Avoiding plagiarism on Wikipedia

Wikipedia policy forbids close paraphrasing and copying and pasting from most sources.

Here's what you need to know to avoid running into trouble.

It's wrong to use someone else's words and claim them as your own; that's called plagiarism, and in most universities, it's a violation of your academic honor code. Wikipedia forbids plagiarism, too. This includes close paraphrasing, where your words follow the source too closely. Because of its collaborative nature — articles are written, revised, and rearranged by many different users — you must take extra care to avoid introducing plagiarism, lest others build their work on top of it.

Respect volunteer time

Cleaning up plagiarism takes up tremendous volunteer time that would otherwise go into building Wikipedia. Wikipedians deal with plagiarism by notifying the instructor and removing the student's contributions. If you plagiarize on Wikipedia, you will be caught, and there will be a permanent online record of plagiarism tied to your account.

Quotations

Large block quotations are less prevalent on Wikipedia than they are in academic writing. Take time to summarize and paraphrase the main ideas from the original author's work, with a citation. If a specific phrasing is important, a short quotation can be used.

Close paraphrasing

Paraphrasing without plagiarizing is a skill that takes some practice to master. If you have the source material in front of you, it can be easy to unconsciously mimic the structure and word choice of the original author.

But such copying of words, structure, or phrases from the original source — even when cited to the original source — violates Wikipedia's copyright policies and is a form of plagiarism. You'll need to be conscious of how you're writing to ensure you're not accidentally running afoul of guidelines.

An example of close paraphrasing

Original text: *Because the weather forecast called for rain, the league decided to switch the location of the game to an indoor facility.*

Close paraphrased text, not acceptable on Wikipedia: *The league switched the game's location to an indoor facility due to a weather forecast calling for rain.*

Acceptable text: *Forecasted rain caused the league to move the game indoors.*

Tips and tricks

• Material in your sandbox is still subject to Wikipedia's policies, so do not copy and paste information from your sources into your sandbox.

• Start by taking notes of key concepts, not phrases, from your sources, noting where each came from. Write the draft from your notes rather than from the original source, so you are not unconsciously mimicking the original author's structure or diction.

• The more sources you use, the better you'll gain an understanding of the topic and will be able to paraphrase and summarize in your own words.

• When you've finished your draft, read it with your sources close by. Ensure that everything you've written is substantially different in style from your sources.

Write responsibly

People are reading what you write, and that's a great thing. But remember that because your writing is going out into the world, others will see it and hold you accountable for what you share. While reaching the world outside of the classroom is the real pleasure of writing for Wikipedia, it also means keeping a heightened sense of awareness and responsibility toward your readers and the Wikipedia community.

For more information

See these pages on Wikipedia to learn more:

• http://enwp.org/WP:Close_paraphrasing
• http://enwp.org/WP:Plagiarism
• http://enwp.org/WP:Quotations

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