

# Avoiding Plagiarism

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## 1. Why You Should Read This Document

In spring 2001 approximately one third of the extra-credit research or analytical papers submitted for Russian 0090 (Russian Fairy Tales) contained instances of plagiarism. A few of these betrayed deliberate fraud, but in most cases the plagiarism was clearly inadvertent, and resulted from ignorance, inexperience, or carelessness on the part of the students. *Inadvertent plagiarism is nonetheless plagiarism*. It is subject to University academic integrity procedures, and it requires that a report be submitted to the Dean's office.

The extent to which inadvertent plagiarism occurs suggests that some students may not read the applicable published University policy (although Russian 0090 course descriptions always provide the URL for this policy). Additionally, our own review of the policy convinces us that it is not sufficiently specific, so that a student could read it carefully and still not understand whether certain actions constitute plagiarism or not. The purpose of the

present document is thus twofold:

1. By providing detailed descriptions of different types of plagiarism, as well as strategies for avoiding plagiarism, this document should enable students to avoid committing inadvertent plagiarism.
2. Because this document has been made available and students have been asked to confirm that they have read it when they submit their papers, instances of plagiarism that do arise will not be presumed inadvertent.

If you have any questions about plagiarism or other issues pertaining to academic integrity, please ask your instructors.

## 2. Why Plagiarism Occurs

Plagiarism occurs for several reasons, including:

1. *Ignorance about what plagiarism is.* This ignorance is not necessarily your fault, since not all of the issues are self-evident, and this document is intended to provide the information needed to recognize and avoid inadvertent plagiarism. Because it is not possible to anticipate all eventualities, if anything remains unclear, please ask your instructors.
2. *Carelessness or haste.* Students often write papers at the last minute. In some cases they plagiarize knowingly (or semi-knowingly) because they are desperate to complete an assignment and have too little time to think about how to do it honestly. In other cases their judgment is too impaired by stress or sleep deprivation for them to be aware of what they are doing. Carelessness and haste may be causes of plagiarism, but neither is an excuse. Particularly if you write your paper under stressful conditions, please reread these guidelines before submitting it. If you realize that you may have plagiarized something, don't submit the paper; it is much better not to complete an assignment than to submit plagiarized work.
3. *Insecurity.* Some students may feel that they are not capable of writing a paper on their own, and that their only hope of receiving credit is copying someone else's work. Writing requires practice, and you may not receive an "A" for the first paper you write in college, but no matter what you plan to do in life, being able to write clearly and effectively will be an asset, and the more you write, the greater the opportunity for you to become a competent writer. If you feel insecure about your knowledge of how to write a paper, consult with your instructors and with the University's Writing Center, which provides free guidance for all students about writing papers. See <http://www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/> for additional information about the Writing Center.
4. *Deceit.* A very small number of students knowingly cheat in an attempt to improve their grades. We are experienced readers of texts and excellent researchers, we have caught many such people over the years, and if you are clever enough to fool us, you are probably also smart enough to write your own paper and earn a good grade. Both your instructors and the Dean's office throw the book at deliberate plagiarists, and the sanctions authorized by the University for academic integrity violations (including plagiarism) may include dismissal without expectation of readmission. It isn't worth the risk.

## 3. University Policies and Procedures Pertaining to Plagiarism

The University's Academic Integrity Code may be found at <http://www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html>.

Among other things, the Code states that a student may be found to have violated academic integrity obligations if he or she:

- Practices any form of deceit in an academic evaluation proceeding.
- Presents as [his or her] own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or works of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgement of sources.
- Submits the work of another person in a manner that represents the work to be [his or her] own.

Most of this is self-explanatory, but “customary and proper” requires clarification. Accordingly, sections 4 and 5 of the present document describe and illustrate customary and proper acknowledgement of sources.

