Plagiarism is defined as submitting material that is in whole or in part not one's own work without acknowledging the portions contributed by the work of others. In brief, handing in work as your own that was done by another. The Latin word “plagiarius” means kidnapper! Plagiarism is unprofessional.

Copying word-for-word the work of another without the proper citation is rather universally recognized as plagiarism by everyone. If you copy something exactly and enclose it in quotes and provide a reference, you are giving the proper credit to the original author. Short of word-for-word copying, plagiarism becomes less clear to the student; however, taking the work of another and rewording a very close imitation of the same sentence or paragraph or idea and claiming it as your work is also plagiarism.

In general when one sits down to write an article, one begins by making an outline of the topics to be covered and then begins to fill in the points of the outline with the details. Unfortunately because of today’s technology, it is an all to common practice in student writing to “grab a paragraph” from a recognized resource (paper, book, etc.). Thus reading papers and then copying a paragraph that makes the point really well and pasting it into a “manuscript in preparation” has become quite common. In many cases this is a process that is repeated over and over with many paragraphs. These paragraphs are then “organized” within the manuscript and, last but not least, “words are changed” so that “this is not plagiarism.” Most recent cases of plagiarism that faculty have encountered have resulted from “cut-and-paste” writing and have been explained by “Oh, I just forgot to reword that paragraph.”

Rewording 5-10 words in a paragraph doesn’t make it your work! Changing the sentence order doesn’t make it your work! The ideas and concepts of the paragraph are the work of the original author. So unless you have put the entire paragraph in quotes and referenced the quote, you have committed plagiarism! Reading the information about a topic from several sources and then putting aside all the references, writing your own paragraph on the topic and then acknowledging the “ideas” from the original sources with a reference would be the correct way to handle this information. Focus on reading first, noting which ideas you got from which resource for future referencing, and then write the material later. If you are unable to explain the material in your own words, then you need to do more reading!

You can self-plagiarize! If you have a published article and simply pull a paragraph from that article and paste that into a new article without acknowledging the original reference, you have committed self-plagiarism! Probably the most common form of plagiarism today in scientific writing is lab self-plagiarism where the entire description of a common lab method is simply pulled from a previous lab manuscript and pasted into a new one! In addition to the ethical issues involved, this can result in copyright violations.

Information from other sources, not only papers and books but websites - must also be appropriately marked with “quotes” and/or appropriately cited in your writings.

In other cultures the conventions governing plagiarism may differ from those in American colleges and universities. If you don’t understand any of the above material, it is important to ask for clarification.

Obviously employing any form of writing service (including a friend) to produce a document for you for submission is considered fraud and a clear violation of the Honor Code. Similarly submitting a very similar paper for two courses without prior permission of the instructors is considered an Honor Code violation.

Plagiarism is considered dishonesty or fraud, and offenders are considered to have committed an Honor Code violation punishable by, up to and including, dismissal. Plagiarism is grounds for failing a paper and/or a course. Accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism and it is the student’s responsibility to not allow this to happen. While there is a learning process to writing, repeated plagiarism is not acceptable.

This has become a frequent enough occurrence among our students that we have invested in a program that scans your paper and then scans the literature and gives a percentage of overlap between the two. If you find
that your paper overlaps 50% with the established literature, you are not “writing” you are copying! It also
doesn’t mean that you sit down with the paper and move words around until you get to a more acceptable
percentage. **There also should not be whole sentences and paragraphs that are marked indicating overlap.** A reasonable 10% overlap should reside in “commonly used phrases.”

It is also important to note that Plagiarism committed in the course of research activities is **research misconduct** with all of its repercussions.

R.W. Keller