission, plagiarism is not tolerated, and one’s culture is no
excuse.

  - A paper copied, literally or with only slight alterations, from another author’s
    work—generally, some published book or article, an Internet paper, another
    student’s paper, laboratory report, or computer program. Having once had
    a teacher who accepted reports copied from the World Book does not count as a
    defense. Such work is not acceptable at college.
  - A paper or PowerPoint presentation containing many phrases, or sentences or
    graphics lifted from some other source (books, periodicals, Web sites, other
    student papers, etc.) without any attempt at attribution. Often, these phrases
    are glued together with phrases and sentences of the student’s own writing. The
    plagiarism here lies in the fact that someone else’s ideas are presented as the
    student’s original work even though, in this case, the source has not been copied
    wholesale. This kind of plagiarism is known as a “mosaic” (a term originating in
  - A paper in which material from another source has been thoroughly paraphrased
    and presented without acknowledgement, so that it appears in the student’s
    own words as if it were the student’s own train of thought, which it is not.
  - A paper that the student purchases and hands in as her own work: the student
    pays another student or professional to write her paper or uses an Internet
    “paper store” to choose and purchase a paper.
  - A paper—written by a friend, roommate, parent, or other person.

  The fundamental principle is that, unless the instructor establishes otherwise, all
  student papers and projects are expected to be the student’s own original work.
  That is what enables the good student to receive credit for completing the assign-
  ment. Everyone knows that each person’s work depends to some extent on the
  thoughts of those who came before and on the ideas of teachers and peers. After
  those have been used and acknowledged, however, the value of a student’s paper
  lies in her own ideas and her own argument.
Some Thoughts about Internet Plagiarism

Internet plagiarism can be very similar to hard copy plagiarism. Both involve copying sentences, paragraphs or whole sections of someone else’s work into your own without citing source material. However, it is faster to find a source on the Internet than to physically go to the library and search the stacks. It’s also faster to cut and paste text into your own document than to manually copy out or paraphrase sentences. Whether you find it on paper or the Internet, no reason justifies or excuses plagiarism.

There are two common forms of Internet plagiarism. The first occurs when a student includes images, graphics, or text from Internet Web sites into his or her own written assignment or oral presentation (including PowerPoint slides), without properly citing the source. For example, a student writing a paper on Beethoven might insert a picture of the composer on the cover; another student giving a class presentation might design PowerPoint data, and perhaps even audio clips, acquired from the Internet. Most materials of that sort are available for educational purposes, without cost. However, this material must be cited, just as consistently as material from written, hard copy texts. This is true whether the student is presenting the material in writing, orally, or visually.

Another form of electronic plagiarism, one that is a very serious offense at Regis, is the use of Internet “paper stores” or “paper mills.” It is possible to buy whole papers already written by other students, to commission an original paper by the page and nearness of deadline, and to pay a monthly fee for access to student papers that can be read, but not downloaded. Paper store sites are readily found on the Internet, and it is legal for these services to sell student writing they have already bought and copyrighted, as well as to sell commissioned writing services. However, it is not ethical or allowable for a student to hand in as her own work any paper, or portion of a paper, that she bought from a paper store. While it may be tempting to purchase a ready-made or custom-made paper from the Internet, students should know that professors are aware of the practice and can plug sections of suspect papers into a search engine and prove plagiarism.

Some students believe that the above situation can be avoided if they alter the material from a secondary source by changing a few words in each sentence or by omitting a sentence or two from the original paragraph. This is generally thought of as paraphrasing, a process that negates the need for quotation marks around the interpreted material. In fact, paraphrasing involves much more than the minor alteration of several words or sentences; a true paraphrase occurs only when the student has grasped the essence of what the source material means by restating the meaning entirely in her own words. Minor word changes only succeed in disfiguring the original material and place it somewhere between quotation and paraphrase, an unacceptable form in academic work.

The Crucial Point

The intellectual problem in papers like the ones described tends to be that they depend too much on secondary sources. Even once all the quotation marks are put in and all sources are properly cited according to conventional rules, an instructor may still feel that a student has relied too heavily on other people’s ideas. This is a common flaw of research papers—the writer hasn’t contributed enough of a discussion of the material she has pulled together. In most cases, though not all, instructors ask you to do research not simply to prove that you can look things up and take notes but to analyze them, to discern their meaning, and to express that meaning in your own words.