## 4. How to Prepare a Bibliography

Every research or analytical paper submitted for Russian 0090 must include a *Bibliography* or list of *Works Cited*. The bibliography must list every work used in preparing the paper and must not list any work not used in preparing the paper. Entries for common types of sources should include the following information:

- *Book*: Author or editor, title (italicized), place of publication, publisher, date of publication.  
Example:  
Ivanits, Linda J. *Russian Folk Belief*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. 1992.
- *Article or chapter in a book*: Author, article or chapter title (in quotation marks), chapter number (if applicable), editor, book title (italicized), place of publication, publisher, date of publication, full range of pages for article.  
Example:  
Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. “The Queen’s Looking Glass.” Chapter 18. In Jack Zipes. *Don’t Bet on the Prince. Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. New York: Routledge. 1989. 200–08.
- *Article in a journal*: Author, article title (in quotation marks), journal title (italicized), volume (if applicable), number (if applicable), date, full range of pages for article.  
Example:  
Rowe, Karen E. “Feminism and Fairy Tales.” *Women’s Studies* 6. 1979. 237–57.
- *Web site*: Full URL (your reader should be able to type in this information and see the exact page you used) and access date. If you use multiple pages from a particular site, you must list them all individually. See also the more detailed information about using web resources at [http://clover.slavic.pitt.edu/~tales/04-2/internet\\_sources.html](http://clover.slavic.pitt.edu/~tales/04-2/internet_sources.html)  
Example:  
<http://clover.slavic.pitt.edu/~tales/04-2/description.html>. Accessed 2002-08-26.

For other types of materials, please consult with your instructor. Instructors in other courses may require a specific bibliographic format; for Russian 0090 the preceding format is suggested, but any alternative that is consistent and clear and provides the same information is also acceptable. Style manuals provide much more detailed and specific information; the most popular style manuals for academic writing in the humanities are *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Failure to include in your bibliography a work that you have used in preparing your paper is plagiarism. Including a work that you have not used is not plagiarism, but this type of “padding” is nonetheless an academic integrity

violation, since your paper is used to evaluate your academic performance, and falsely claiming to have used certain materials entails “practicing deceit in an academic evaluation.”

## 5. Failure to Use In-Line Attribution Is Plagiarism

The bibliography constitutes only half of the “customary and proper acknowledgement of sources” required by the Academic Integrity Code. It is also necessary to acknowledge the sources for specific words or ideas within the body of the paper itself, and this is where most problems with inadvertent plagiarism arise. Here’s a bit of text that will be used below to illustrate proper and improper citation; it is taken from Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, New York: Vintage, 1976, p. 75:

When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called “the dummy” or “Simpleton” at the start of the story, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the inner world of drives, and with the difficult problems which the outer world presents.

In general, any time you reproduce facts or ideas taken from a source you must provide an in-line attribution identifying the source (including the page). The only time you may omit a page number is when you are genuinely referring to an entire work, e.g., “Fairy tales may be approached from a psychoanalytical perspective (Bettelheim), but ... .”

### a. Copying without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism

To reproduce the preceding paragraph in its entirety in your paper without direct attribution would be plagiarism, even if you list Bettelheim’s book in your bibliography. You can avoid plagiarism in two ways: 1) by wrapping the text in quotation marks and including a brief reference to the source in the body of your paper or 2) by formatting the text as a “block quote.”

The following use of quotation marks is appropriate:

#### **Not plagiarized:**

“When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called ‘the dummy’ or ‘Simpleton’ at the start of the story, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the inner world of drives, and with the difficult problems which the outer world presents.” (Bettelheim 75)

Note that the quotation marks, the brief in-line reference (including the page number) where the citation occurs, and the full bibliographic entry at the end of the paper are all required. The use of quotation marks varies across disciplines, but in the humanities, and therefore in this course, quotation marks are obligatory whenever you reproduce someone else’s words (except in block quotes, discussed below). Some style manuals suggest recording sources in footnotes, rather than in line, but the in-line style is recommended for this course because it is easier to read, and it enables you to reserve footnotes for explanatory material.

