

## Avoiding Plagiarism

Prepared by Laura Scavuzzo Wheeler

### Myths about Plagiarism:

1. I am not plagiarizing as long as I change a few words from the original source. (Not true)
2. I am not plagiarizing as long as I copy only a few words from the original source. (Not true)
3. I can copy word-for-word and I am not plagiarizing as long as I mention the author of the original source. (Not true)

The key idea to remember when citing sources is that students must give credit for two things: *words and ideas*. If a student copies words from a source verbatim (word-for-word) and does not use quotation marks, the student is committing plagiarism. However, a student is also plagiarizing when he or she changes the wording a lot but doesn't credit the original source. And here is something that surprises many students: if they change the original wording only slightly, chances are they are still plagiarizing even if they mention the author's name in the parenthetical reference. Below are some examples for review.

The following paragraph is from "Burned Up Over Flag Burning," by Cal Thomas. The essay appears in *Reading and Writing Short Arguments*. Ed. William Vesterman. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Mayfield Publishing, 1997. Pp. 110-11.

**Original Text:** Those who would ban flag burning have placed the American flag in a category and context that is idolatrous. Idolatry is defined as "the worship of a physical object as a god; immoderate attachment or devotion to something." While we don't worship or devote ourselves to the flag as we might a religious symbol or being, the attachment some would force on the rest of us comes pretty close to resembling that definition. { . . . } When a flag is burned, it is the protester, not the flag, who is demeaned. He reveals his base ingratitude when he burns a symbol of a nation great enough even to allow him to indulge in moronic behavior.

**Plagiarized Version:** The attachment to the flag that some would force on the rest of us comes pretty close to resembling the definition of idolatry. {*The writer copied Thomas's words almost verbatim and failed to credit either the author's words or ideas. This is plagiarism.*}

**Plagiarized Version:** When a flag is burned, the protester reveals his base ingratitude. The protester, not the flag, is demeaned (Thomas 111). {*The writer*

*changed the words somewhat but is still relying too heavily on the language of the original source. The lack of quotation marks indicates that the wording is the writer's; however, key words and phrases come verbatim or almost verbatim from the original source. This is still plagiarism, even though the writer credits Thomas in the parenthetical reference.}*

**Acceptable Paraphrase with Correct Parenthetical Reference:** Cal Thomas believes that the protective attitude some people feel toward the flag makes it almost an object of worship, like an idol. Because their actions demonstrate their lack of appreciation for this country, angry protestors who burn flags degrade themselves, not the flags (111).

**Acceptable Mixture of Paraphrase and Quotation with Correct Parenthetical References:** While Cal Thomas acknowledges that we don't actually worship the flag, he argues that the protective attitude some people feel toward the flag puts it "in a category and context that is idolatrous" (111). "When a flag is burned," Thomas continues, "It is the protester, not the flag, who is demeaned" by his or her lack of appreciation for this country and "moronic behavior" (111).