

English / Language Arts Department Policy on Plagiarism

Your responsibility as a student: cite and document your sources. If you have information that comes from somewhere other than your own head, *you must cite the source, regardless of whether you summarize, paraphrase or quote directly.*

The Definition of Plagiarism

The *Modern Language Association Manual*, a guide used by many disciplines in documenting resources for papers, defines plagiarism as “the use of another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source.” People work with others’ ideas all the time, and in fact, many times you have worked with other students’ ideas that came through small group collaboration or class discussions of particular texts. Plagiarizing is not to be confused with working with an idea that came from the free flow of a classroom exchange, for collaboration is more about your trying to come to terms with what you think and why or how you do so. One reason why it is so important that you participate in these classroom exchanges is that you don’t just take others’ ideas but give your own, so that everyone can be part of a discussion process that helps ideas take shape and grow. Collaboration helps you find what you really want to say, and therein lies the difference between it and plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft because it takes an idea, and keeps it exactly the same. The idea never grows. The idea never had a chance to become part of you in all the uniqueness that is your experience and your intellect. Another form of plagiarism is taking an idea and altering it so slightly that the changes are really what are called “cosmetic” ones. An example would be taking someone’s song and changing all the masculine pronouns to feminine ones or changing the line “He gunned the accelerator” to a paraphrased form such as, “He drove so quickly.” In both cases the writer’s essential property has been stolen.

Most often people feel very honored if you want to work with something they’ve created--but that work requires that you do indeed honor people by giving credit for their original work. “Citing the source” is what is done in order to give the original writer credit. We cite the source because thinking up an idea and writing a well-crafted sentence is hard work! As the MLA manual points out, “The best scholars generously acknowledge their debts to others.” It is not only wrong then to steal others’ work; it also shows a mean-spiritedness and a terrible misunderstanding of what real learning demands. As with any theft, stealing others’ intellectual property comes with consequences, some of which are rather harsh.

Consequences of Plagiarism

If you are suspected of stealing another’s ideas, your teacher will attempt to determine if you did so because of misunderstanding, carelessness, or mean-spiritedness. Generally, if you submit someone else’s work as your own, you will not receive any credit for that work because it is not yours.

While submitting a paper completed in one class for another class is not plagiarism, it speaks of an intellectual dishonesty that requires special attention: Learning is a lifelong process, and when you submit past work as a present endeavor, you are, in essence, saying that your learning has not progressed any further than those past efforts. Each class you take offers you an opportunity to take your learning to some place it has not been before, and you undermine that learning by not using prior learning in new ways. Therefore, the consequences of submitting old work to a new endeavor will be the same as if you plagiarized another’s work.

The most serious consequence that befalls students who submit another’s work under their own name is a breach in the trust shared between teachers and their students. Following through on a renewed commitment to intellectual honesty will work to repair that breach. We all recognize that education always offers a second chance--and your teachers are there to help that happen.

Samples of What *Is* and What *Is Not* Plagiarism

Plagiarism: The most blatant form of plagiarism is reproducing someone else’s sentences more or less verbatim (word for word), and presenting them as your own. In this case, the student takes the electronic or print source nearly verbatim without giving any credit to the source from which it came. The “intent” is clearly to pass off someone else’s words and ideas as her own. A clear case of plagiarism because none of the words are the writer’s own.

1) Analysis (Chapters 25-31 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*): Maycomb’s reaction to the news of Tom’s death demonstrates how willingly the citizens interpret the actions of one black person negatively in order to maintain their social construct of subjugating the black population. Scout realizes that the decision to see the world fairly can only occur within each individual’s heart, and that there is no way to reach a person who has not become personally convinced of the equality of all races and the virtue of following a moral course of action.

Beginning to a Student's Response: Maycomb's reaction to the news of Tom's death demonstrates how willingly they will interpret the actions of one black person negatively in order for it to feed into their existing negative feelings for all black people. Scout realizes that the decision to see the world fairly can only occur within each person. There is no way to reach a person who is not convinced of following a moral code and the equality of all races.

2) Summary (Chapters 25-31 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*): Atticus and Calpurnia were driving out to see Tom's wife when they spotted Jem and Dill on their way back from swimming. Jem and Dill ask for a ride, and although hesitant at first, Atticus finally agrees to let them come along. Apparently, when Tom's wife saw Atticus and Calpurnia, she seemed to faint, falling to the ground in a heap. Tom's death was only news in Maycomb for two days, and was regarded as "typical," since prevailing opinion was that black men tend to run away without any plan.

Beginning to a Student's Summary Response: Jem and Dill were out swimming on the day that Atticus and Calpurnia went to see Tom's wife, and they got a ride with them. Dill said that when Tom's wife saw the two of them, she seemed to faint, falling to the ground in a heap. Scout is remembering this week later, after Dill has gone home to Meridian. Tom's death was only news in Maycomb for two days...

The two examples above are from GradeSaver: ClassicNote on *To Kill a Mockingbird* (www.gradesaver.com/ClassicNotes/Titles/killmockingbird/summ25-31.html)

Not Plagiarism: If the student took the time **to cite and use** the source, then the piece becomes a **"supplemental source,"** and therefore a positive component in the interpretive process.

Example--Student's response: After reading chapters 25-28, I was struck by how racist people will see their world from an entirely different perspective than a non-racist. A racist could see the simplest act, possibly shaking hands with another person, and think that this is the first step to an assault.

I was reading an essay on "Gradesaver.com" and this statement caught my eye: "Maycomb's reaction to the news of Tom's death demonstrates how willingly they will interpret the actions of one black person negatively in order for it to feed into their existing negative feelings for all black people" (12). This made me think about Tom. What did he do? He went in and broke up a chifforobe. I interpret this as an act of kindness. Tom is simply helping out. However, in the trial I found out that the Tom's intent behind the act is because he "felt sorry for her" (178). So what's the big deal? However, a racist such as Bob Ewell sees Tom's action from a third perspective: the first step towards relations with his daughter.

Developing Creative & Original Thought

Phillipsburg High School subscribes to an online service called Turnitin which checks student work for originality. It highlights any material that has already been published and directs the teacher to the original work. The teacher then determines whether the student has correctly given credit to the author by using proper quotations, paraphrases, and citations. In an effort to remain consistent with the required amount of original content submitted in a research assignment, we have created required Turnitin originality ratios for each grade level. Final papers which do not meet the following threshold of original and creative thought will not be accepted.

- **Grade 9:** 60% original & creative thought
- **Grade 10:** 65% original & creative thought
- **Grade 11:** 70% original & creative thought
- **Grade 12:** 75% original & creative thought

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