Alternatively you may reproduce longer direct citations without quotation marks (but with in-line attribution) by formatting them as “block quotes.” A block quote is a citation of more than a sentence or two that is identified graphically by indentation on both sides, so that the indentation distinguishes it from the surrounding prose as

clearly as quotation marks would. For example:

**Not plagiarized:**

Bettelheim discussed “youngest-child” tales as follows:

When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called “the dummy” or “Simpleton” at the start of the story, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the inner world of drives, and with the difficult problems which the outer world presents. (75)

This interpretation ...

Short citations (one sentence or less) should normally be placed in quotation marks and rendered in line. Longer citations should normally be rendered as block quotes.

## **b. Copying with Rearrangement without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism**

Reproducing the text of your source with only the order of words or phrases changed is plagiarism. Both of the following examples constitute plagiarism:

**Plagiarized:**

When the hero of a fairy tale is specifically called “the dummy” or “Simpleton” at the start of the story, or is the youngest child, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the difficult problems which the outer world presents, and with the inner world of drives.

**Plagiarized:**

When the hero of a fairy tale is specifically called “the dummy” or “Simpleton” at the start of the story, or is the youngest child, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the difficult problems which the outer world presents, and with the inner world of drives. (Bettelheim 75)

In these examples the order of two clauses at the beginning of the sentence has been reversed, as has the order of two clauses at the end. The first example is plagiarized because it attributes neither the words nor the ideas to Bettelheim. The attribution in the second example indicates that the ideas are Bettelheim’s, but the absence of quotation marks falsely implies that the wording is your own.

Although Bettelheim’s text has been modified slightly in these examples, the rearrangement of clauses is so superficial that it cannot reasonably be called paraphrase, and the wording essentially remains Bettelheim’s and needs to be credited as such. Furthermore, the rearrangement of clauses serves no purpose; it doesn’t make the text clearer or more concise or in any other way improve on Bettelheim’s original wording. Students who rearrange clauses in this way often do so not because it improves their papers, but because they mistakenly think that they should avoid direct quotation, and that superficial rearrangement allows them to do so.

Where there is a need to reproduce a source this closely, it is a mistake to change the order of words or clauses merely in an attempt to escape having to use quotation marks. You can avoid plagiarism in this type of situation by reproducing the text as Bettelheim wrote it, using both quotation marks and proper in-line attribution.

## c. Copying with Selective Omissions without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism

Reproducing parts of a source without quotation marks and without direct attribution where the reproduction occurs is plagiarism. The following are both plagiarism:

### **Plagiarized:**

When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, this is the fairy tale's rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the difficult problems which the outer world presents.

### **Plagiarized:**

When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, this is the fairy tale's rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the difficult problems which the outer world presents. (Bettelheim 75)

Because the words here are entirely Bettelheim's, quotation marks and attribution are both required. The first of the preceding examples is plagiarism because it contains neither quotation marks nor attribution. The second is plagiarism because although it contains attribution (indicating that the ideas are Bettelheim's), it does not use quotation marks (thus falsely implying that the words are not taken directly from Bettelheim).

Avoid plagiarism in this case by using quotation marks and attribution. The correct way to indicate the selective nature of the copying is with "suspension points" (three periods in succession), as follows:

### **Not plagiarized:**

"When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, ... this is the fairy tale's rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with ... the difficult problems which the outer world presents." (Bettelheim 75)

At times you may need to alter some of the wording, capitalization, or punctuation in a direct citation for grammatical purposes. The normal way to indicate these alterations is to put the text in quotation marks, but enclose your own alterations in square brackets. For example:

### **Not plagiarized:**

Bettelheim has stated that "[w]hen the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called 'the dummy' or 'Simpleton' at the start of the story, this is the fairy tale's rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the inner world of drives, and with the difficult problems which the outer world presents." (75)

Here embedding Bettelheim's sentence in your own "Bettelheim has stated that" frame requires you to change Bettelheim's upper-case "W" to lower case, since it no longer stands at the beginning of the sentence. The combination of quotation marks and square brackets indicates this type of minor alteration within a direct citation.

