

Is It Paraphrasing, or Is It Plagiarism?

Levels

Intermediate +

Aims

Learn what constitutes plagiarism
Practice paraphrasing

Class Time

40–50 minutes

Preparation Time

20 minutes

Resources

Handout
Published article
Students' summaries of the article
Reasons form

Teaching the avoidance of plagiarism can be tricky, especially within ESL contexts in which students may not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. This activity raises students' consciousness of the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarism. The students then put into practice what they have learned by reflecting on their own texts. The activity is a companion to "But I *Can't* Use My Own Words" (p. 108).

Procedure

1. Collect student-written summaries of one published article. Choose some excerpts from the summaries that demonstrate paraphrasing and some that would be considered plagiarism. Number the extracts. On a copy of the article, mark the location of the information used in each excerpt with a number corresponding to that excerpt.
2. Put the students in heterogeneous L1 groups (if possible), and ask them to choose a reporter.
3. Pass out the handout on approaches to using outside sources in writing (see Appendix A).
4. Have the students in their groups read each description and decide which approaches would lead to plagiarism and which would produce appropriate original work. Tell the students to negotiate until all group members agree on the appropriateness of each approach in a U.S. academic context.
5. Ask each group to report back to the class as a whole. Talk about each group's answers and rationale, and discuss what an academic audience would deem appropriate.
6. Pass out excerpts of students' written work, one copy to each student, and give each group a Reasons Form (see Appendix B). Also distribute copies of the original article with relevant passages noted.

From: Masters, P. & Brinton, D.M., ed. (1997)
New Ways in English for Specific Purposes.
Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Caveats and Options

References and Further Reading

7. Ask the students, again in their groups, to decide whether each excerpt is acceptable by circling *OK* or *not OK* on the form based on their discussion in Step 4.
 8. Have each group report back to the class about one of the excerpts, justifying its choice of *OK* or *not OK*.
 9. If time allows, have the students rewrite the excerpts they have deemed inappropriate.
 10. Ask the students to revise their first-draft summaries, and follow up with an in-class or take-home peer analysis focusing on the appropriateness of each other's paraphrasing attempts.
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1. Unfortunately, agreeing on where paraphrasing stops and plagiarism begins is not so easy. In addition to various cultures' differing notions, different academic disciplines might also disagree as to what constitutes plagiarism and what is appropriate paraphrasing. Discuss this phenomenon as part of the initiation into a discourse community, especially when (potential) graduate students are in the class.
 2. Discussion of Approach 4 in Appendix A sparks much debate and can create anxiety among students. It is true that some phrases (e.g., terms, names) must be taken directly from the original text, as there is no other way to say them. Also, at times the author of the original text has coined a phrase that someone might want to include in a summary. Making the distinction between what must and what must not be paraphrased is sometimes difficult for students because of their level of English. To provide practice, try to pick student excerpts that include both phrases that need to be quoted and those that do not.

Bakka, T. (1993). Locking students out. In S. Barnet & H. Bedau (Eds.), *Current issues and enduring questions: A guide to critical thinking and argument, with readings* (3rd ed., pp. 210–213). Boston: St. Martin's Press.

Spack, R. (1990). *Guidelines: A cross-cultural reading/writing text*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Appendix A: Approaches to Using Outside Source Information in Writing

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (1994). *Academic writing for graduate students: A course for nonnative speakers of English*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Directions: Listed below are various approaches to take when you want to use information from an outside source. Read through the list, and then decide which approaches are acceptable and which are not. Then get together with your group members and share your answers. You and your group have 10 minutes. Be ready to report your negotiated answer to the class.

1. Taking a section directly from the original source without changing the wording, giving the source, or using quotation marks
2. Taking a section directly from the original source without changing the wording or using quotation marks, but listing a source
3. Taking a section directly from the original source, adding quotation marks and an appropriate citation
4. Changing a few words from a part of a book, magazine, or newspaper and including it in a paper without citing the source
5. Using a paragraph from the original source, substituting synonyms for some of the words but keeping the original sentence and paragraph structure
6. Copying a section from an article, leaving out some sentences, and making your own paragraph with these sentences without using quotation marks or including a citation
7. Taking phrases directly from various outside sources and making a paragraph by combining these phrases with your own words
8. Taking phrases directly from various outside sources and making a paragraph by combining these phrases with your own words and adding citations
9. Taking the message of a paragraph and then rewording and rewriting it, changing the sentence structure, vocabulary, and organization
10. Rewording the message of a paragraph by changing the sentence structure, vocabulary, and organization, and adding a citation for the source

Appendix B: Reasons Form

Directions: Read these excerpts (edited by the teacher) from your comparative summaries. Each refers to the first page of Bakka (1993). Based on the decisions made in the previous task, decide if the wording in these excerpts is acceptable. If not, why not?

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| <p>1. OK Not OK</p> <p>Reasons:</p> | <p>Some people support bilingual education because it eases the youngster's transition into U.S. culture and it preserves cultural heritage, but Bakka states that there is no impartial evidence that such education improves a student's academic work.</p> |
| <p>2. OK Not OK</p> <p>Reasons:</p> | <p>Supporters of bilingual education present two reasons: Bilingual education helps the child's entrance into U.S. culture and saves the child's cultural heritage.</p> |
| <p>3. OK Not OK</p> <p>Reasons:</p> | <p>Various programs exist, but the proponents of bilingual education feel that the international student should be spared the trauma of content courses in English. They feel the method of total immersion is sink or swim.</p> |
| <p>4. OK Not OK</p> <p>Reasons:</p> | <p>Bakka discusses the supporters of bilingual education, who assert that bilingual education programs are needed, for they make the child's transition into U.S. culture smooth and still allow that child to keep positive thoughts about his own culture and ethnic identity.</p> |

Contributor

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