

## Plagiarism

**First and Only Principle:** Do not steal the words or ideas of another.

**Definition of Plagiarism:**

“The spectrum is a wide one. At one end there is a word-for-word copying of another’s writing without enclosing the copied passage in quotation marks and identifying it in a footnote, both of which are necessary . . . It hardly seems possible that anyone of college age or more could do that without clear intent to deceive. At the other end there is the almost casual slipping in of a particularly apt term which one has come across in reading and which so admirably expresses one’s opinion that one is tempted to make it personal property. Between these poles there are degrees and degrees, but they may be roughly placed in two groups. Close to outright and blatant deceit — but more the result, perhaps, of laziness than of bad intent — is the patching together of random jottings made in the course of reading, generally without careful identification of their source, and then woven into the text, so that the result is a mosaic of other people’s ideas and words, the writer’s sole contribution being the cement to hold the pieces together. Indicative of more effort and, for that reason, somewhat closer to honesty, though still dishonest, is the paraphrase, an abbreviated (and often skillfully prepared) restatement of someone else’s analysis or conclusions without acknowledgement that another person’s text has been the basis for the recapitulation.”

Source: [www.research.umn.edu/ethics/curriculum/plagiarism.html](http://www.research.umn.edu/ethics/curriculum/plagiarism.html)  
From Martin et al. 1969, AAUP, 1989; Salazar, M. K., 1993.

## Plagiarism Case 1

Dr. Alice Charles, a mid-career scientist, was revising and updating a book chapter. This led her to review other articles on the same subject to help determine what new material to cover. During the course of her reading, she came upon a chapter in a major text by Dr. Chris Long, a departmental chair at a leading medical school that contained long passages from her previous chapter without attribution. Dr. Charles called Dr. Long and confronted him with her finding. At first, he vehemently denied having used any of Dr. Charles's text inappropriately. Dr. Charles then faxed Dr. Long copies of the offending passages. After some delay, Dr. Long finally responded, acknowledging that the language was indeed remarkably similar. Dr. Long noted that he had engaged younger members of his research group to write portions of the chapter because he was very busy at the time that the deadline was approaching. Furthermore, to defend himself, he pointed out that much of the original research on which her chapter was based was derived from the work of his laboratory. He admitted only to negligence in not adequately monitoring the activities of his subordinates. Dr. Charles replied that the subordinates were not acknowledged in Dr. Long's chapter either, and that admission of plagiarism required more than a apology. She indicated her intention to report the matter to Dr. Long's dean and the editor of the text.

1. Did Dr. Charles act appropriately? Would you have done anything differently? Considering the difference in status between herself and Dr. Long, was she taking a professional risk?
2. Did Dr. Long do anything wrong? What if he were copying his own previous writings?
3. How would you have handled this matter if you were Dr. Long and were confronted with Dr. Charles's revelations?
4. If you were Dr. Long's dean, how would you handle Dr. Charles's letter, which contained copies of the plagiarized texts?
5. Upon hearing Dr. Charles's complaint, what would you do as editor of Dr. Long's textbook?

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## Plagiarism Case 2

Maurice LaCroix, a postdoctoral fellow at a research-intensive medical school, was asked by faculty member Dr. Frank Hardy to co-author an in-depth review article on hemolytic anemias for a leading medical journal. Publishing this chapter was important for Maurice because it would establish his credibility in the field and give him professional exposure. Maurice felt that preparation of this chapter would be easy because he would be referring substantially to his own recent research and to that of Dr. Hardy's laboratory. He had all the data and papers on disk. Shortly after the issue appeared, Dr. Hardy was called by Dr. John Barrett, a colleague and co-author on many papers that Maurice and Dr. Hardy previously published jointly. "You plagiarized me," he said. "You have no right to extract whole passages from our papers without quotation marks, even if you did reference the papers in the text. It's as though my contribution never existed. You should have specifically acknowledged the directly quoted text or made me a co-author of the review. Besides, you need permission from the publisher to reprint material verbatim." Maurice was shocked when he heard this. He looked back at the review and papers and found that he indeed had utilized whole sentences from the papers and one whole paragraph describing the methods. However, although the three individuals had collaborated, it was Maurice who actually wrote the sections in question and who submitted the papers in which they were contained. In addition, he had been the senior author on two of the key papers. Maurice called Dr. Barrett to apologize and indicated that there are only so many ways to say the same thing. Unmollified, Dr. Barrett said that he planned to call the editor of the journal and inform him of the plagiarism.

- Was Dr. Barrett's complaint legitimate?
- Do you believe Maurice's actions constituted plagiarism?
- To what extent were Maurice and Dr. Hardy each responsible for the contents of the chapter? Could Dr. Hardy be partly responsible for the situation that developed?
- Assume that Dr. Hardy brought the matter to the attention of the medical school dean. If you were the dean how would you handle it? If Maurice admitted to inadvertent plagiarism, what kind of sanctions would you, as dean, be inclined to consider?
- If you were the journal editor and received a letter from Dr. Barrett describing the situation given in the case, what would you do?
- Dr. Barrett asked Dr. Hardy to rectify the situation. What would you suggest?

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### Plagiarism Case 3

Professor Diane Archer is a tenured member of a biology department at a major Midwestern university. She has been in the department for 15 years, and during that time she has supervised the work of 20 Ph.D. students. As part of the mentoring process, she has worked closely with her students, teaching them the ropes of writing grant proposals and on occasion inviting students to assist her in reviewing NIH grant applications.

Professor Archer is currently in her last year on an NIH study section. As she is reviewing a group of proposals, she comes upon one written by Charlie West, a former graduate student of one of her close departmental colleagues. Archer knows and remembers Charlie West because she had solicited his help two years earlier in reviewing a proposal closely related to West's own area of research. As she now reads West's proposal, Archer is impressed with the scientific soundness and fine writing style in the Background section. She notes, however, the extremely terse and awkward phrasing in the Research Design and Methods.

Perplexed by this shift in style, Archer retrieves from her files a grant proposal West had reviewed with her two years earlier. She is dismayed to see that West has used verbatim virtually the entire Background section of the earlier proposal for his own current proposal.

She decides to contact West directly, and confront him with her finding. She plans to advise West that what he has done constitutes plagiarism and suggest to him that he withdraw the proposal. If West agrees, and withdraws the grant application, Archer feels she need take this incident no further.

1. Should Archer proceed with her plan to contact West? Why or why not?
2. What are some other alternatives and their pros and cons?

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