At other times you may need to highlight (using italics or bold) part of a direct citation. The correct way to do this is to include the phrase "emphasis added" after the page reference. For example:

**Not plagiarized:**

“When the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called ‘the dummy’ or ‘Simpleton’ at the start of the story, this is the fairy tale’s rendering of the original debilitated state of the ego as it begins its struggle to cope with the *inner world of drives*, and with the difficult problems which the outer world presents.” (Bettelheim 75; emphasis added)

Here the italics and the phrase “emphasis added” make it clear that you, rather than Bettelheim, are responsible for italicizing “inner world of drives.” You might use this type of emphasis if you are going to discuss that particular phrase, and you want not only to present it in context, but also to draw your reader’s attention to it.

#### **d. Copying Distinctive Words or Phrases without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism**

The following use of Bettelheim’s “debilitated state of the ego” is plagiarism, even though the ideas are attributed to him, because there are no quotation marks around this distinctive phrase:

**Plagiarized:**

As Bettelheim notes, the hero of a fairy tale may be a young child, which is a way of encoding the original debilitated state of the ego at an early stage in the struggle with the world at large. (75)

To avoid plagiarism, use quotation marks for distinctive words or phrases. In this case:

**Not plagiarized:**

As Bettelheim notes, the hero of a fairy tale may be a young child, which is a way of encoding “the original debilitated state of the ego” at an early stage in the struggle with the world at large. (75)

#### **e. Paraphrase (Reproducing Someone Else’s Ideas in Your Own Words) without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism**

Rephrasing someone else’s text in your own words without attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else’s ideas as your own. You should not use quotation marks if the words are yours, but you nonetheless must attribute the ideas. Failure to attribute paraphrase is the most common type of inadvertent plagiarism.

For example, the following is plagiarism:

**Plagiarized:**

The hero of a fairy tale may be a youngest child, or may be described as “simple” or “dumb,” as a way of representing the fragility of the ego as it begins to deal with both unfamiliar inner drives and the demands of the outside world.

The words in the preceding example are not Bettelheim’s, but the ideas are, and the absence of attribution conceals this fact. To avoid plagiarism, give credit for the ideas in either of the following ways:

**Not plagiarized:**

As Bettelheim explains, the hero of a fairy tale may be a youngest child, or may be described as “simple” or “dumb,” as a way of representing the fragility of the ego as it begins to deal with both unfamiliar inner

drives and the demands of the outside world. (75)

**Not plagiarized:**

The hero of a fairy tale may be a youngest child, or may be described as “simple” or “dumb,” as a way of representing the fragility of the ego as it begins to deal with both unfamiliar inner drives and the demands of the outside world. (Bettelheim 75)

## f. Secondary Citation without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism

If you obtain information from a source indirectly, you need to acknowledge that you did not make meaningful use of the original source on your own. For example, on pp. 122-23 of *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim refers to the conclusions of a study by Ephraim Biblow regarding the relationship between children’s aggressive fantasies and their aggressive behavior. If you refer to this information from Bettelheim’s book, you need to attribute it to “Biblow, as cited in Bettelheim 122–23,” rather than just to “Biblow,” since you did not actually use the Biblow source yourself. This is true even if you look up Biblow’s work after learning about it in Bettelheim. On the other hand, if you read Biblow’s work and discuss aspects of it that Bettelheim doesn’t mention, you should cite Biblow, since at that point Biblow has become a real source that you have used directly for your own research, and you are no longer merely reproducing Bettelheim’s observations.

## g. Unclear Scope of Reference Is Plagiarism

Your reader must be able to tell from your references where you are representing your own ideas and where you are representing someone else’s. To return to our original Bettelheimian example, the following would be plagiarism:

**Plagiarized:**

As Bettelheim (75) notes, sometimes “the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called ‘the dummy’ or ‘Simpleton’ at the start of the story.” This is an encoded way of representing the hero’s weakness as he begins to deal with his inner desires and the demands of the outside world.

