

Plagiarism

“To use another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source is to plagiarize. Plagiarism, then, constitutes intellectual theft . . .”

This and other quotations used below are all taken from section 1.7 (pages 26-29) of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achert, 4th edition. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1995. Available at the Shapiro Undergraduate Library, the Graduate Library, and the Media Union Library. PE 1478 .G43 1995.

WHAT IS THE PENALTY FOR PLAGIARISM?

“Plagiarism . . .often carries severe penalties, ranging from failure in a course to expulsion from school.”

DO I HAVE TO FOOTNOTE EVERY FACT?

“If you have any doubt about whether or not you are committing plagiarism, cite your source or sources.”

WHAT IF I PUT SOMEONE ELSE’S IDEAS IN MY OWN WORDS?

“A writer who fails to give appropriate acknowledgment when repeating another’s wording or particularly apt term, paraphrasing another’s argument, or presenting another’s line of thinking is guilty of plagiarism.”

WHY DOES PLAGIARISM MATTER?

Careers and reputations have been damaged by findings of plagiarism. Journalists have been fired from the *Sun-Times*¹, the *Wall Street Journal*², and the *Nashville Tennessean*³. A Harvard psychiatrist resigned after a finding of plagiarism against him⁴. Art Buchwald sued Paramount Pictures (and won) over the *idea* for the plot of *Coming to America*⁵.

IS THIS PLAGIARISM?

Read this passage from the article on Malcolm X by Peter Goldman in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, page 422, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982.

“In prison Malcolm was introduced by his younger brother Reginald to the teachings of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, the sect led until 1975 by Elijah Muhammad and known popularly as the Black Muslims. Malcolm quickly became a convert, took the Muslim “X” in place of the “slave name” Little, shed his past and entered upon his own reeducation, beginning by copying words out of a dictionary

¹ Mark Fitzgerald, “Sun-Times Drops Columnist over Plagiarism.” *Editor & Publisher* June 23, 1990: 17.

² Daniel Lazare, “The Kandell Case: Plagiarism at *The Wall Street Journal*?” *Columbia Journalism Review* January-February, 1991: 6.

³ Mark Fitzgerald, “Rash of Plagiarism: *Nashville Tennessean* Fires an Editor, Reprimands Another.” *Editor & Publisher* September 16, 1989: 15.

⁴ Kim a. McDonald, “Noted Harvard Psychiatrist Resigns Post after Faculty Group Finds He Plagiarized.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* December 7, 1988: A1.

⁵ Jeanne McDowell, “He’s Got Their Number, Almost: A Writer Scores Against a Studio But Where’s the Money?” *Time* January 22, 1990: 50.

from A to Z. He was ordained a minister after his release, and over the next twelve years he became the best known and most effective evangelist of the Nation of Islam, heading its Harlem mosque, organizing dozens more temples from Connecticut to California, building its following from 400 to perhaps 10,000 registered members and countless additional sympathizers.”

Are the following paragraphs correctly done or has some plagiarism taken place?

- Malcolm was introduced by his younger brother to the teachings of the Nation of Islam while he was in prison; he became a convert, exchanged the Muslim “X” for the “slave name” Little and eventually became an ordained minister.

Loose paraphrasing of the author’s words with no credit given for the ideas is plagiarism.

- As the Nation of Islam’s most famous evangelist, Malcolm built its membership from 400 to as many as 10,000.

The statistics given are not common knowledge and are not credited. Plagiarism!

- Malcolm quickly became a convert, took the Muslim “X” in place of the “slave name” Little, shed his past and entered upon his own reeducation, beginning by copying words out of a dictionary from A to Z.¹

Still plagiarized! While the writer used a footnote to indicate the source, she does not use quotation marks to indicate that the sentence was lifted in its entirety. Chances are that an abrupt change in writing style will be noticeable to a critical reader.

- The “best known and most effective evangelist of the Nation of Islam” Malcolm had been introduced to the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, known as the Black Muslims, by his younger brother while he was in prison; later ordained as a minister, he was instrumental in the growth of the Nation of Islam over the next 12 years.²

The direct quote is in quotation marks but the footnote number does not appear until the end of the sentence, indicating that both those specific words and other facts are Goldman’s.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY & FOOTNOTE AIDS: CHECK MCAT FOR LOCATIONS

A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Kate L. Turabian, Fifth Edition. 1987. 300 pp. Index. Revised and expanded by B.B. Honigsblum. LB 2369 .T93 1987.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Fourth Edition. 1984. 208 pp. Index. Z253 .A55 1994.