Paraphrasing: Avoid "accidental plagiarism"!

Poor paraphrasing or inadequate documentation can lead to "accidental plagiarism." Plagiarism, as you probably know, is "presenting another person's [or AI source's] words or ideas–either accidentally or intentionally–as if they are your own."

- Plagiarism is most flagrant when a student turns in a paper they did not write (bought it, downloaded it, stole it). It can also happen when a writer uses sources but intentionally doesn't acknowledge or cite them, making it appear that all the ideas are the writer's own.[*]

- **However, plagiarism in college papers most commonly results from ACCIDENT–inaccurate citation or incomplete documentation** or from **ineffective paraphrase.**

We know most students have no intention of plagiarizing. But "accidental plagiarism" happens without the writer intending it. As Mike Palmquist points out in *The Bedford Researcher*, "Few writers intentionally try to pass off the work of others as their own. However, **deadlines and other pressures can lead writers to take notes poorly and cite sources improperly**"–and, we would add, **paraphrasing poorly.**

BE CAREFUL!

Does accidental plagiarism matter? YES! *Just because plagiarism is accidental doesn't mean it is not a problem and doesn't mean you aren't responsible for it.*

"Accidental" (unintentional) causes of plagiarism[†]:

ineffective paraphrasing:
"borrowing" too closely **either**

- original **wording**

  OR

- original **syntax** (sentence structure/word order)
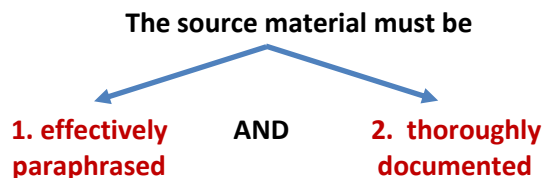
documentation problems:

- using ideas from sources that are paraphrased but not fully cited

- using exact words/phrases/sentences from sources without putting them in quotation marks

- **using source material that is not clearly differentiated from the writer's own words**– that is, material that is not cited fully

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[*] *These kinds of plagiarism is a clear violation of academic standards and student conduct codes. Students might receive no credit for a plagiarized assignment, fail or be removed from a class, or even suspended from attending at all!*

[†] *Using statistics or data points without citing the source is also plagiarism.*

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How to avoid accidental plagiarism when you paraphrase

YIKES! How do you avoid accidental plagiarism? As you can see, there are two things you must watch out for to ensure you don't accidentally plagiarize:

The source material must be

1. effectively paraphrased   AND   **2. thoroughly documented**

1.   Effectively paraphrased

Paraphrase must be in the writer's **own language,**	
using the **writer's own words** ⤑	**Writer's OWN WORDS** means **that the original expression should be rephrased as the writer would say it;** the original wording should not be used except when those words are technical terms or expressions specific to the discipline or field of the original. *Many students underestimate how much of the original words may be used. The answer is: practically none!*
using the **writer's own syntax** ⤑	**SYNTAX** is the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. In a syntax-driven language (like English), **parts of speech** (e.g., subjects, verbs, objects) have to be in a certain order to make sense. In a different order they will be meaningless. **Effective paraphrase must use the writer's own syntax; it is NOT acceptable paraphrase to "plug in" synonyms into the original syntax of a sentence.**

2.   Thoroughly documented

All uses of source material must be fully cited ⤑	There must be **both complete in-text citations** (narrative and/or parenthetical) for all uses of source material in the writing **AND complete entries on the bibliography** (References of Works Cited page, e.g.) for all sources cited; original wording from a source must be in quotation marks.
All source use must be **evident** ⤑	this means that it must **always be clear what is from a source and what is the writer's own thoughts and ideas. Narrative citation, running attribution, etc.** *using source material that is not clearly differentiated from the writer's own words*–that is, material that is not cited fully enough that it is **always clear what is from a source and what is the writer's own thoughts and ideas.**

For more support, *see the SVCWC Writing Guides "Parenthetical & narrative citations" (APA & MLA), "Running attribution," and the documentation collections.*