The preceding is plagiarism because although it identifies the direct quotation correctly, it does not make it clear that the text following the quotation represents Bettelheim’s ideas, as well. You can make the scope of the reference clear in the following way, where the mention of Bettelheim’s name at the beginning and the page number at the end identify all the ideas in between as Bettelheim’s:

**Not plagiarized:**

As Bettelheim notes, sometimes “the hero of a fairy tale is the youngest child, or is specifically called ‘the dummy’ or ‘Simpleton’ at the start of the story.” This is an encoded way of representing the hero’s weakness as he begins to deal with his inner desires and the demands of the outside world. (75)

## h. Reproducing Facts without Proper Attribution Is Plagiarism

It is not necessary to cite a source for isolated facts that are self-evident or are common knowledge. For example, if you are writing a report about the Grimm Brothers and want to include the years of their birth and death, you do not have to attribute those dates to the source where you look them up.

On the other hand, if you reproduce any isolated facts that are not self-evident or common knowledge, you do have to acknowledge your source. Similarly, if you reproduce a series of facts that may be unremarkable individually, but that you've taken as a set from another source, you have to attribute them. For example, if you provide a brief biography of the Grimm Brothers that you summarize from D. Ashliman's Grimm Brothers web site (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html>), you need to attribute it. What you are acknowledging here is not so much the source of the facts (which may all be common knowledge), but the source of the organization of the facts.

## 6. How to Avoid Plagiarism

### a. Base Your Paper on Your Own Ideas

A paper must use sources, but it should not merely summarize the information found in those sources, with no original input. Even if all sources are attributed properly (avoiding plagiarism), a paper that contains little original thought is unlikely to be successful. In other words, choose a topic that requires you to analyze and interpret, rather than just to reproduce what you have read.

When you begin a paper, formulate an interesting question or problem that you plan to answer. For example, instead of something like "Who were the Brothers Grimm?" (which would produce only a compilation of facts from other sources), or "How did the Brothers Grimm prepare their fairy tale publications?" (which is better because it is more specific, although it, too, leaves little room for originality), try something like "How did the way the Brothers Grimm prepared their fairy tale publications differ from other possible approaches and what are the consequences of those differences?" This last formulation lets you research what the Brothers Grimm did, but it also lets you think and write originally about the consequences of what they did.

### b. Don't Be Afraid to Acknowledge the Use of Sources

Students sometimes fail to acknowledge sources because they mistakenly think that they aren't supposed to rely on other people's work. The opposite is true: it is extremely difficult to write a successful paper that does not use sources to supply background, context, and information that the author cannot know without conducting research. This use of sources (with proper attribution, of course) is a virtue, since it shows the extent of your research and your ability to situate your own ideas in a general critical context. But the sources are not the focal point of the paper; what is most important is not how you reproduce the information in your sources, but how you analyze, criticize, and compare. (Part of this section is adapted from Robert Harris's "Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers," available at <http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm> [accessed 2003-02-15]. This source is acknowledged here because the idea that some students might think they are not supposed to use sources did not occur to us until we read about it on Harris's site. That tells us that this idea is neither self-evident nor common knowledge, which means that we should acknowledge our source.)

### c. Keep Track of Your Research

It is important to keep track of your sources. If while taking notes or writing you fail to use quotation marks where needed, or fail to record all the necessary bibliographic information from your sources (including page numbers), you may have trouble remembering where you found certain information, which may make it very difficult to cite your sources properly. It may help to get in the habit of recording sources as you take notes,

maintaining a sort of “bibliographic log” where any notes are automatically accompanied by the necessary bibliographic information.

#### **d. Use Multiple Sources**

Research based on a single source often turns into little more than a summary book report, which is not acceptable as a paper in this course. One way to avoid the temptation to walk through and summarize a single source is to use multiple sources and integrate the information you glean from them according to your own logical order (which often will not be the order in which this information occurs in your sources). Incorporating carefully selected information from multiple sources where it helps the exposition of your own ideas reduces the risk of sinking into relentless serial paraphrase. (Note that it is possible to plagiarize from multiple sources, and mere rearrangement does not preclude plagiarism. But using multiple sources does discourage writing “book report” summaries of other people’s work, instead of original papers that use multiple sources to support original arguments.)