

Problems to Avoid for Sociology Students

Plagiarism, Paraphrasing, Submitting One Paper to Two Courses:

Every year, course instructors arrive in the Chair's office with a look of combined perplexity and frustration on their faces: they have come to report an apparent case of **plagiarism**. The student is then invited to an interview with the Chair and the course instructor. The resulting meeting is often fraught with intense emotion. If penalties are indicated, the case must be taken to the Dean of Social Sciences. To protect yourself from becoming involved in a situation such as this, the **first** thing you must do is read the *Brock Calendar* on "Academic Misconduct."

The Department of Sociology sees one of its tasks as helping students learn to express themselves, **in their own words**. You need to demonstrate that you not only have read another writer's ideas, but that you have *understood* them and can *re-present* them in *a new way* rather than just parroting or **paraphrasing or stating the ideas of another writer in another way**. In some cases, it is difficult to paraphrase, because the author has a unique and powerful mode of expression. **If you feel it is best to quote an author directly**, you should accurately reproduce the author's words, surround them in quotation marks, and provide a reference to the work and the page number(s) on which the words were found. If the quoted passage is more than six lines long, a block quotation is indicated (single-spaced, with indents on both sides). However, **excessive and lengthy direct quotation should be avoided**; it is a "lazy" way to complete an assignment and only demonstrates a student's ability to assemble quotations rather than a real comprehension of the subject matter.

People will tell you that it's all right to **paraphrase**. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "paraphrase" as: "1. Free rendering or amplification of a passage, expression of its sense in other words.... 2. Express meaning of in other words" (1964: 881). Understood in these ways, **"paraphrasing" is an acceptable practice in sociology, so long as you cite your source and do not pass on the paraphrased ideas as your own**, and so long as you don't overdo it. Excessive paraphrasing is no more acceptable than excessive direct quotation. What is most certainly **OUT OF THE QUESTION is to reproduce an author's words, changing words, or their order, here and there**. We have encountered students who do this sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. They are the ones who end up in tears in the Chair's office.

The *Brock Calendar* includes within its definition of plagiarism "presenting work done (in whole or in part) by someone else as if it were one's own" (p. 46). **Students in sociology courses will be penalized on the mark for an assignment if their work is based on extended copying of another author's work, whether or not words are changed or reordered here and there, and whether or not the source is acknowledged**. If the source is not acknowledged, it is a more serious academic transgression and will be more severely penalized. At the very least, extended copying indicates laziness; at its most serious, it suggests academic dishonesty. In either case, the student has not demonstrated the ability to express complex ideas in his or her own words, and that is the whole point of written assignment

In universities, most of us spend much of our time reporting on other people's ideas, and very rarely come up with an original one of our own. The skills you are expected to learn is how to read a passage, put it aside, and imagine how you would explain the author's argument to a friend. After removing the ("Like, you know") colloquialisms, you should be able to report the author's ideas in your own words.

If you have any problems with your writing or the originality of your ideas, ask for help. Talk to your course instructor, or talk to your seminar leader. You should also consider attending the writing workshops provided through the university.

Another problematic that is sometimes encountered is a student submitting their own work to more than one Professor, without having negotiated an arrangement with the Professors of the courses. Students need to demonstrate that they have submitted independent work and course relevant work for different courses. Usually if students try to cut corners and **submit one paper to two ore more Professors**, it becomes apparent to graders. The work appears to be only tangentially related to issues and perspectives in the course at hand, and appears more pertinent to other courses.