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Plagiarism

Understanding and Avoiding It

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by Daniel Sabet

Introduction

Plagiarism is often defined as, “The act of passing off as one’s own the *ideas* or *writings* of another.” [emphasis added]¹ Unfortunately, plagiarism is common in Bangladeshi institutions of higher learning. Not only are students “stealing” the ideas and words of others, but perhaps more importantly, they are failing to develop their own ideas and improve their own writing abilities.

What is Plagiarism?

Consider the following original text taken from: Shariful Islam. 2011. “Steps taken not to follow through.” The Daily Star: April 19.

Original Text

At least 10 steps taken by the government in the last two and a half years to improve the capital's traffic situation and road safety had fizzled out within a few days. The measures came to nothing because they were ill-conceived in the first place. The slackness of the implementing agencies too did not help things either, experts observe. The same people who follow traffic rules in Dhaka cantonment area do the opposite elsewhere in the city. It is because the cantonment authorities strictly enforce the rules while traffic police take little action against the lawbreakers for fear of backlash from influential people or for bribe, point out the experts.

Students asked to write a paper on the traffic situation in Dhaka might be tempted to simply copy and paste such statements into their papers. This is the clearest example of plagiarism; however, **many students believe that if they cite the source and alter the wording of the text they will have avoided plagiarism. This is incorrect.** The following paragraph is *also* an example of plagiarism.

Plagiarized:

Over the last few days, at least 10 steps taken by the government in the last two and a half years to improve the capital's traffic situation and road safety have fizzled out. Because they were poorly conceived, the measures came to little. Experts observe that the slackness of the implementing agencies has not helped things either. Why do the same people who follow traffic rules in Dhaka cantonment area do the opposite elsewhere in the city? The reason is because the cantonment authorities strictly enforce the rules while traffic police in the rest of the city take little action against the lawbreakers for fear of backlash from influential people or for bribe, point out the experts (Islam 2011).

¹ Georgetown University Honor Pledge: <http://www12.georgetown.edu/undergrad/bulletin/regulations6.html#council>

By adding the citation, the student writer is now giving credit to the original author for the *ideas* contained in the paragraph, but the student writer is still misappropriating the original author's *words*. The solution to this problem is to “paraphrase,” or re-write the author's ideas in the student's own words. The following would be an acceptable paraphrase:

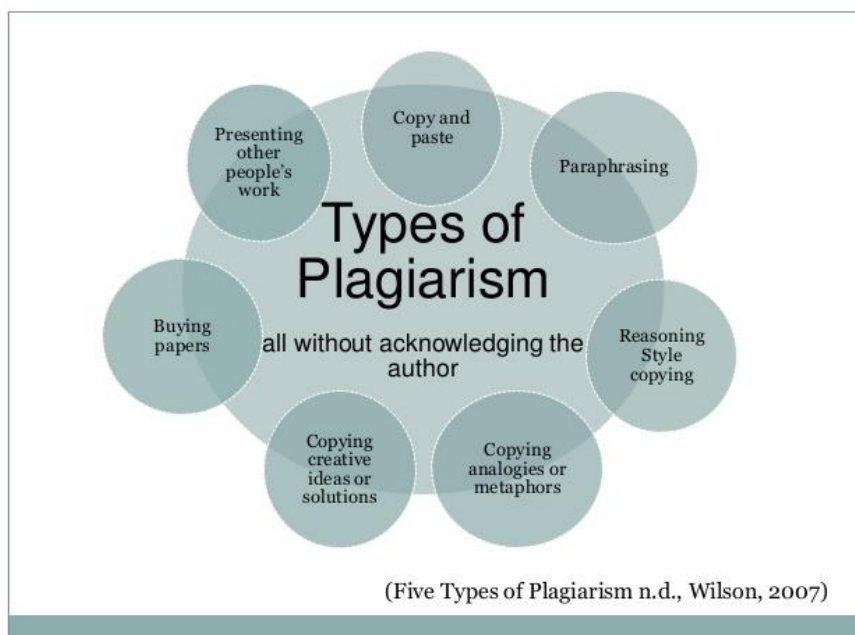
Acceptable Paraphrase:

According to Shariful Islam (2011), a number of recent governmental initiatives designed to reduce Dhaka's traffic problems have not been successfully implemented. Much of the problem appears to be one of enforcement. Islam (2011) argues that this is evident when we compare the far more orderly traffic situation in the military cantonment with the chaos found in the rest of the city.

Here the writer has both paraphrased and cited the original work. Another option would be to “quote” the original author. It would, however, be inappropriate to simply place the original paragraph in quotation marks. Quotes should be used selectively and are best used when paraphrasing is not an option or to provide support to a student writer's argument. The following would be an acceptable use of quotes.

Acceptable Use of Quotes:

A number of recent governmental initiatives designed to reduce Dhaka's traffic problems have not been successfully implemented (Islam 2011). There are many reasons why these measures failed to reduce traffic congestion. First, in many cases the policies were poorly designed. As Islam (2011) argues, “The measures came to nothing because they were ill-conceived in the first place.”



The Honor Pledge

Each term, freshers sign an Honor Pledge committing themselves to academic integrity. By itself, such a pledge risks being mere words; however, if taken seriously by faculty, it can be an important tool to address problems of plagiarism and academic misconduct. The text is as follows:

Honor pledge²

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I _____
commit myself to be honest in every academic endeavor, to conduct myself honorably, and to not engage in cheating, plagiarism, or the use of false data. I understand the meaning of this pledge and I recognize that failing to uphold the pledge will result in a failing grade.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Definitions

- **Cheating** is defined as: “The use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or unauthorized collaboration on in-class examinations, take-home examinations, or other academic exercises.”
- **Plagiarism** is defined as: “The act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another.”
- **False data** are “data that have been fabricated, altered or contrived in such a way as to be deliberately misleading.”

ULAB Policy

The student handbook states the following:

Cheating, presentation of somebody else’s work as own, preparing work to be used for somebody’s works, knowingly furnishing false information about academic matters to an university official are an act of academic dishonesty.

Depending on the degree of the infraction, various disciplinary actions may be taken at the discretion of the course faculty involved or the University authorities. Faculty may: issue a verbal warning; give a failing grade on that particular exam/ quiz/ assignment/ etc.; and/or give a failing grade for the course. In exceptional cases, the Disciplinary Committee may recommend term suspension or dismissal.³



² Wording and definitions taken from the Georgetown University Honor Pledge:

<http://www12.georgetown.edu/undergrad/bulletin/regulations6.html#council>

³ “Code of Conduct & Disciplinary Procedures.” *Student Handbook: Undergraduate Program*. University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Summer 2015: pg.50.