

Tips to Avoid Plagiarism

In a letter to the editor of the National Council of English Newsletter, Monty Prater of Tulsa Junior College provided the tips he gives his students to help them avoid plagiarism. One of many letters addressing the problem of plagiarism along with his advice and suggestions are listed below.

1. As you write your research paper, develop each paragraph around a KEY idea. "Focusing your ideas around a topic sentence helps you gain control of the material and hence avoid using the words or sentence structure of the original" (Prater, 1994).
2. After reading the author's wording, try to paraphrase without looking at the original text.
 - ◆ Prater (1994) suggests annotating important words or phrases in the original before paraphrasing. He suggest checking the original later to insure accurate paraphrasing.
 - ◆ If you have trouble paraphrasing without consulting the original source, Prater says, "...refer to it, but approach it from a different direction and use different sentence structure."
 - ◆ If you have a complicated section with lots of details, isolate the initial statement in a short sentence and then follow it up with other sentences that are different in length and order from the original source. Prater (1994) feels lists are often troublesome for students to paraphrase. He offers the following advice: "...you might approach the material as $2 + 2$ instead of $1 + 1 + 1 + 1$ " (p.19).
3. Although a paraphrase is similar in length to the original you are paraphrasing, if you don't need minor details and you are careful to paraphrase fastidiously, Prater (1994) asserts you can "summarize or generalize about some of your material" (p. 19).

4. Stuck? Prater offers the following advice to crack through writer's block:

Give in and quote. Never get bogged down on an especially difficult passage. When you finish your paper, you can go back to the problem area and either paraphrase it then when you're more relaxed or keep it as a quotation if you haven't been quoting excessively in the rest of your paper (Prater, 1994).

5. Use Prater's "Dot Method" to guarantee your paper is plagiarism-free.

Compare your paraphrase or summary with the quoted words on the note card (or original). Insert a large dot on your paper over each word that also appears on the card (or original) either in that form or a closely related form (ex: require or requirements). If more than just a few dots occur, you have plagiarized—whether you meant to or not—and must revise the sentence to remove some of the author's words (Prater, 1994).

Prater, M. (1994, September). [Letter to the Editor]. The Council Chronicle. p. 18-19.