

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 copy and paste from another source and claim it as your own; that's called plagiarism. Wikipedia's definition of plagiarism may be more strict than you're used to, so be sure you read this handout before you start writing.

Respect volunteer time

Be mindful of the thousands of volunteer hours that have gone into making Wikipedia a great resource, and please take extra care to avoid making a mistake that will cost volunteers valuable time. If you see a classmate plagiarizing, revert their edit and bring it to your professor's attention.

Quotations

Academic writing often favors large block quotes from original sources, but long verbatim quotations are frowned upon in Wikipedia and, if the source is copyrighted, forbidden. Instead, you should spend the effort to summarize and paraphrase the main ideas from the original author's work. In cases where there is a specific phrasing that is important, a short quotation can be used. But expect to spend a lot more time summarizing and paraphrasing others' ideas — with a citation to the original author(s) — than you would in a traditional college paper.

Close paraphrasing

Many students unintentionally run into problems with close paraphrasing when they try writing on Wikipedia for the first time because they are used to simply quoting extensively. 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 for you to mimic the structure and word choice of the original author, even unconsciously. 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.

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>