

## What is Plagiarism?

Chris just found some good stuff on the Web for his science report about sharks. He highlights a paragraph that explains that most sharks grow to be only 3 to 4 feet long and can't hurt people. Chris copies it and pastes it into his report. He quickly changes the font so it matches the rest of the report and continues his research.

Uh-oh. Chris just made a big mistake. Do you know what he did? He committed plagiarism (say: PLAY-juh-rih-zem). Plagiarism is when you use someone else's words or ideas and pass them off as your own. It's not allowed in school, college, or beyond, so it's a good idea to learn the proper way to use resources, such as websites, books, and magazines.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating, but it's a little complicated so a kid might do it without understanding that it's wrong. Chris should have given the author and the website credit for the information. Why? Because Chris didn't know this information before he came to the website. These aren't his thoughts or ideas.

The word **plagiarism** comes from a Latin word for kidnapping. You know that kidnapping is stealing a person. Well, plagiarism is stealing a person's ideas or writing. You wouldn't take someone's lunch money or bike, right? Well, someone's words and thoughts are personal property, too.

What should Chris have done? He should have written down the name of the website and the name of the person who wrote the article. Then he could have added it and given credit to the source. Teachers have different rules on how you list sources. Sometimes, you provide a list at the end of a report. Other times, a teacher might want you to list the source immediately after the information you took from that source. Or you might just make it part of the sentence (for example: "According to the National Institutes of Health, breathing secondhand smoke can cause problems for kids with asthma.").

All this shouldn't make you nervous to use websites, books, and other sources. It's great that you can get information from experts on stuff you don't know much about. You just have to make sure to show where the information came from. If you do that, you're in the clear.

It's not always easy to tell what's plagiarism and what's not. Sometimes, it's accidental — you really intended to do your own work, but instead ended up with some sentences that sound just like something you've read. You might not be doing it intentionally, but if you don't identify the original source, you're risking a lot of trouble.

So even if you put the information into your own words, you still should list the source. Ask yourself, "Would I know this if I hadn't read it on that website or in that book?" If the answer is *no*, list the source.

But your most important guide on sourcing is your teacher. Different teachers will have different rules. If you're confused, ask questions to make sure you understand what your teacher expects. And if you write something really great about sharks or any other topic, maybe someday someone will be quoting you in a report!

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I have read this definition of plagiarism and I agree not to commit plagiarism at any time as I complete writing assignments this year. I understand that the consequences of plagiarizing the works of others in middle school are as follows:

- 1.)** The plagiarized assignment will have a grade restriction on it.  
1st offense: Grade restriction of D  
2nd offense: Grade restriction of U
- 2.)** I will re-do the assignment until the teacher is satisfied with it.
- 3.)** I will sit on the wall at lunch until the assignment is completed to the teacher's satisfaction.
- 4.)** The removal of special privileges, including computer usage, will be at the discretion of the teacher.

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Plagiarism Policy--sign, cut, and return

Student's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_