

Plagiarism: A Booklet for Use in
Literary Tradition Classes



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I. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism includes any act of claiming as your own the words or ideas of others. Whenever you take someone else's work and try to pass it off as your own, you are plagiarizing. If another person writes, revises, or edits any part of an essay or other assignment for you, or if you take words or ideas from someone else and pretend that they are your own, you are plagiarizing.

It does not matter if the source is a friend or family member, a published critic or an anonymous webpage, a book, a journal article, or a fellow student's class notes—if the original source of any of the ideas or words in your work is someone else, and you do not cite that source, you are plagiarizing.

II. What are the potential consequences if you plagiarize and it is discovered?

- *Failure of the paper.

- *Failure of the course.

- *You will be reported to the chair of the department and the dean of Constantin College.

- * Potential disciplinary action by university authorities, including a mark on your permanent academic record.

- *By law, any disciplinary action against you must be reported by the university to potential employers if they ask.

- *You may be prohibited from participating in university athletic activities.

- * You may be expelled from the university.

III. Why is plagiarism such a serious matter?

- * Plagiarism is an immoral act: it is an academic crime, the intellectual equivalent of theft.
- * Plagiarism cheats others out of the hard-earned fruit of their own academic labors. Just consider: how would you feel if someone else took your work and passed it off as his or her own?
- * If you plagiarize, you are depriving yourself of the benefits of education. In order to learn, you need to bring your own original words and ideas to the process and respond constructively to your teacher's feedback on your written work. Plagiarism cuts off this educational process and keeps you from improving as a reader, writer, and thinker.
- * Plagiarism breaks the bonds of trust between teachers and students. When a teacher discovers that you have plagiarized, he or she will not only cease to trust you, but also have less confidence in the honesty of all your fellow students in the future. Because it breeds distrust, plagiarism has destructive consequences for the entire educational community to which we all belong.

IV. What are the causes of plagiarism, and how can you avoid the situations that lead to it?

* **Simple dishonesty.** Plagiarism is an immoral act and an academic crime, and you should resist any temptation to engage in it just as you would resist the temptation to steal an item from a store.

* **Ignorance of the definition and significance of plagiarism.** By confirming that you have read this document, you indicate that you now understand what plagiarism is, why it is a grave offense, and what the potential consequences are.

* **Laziness.** You may be tempted to plagiarize if you are unwilling to put in the hard work and time required to produce an essay on your own. In order to fight this tendency, you should remind yourself that you can only get out of your education as much as you put into it. If you will not contribute your own best effort, you cannot expect to learn, and you may be tempted to cheat.

* **Procrastination and poor time management.** If you are not dividing up your time appropriately and are leaving your work on written assignments to the last minute, you may panic and give in to the temptation to plagiarize. For this reason, it is essential that you learn to do your work well in advance of the deadline, giving yourself plenty of time to plan and revise.

* **Students often plagiarize because they feel overwhelmed in the class or confused by the assignment,** but are embarrassed about confessing their difficulties and asking the teacher for help. As a result, they panic and copy ideas or words from other students or outside secondary sources. In order to avoid this temptation, when you feel overwhelmed or confused, you should go to your teacher, honestly explain your situation, and ask for help.

***Students often plagiarize because they lack confidence in their own ideas and abilities**, and feel that they cannot rely on these alone in order to fulfill the requirements of the class. As a result, they choose to take the words and ideas of others and pass these off as their own. You need to remember that you are expected to learn through the course and improve in response to your teacher's feedback; no one expects you to come into the class as a perfectly polished writer and thinker. Your final grade in the class will reflect this expectation, rather than some lofty standard of perfection.

***Students also frequently commit plagiarism when they take sloppy or careless notes while looking at secondary sources** (particularly online webpages). If you use any phrases or ideas gleaned from these sources in your own work and do not cite them, you have committed plagiarism. It is not an excuse to claim that your notes were inadequate or unclear, and that you simply forgot that the words or ideas included in your paper were not your own. Your teachers cannot read your mind—they can only see that parts of your essay did not originate with you.