Advice

When taking notes from a source, always put quotation marks around anything you copy word for word. This will let you know later on what came from the text (as opposed to your own paraphrase of it, or thoughts about it). Always write down the bibliographic data on the source (author or editor, edition number, publisher, place, and date), and always put a page number after each quotation you write down. This may well save you a second trip to the library to verify your findings.

Copy significant passages word for word, not just key phrases. In writing a paper you will find it necessary to know exactly what the source said, for you may find
later that there is more of interest in the passage than you realized when you first encountered it. Copy more than you think you absolutely need.

When you paraphrase something in your notes, put a page number after it in parentheses as a signal that this has been paraphrased. The abbreviation “WTTE,” meaning “words to that effect,” is useful in these situations. A paraphrase could be followed by [p.24 -WTTE], meaning that on page 24 of the source there are words whose meaning you have intended to capture in your notes but which you have not copied exactly.

Use some indicator of your own, such as an arrow or a star, at the beginning of any passage of your own thoughts in your notes. This, too, will help you keep your ideas distinct from those of the source. When using material from a secondary source in your paper, either quote it word for word (using “...” to indicate the places where you omitted parts of the passage) or completely restate the meaning in your own words, remembering to cite the source for this paraphrased material.

Do not mangle a passage from the source by changing a word here and a word there; the result will not help your train of thought or your paper.

When downloading and printing articles, brochures, reports, and other texts from Internet sources, always write down the bibliographic data on the source, perhaps in the header on the first page of your file or paper copy, to insure you’ll have the information required for proper source referencing. In addition to recording the usual details (author, date, publication), record also the name of the organization that sponsors the Web site or database and the URLs for both the organization and the page you are using.

Remember that what matters in the end is what you have to say. What if you feel, after considerable reflection, that you don’t have anything to say, especially after reading what others have already said? Confer with the professor. This is one of the crucial turning points in a course. Perhaps you need to try a different topic, but perhaps all you need to do is modify or extend your existing ideas. Don’t underestimate the originality of your point of view. Keep digging. The more expert you become, perhaps all you need to do is modify or extend your existing ideas.

Document assertions of fact by citing an authoritative source.

You do not need to document matters of common knowledge, including common knowledge in the course or discipline for which the paper is being written.

Acknowledged indebtedness to members of writing groups, tutors, friends, roommates, etc., if you have borrowed ideas from them that you believe you would not have come up with on your own. If conversations have simply stimulated or clarified your thoughts, consider this an expected part of the process that does not need to be acknowledged.

When taking notes from secondary sources, always put quotation marks around everything copied word-for-word from the source. Write down all bibliographic information on a source when you begin to take notes from it. Put a page number after anything you paraphrase from the source, to signify that this is not your own thought. Distinguish your own thoughts on the subject from the rest of your notes by starting with a mark such as an arrow or star.

Either quote or paraphrase—don’t get stuck in between. Your quotations should either be copied word-for-word or completely restated in your own words. Simply changing a word or two of the original quotation is not considered paraphrasing.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting other people’s words or ideas as if they were one’s own. It is considered dishonest and, therefore, violates Regis College’s policy on academic integrity, which states, “All students enrolled in classes at Regis College are expected to maintain integrity in all academic pursuits.”

Plagiarism includes

- Copying blocks of text or graphics from a paper or electronic source and presenting them as your own work.
- Lifting many phrases or sentences from a paper or electronic source and incorporating them into your paper without attribution.
- Presenting another person’s ideas or argument without acknowledgement of indebtedness.
- Submitting as your own a paper that you purchased from an Internet “paper store.”
- Submitting as your own a paper written by a friend, roommate, parent, or other person.
- Submitting the same paper for two courses without authorization from both professors is not plagiarism, per se, but is cheating.

Remember that the strength of your paper lies in the quality of your ideas and your argument.

Use of Sources and Collaboration:
A Quick Reference Guide

- Place all direct quotations in quotation marks. Indicate omissions by use of ellipses(...); if you change a word or words in the quoted passage, put the changed words in brackets [ ].
- Give citations for sources of all quotations and for ideas, arguments, and insights that are not your own, even if you have restated them in your own words. See appropriate handbooks or research guides for the proper form of citation in your field of study.
- Document assertions of fact by citing an authoritative source.
- You do not need to document matters of common knowledge, including common knowledge in the course or discipline for which the paper is being written.
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