Above all, you should always listen to your own conscience: if you sense within your mind and heart that what you are doing constitutes plagiarism, listen to that inner voice and avoid committing an act which could have very serious consequences. Remember that it is always better to ask your teacher for help—even if doing so means taking a penalty for lateness on the assignment—than to plagiarize and risk your academic future.

V. What are some forms of plagiarism?

*** A fellow student, friend, family member, or any other person writes, revises, or edits any part of the essay for you, or gives you specific points to include.** If anyone reads the essay in draft form and offers advice or feedback, this must be noted on the cover sheet.

Each of the following kinds of plagiarism is illustrated by an example which draws on this paragraph of published Milton criticism:

“This complexity of tone depends upon the fact that both narrator and reader are involved in the epic argument, that we are made to interpret our own lost innocence by the light of our own experience in the fallen world. In the introduction to Book III, for example, or in Eve’s lament for her banishment or in the descriptions of the Garden of Eden, our nostalgic feelings about the lost light of innocence are evoked not only by the lovely simplicity of the lines, but also by their references to the tradition of pastoral poetry. That tradition, although it celebrates the world of innocence which we and the speaker have lost, belongs itself to the fallen world.”

—Anne Ferry, *Milton’s Epic Voice: The Narrator in Paradise Lost* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1983), p. 35.

*** Plagiarism may consist of the copying of phrases, sentences, or full paragraphs into the student’s own paper, whether verbatim or with some verbal changes, omissions, or additions.** For example:

Paradise Lost creates a complex tone by forcing both the narrator and the reader to interpret our own lost innocence by the light of our own experience in the fallen world. The beginning of Book III, as well as Eve’s lament for her banishment and the accounts of the Garden of Eden, evoke nostalgic feelings about the lost light of innocence not only by the lovely simplicity of the lines, but also by their references to the tradition of pastoral poetry, which belongs itself to the fallen world.

***Plagiarism may consist of the insertion of an idea, phrase, or sentence from an outside source alongside the student's own original points.** For example:

Before Satan visits Adam and Eve in order to tempt them into disobeying God, Milton has already presented him as embodying the fall from a state of innocence to one of experience. Through his crime of rebellion Satan has lost his original condition of innocence along with his place in Heaven, and we have seen him expressing his anguish over those losses before the beginning of Book III. The introduction to this book further emphasizes these nostalgic feelings not only by the lovely simplicity of the lines, but also by evoking the tradition of pastoral poetry, itself a product of the fallen world.

***Plagiarism may consist of the copying of an idea, even when you express it in your own words rather than duplicating those of the source.** The act of rewriting the idea in your own words (paraphrasing) and/or adding to it further analysis of your own does not change the fact that the idea is not yours. If you do not cite the source for it, you are plagiarizing. For example:

Various passages in *Paradise Lost*, including Eve's reaction to her expulsion from the Garden, depend for their effects upon the contrast between the perspectives of the narrator and the reader as inhabitants of the fallen world, and the poetry's evocation of a world of innocence which has been lost. These passages create nostalgia through their beautiful simplicity, as well as their allusions to the genre of pastoral poetry, which recalls the lost state of innocence from the standpoint of experience.

***By citing the source properly both when you quote its exact words and when you paraphrase any of its ideas, you avoid all these forms of plagiarism.** In the process, you allow yourself to enter into a scholarly conversation, properly crediting the words and ideas of others so that you can then respond to them and develop your own argument. For example:

As Anne Ferry argues, the complexity of Milton's tone "depends upon the fact that both narrator and reader are involved in the epic argument, that we are made to interpret our own lost innocence by the light of our own experience in the fallen world" (Ferry 35).

Anne Ferry observes that the opening to Book III of *Paradise Lost* evokes the reader's nostalgia for the world before the fall through its allusion to the genre of pastoral poetry, which remembers lost innocence but is written from the standpoint of experience after the fall (Ferry 35).