**Academic Honesty, Plagiarism, and Collaborative Work**[[1]](#footnote-1)

This statement will provide guidance in the proper use of quotations, selection of research sources, and, most importantly, the avoidance of plagiarism. The latter is a serious matter indeed. The Trinity Handbook offers advice parallel to this document. All students should be familiar with the material on plagiarism it contains. Recent experience indicates that while students in their first or second year at Trinity who are found guilty of plagiarism are usually only Censured and given an F for the course, juniors and seniors are usually suspended for at least one semester and given a grade of F for the course involved. This document was prepared to help insure that you understand fully what is meant by plagiarism so that you can take care to avoid it.

Plagiarism in Collaborative Writing

In many cases, you are encouraged to work together and share ideas during the process of writing. This situation requires extra caution to avoid plagiarism. **Papers prepared by two individuals should not contain identical sentences, paragraphs or phrases.** The collaboration should occur in the development of the ideas and approaches. Copying the same discussion from one report to another is not collaboration. Even writing your papers from a common outline is not acceptable. **You should acknowledge the contribution of your collaborators through quotations, or an acknowledgement statement.** Unacknowledged collaboration is not acceptable.

Acknowledge the Contributions of Others to your Work

Your work is in no way diminished by your acknowledging that others have helped you. Try to get into the habit of acknowledging the help you have received. This is easily done by adding an **Acknowledgment** statement at the beginning or the end of your report. You can find an example of these statements in most published work.

What is Plagiarism? Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines plagiarism in this way:

"To steal or purloin and pass off as one's own"

the exact ideas, words, writings, etc. of another. **If a student copies the exact words of a clause, sentence or paragraph written by another without enclosing these words in quotation marks and citing their source in a footnote, he or she is guilty of plagiarism.**

A frequent problem is the student who changes some words, or perhaps even rearranges the sequence of clauses in the material he or she is using. Such an approach is also plagiarism. Several papers submitted by students with obvious problems in this area appeared to be a cut and paste job from the specific sources. Cut and paste paraphrasing is still plagiarism. It is interesting to note that in 1983 a journalist for a major television news service was fired and barred from journalism for using the first five sentences of a Newsweek article as a part of a television report on the same topic without attributing it to its source. This is serious business. Presidential candidates have been forced to withdraw after evidence of plagiarism was discovered on their college transcripts. In August 2012, Fareed Zakaria was taken off the air by CNN and dropped from Time Magazine for copying a single paragraph from another work without attribution.

The Internet creates a strong temptation to plagiarize. It is possible to copy documents directly into your word processor and use cut and paste to create a written document. This is totally unacceptable and will be prosecuted through the Academic Affairs Committee of the College when detected. Search tools are available to detect this type of work, so don’t even think about doing it. The same search engine you used to find the material will allow me to find it.

What is Paraphrasing?

Quoting Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary again, to paraphrase is; "to say the same thing in other words... A restatement of a text, passage or work, giving its meaning in other form...". In general the procedure for paraphrasing is as follows:

1. The student should read the material to be paraphrased as often as needed in order to grasp the substance of the writer’s idea.

2. The student should then write her own version of the idea without referring to the original source.

3. She should check the paraphrased statement against the source to insure that the thought is accurately reproduced and she has not unconsciously reproduced the author's words.

4. Then cite the source of the idea. The fact that the idea has not been quoted does not absolve the student from giving credit to the **source of the idea**.

The following examples will clarify the matter further. The first is an exact quotation properly footnoted:

" By the summer of 1929, prices had soared far above the stormy levels of the preceding winter into the blue and cloudless empyrean. All the old markers by which the price of a promising common stock could be measured had long been passed: if a stock once valued at 100 rose to 300, what on earth was to prevent it from sailing to 400? And why not ride with it for fifty or a hundred points, and Easy Street at the end of the journey?

[[2]](#footnote-2)

Of course it would be plagiarism to copy all or part of this quotation without using quotation marks and without citing the source. It would also be plagiarism to "doctor" the original passage as in the following "paraphrase":

The summer of 1929 saw prices soaring into the blue and cloudless firmament‑‑high above the turbulent levels of the preceding winter. *All the old markers* which could be used for measuring *the price of a promising common stock* had been passed long ago. If a stock which had been *valued at 100 rose to 300, what in the world could stop it from going on up to 400?* Why not stay with it for *another fifty or one hundred points, with Easy Street at the end of* the ride?

Obviously the "author" of this second example did nothing but substitute a clause or two and break one sentence into two. Compare a few words of the second passage with the passage quoted directly from Allen's book and, you will see what an obvious example of plagiarism looks like. Suppose the student writer of a research paper had footnoted this second example and had even stated that it represented a close paraphrase, would it then be acceptable? The answer is "NO!" Technically, she would not be plagiarizing and could not be charged with such. However, her procedure represents little mental effort at understanding or reproducing Allen's thought. Thus a paper containing the properly attributed "paraphrase" would still be failing work by college standards. How then can one really paraphrase the original paragraph? There are as many possibilities as there are people to write them. Here is one possible paraphrase:

The rising temperatures in the summer of 1929 had their counterpart in the stock market. Indeed, stock prices reached unprecedented levels. By all standards of measure, stocks were greatly overvalued. But they were still rising and it appeared to many that they would continue to rise. Many could not resist the temptation to buy in the hope of making fabulous profits.2

This paragraph captures the ideas and intent of Allen's paragraph without plagiarizing. The words and phrases are entirely different; **yet note that it is still necessary to give Mr. Allen credit by citing his book in the footnote**.

Quotations

The question always asked is "When is it important to use actual quotation and when should I paraphrase?" In general, do not quote without a specific definable reason.

* the need to reproduce precisely the author's position exactly
* the writer's phrasing is so vivid or felicitous that the student could not improve upon it.

In the example above, Mr. Allen's prose is certainly vivid and could justify a quote depending on the nature of the paper.

In technical writing quotations are rare indeed. However, technical writing often requires you to transmit factual information which you have not obtained directly by experiment or observation.

**The proper way to handle this situation is to provide a reference to the source of the fact but to use your own words rather than a direct quotation. In this case, the reference provides the reader with a way to obtain verification of your facts.**

It also provides credit to the original source. One means used in the scientific literature to assess the significance of a study is to measure the number of times the work is cited by other authors. Thus, it is quite important to the original author that you correctly cite the original work.

Paraphrasing in Relation to Scholarship

A piece of writing based on research need not, in order to be considered scholarly, consist of a series of paraphrases and quotations. A good scholar, in fact, while she may build on the work of others, does her own thinking. Anyone can paraphrase. A proper research paper will be the unique product of the writers own thought. While it will make use of facts and ideas of others, the quality of the paper will be the extent to which the paper demonstrates analysis, interpretation, and critical evaluation of the source materials. In fact, in the sciences, quotations and citations are more often used to provide connections with previous work than to add authority to the work.

Use of Primary Sources

The final question to be dealt with in evaluation of the quality of a research paper or proposal is the quality of the sources used by the writer. The following hierarchy of source material rates the various types of sources from best to worst.

1. Refereed Academic journals (Best source) Science, Nature, etc.

2. Refereed academic books (excellent) ACS Symposium Series

3. Unrefereed journal articles (very good) Science News, article summaries in Science

4. Unrefereed books by reputable authors/publishers (good) your text

5. Trade Journal Articles (OK)

6. Reputable magazines and Newspapers (Weak) Newsweek, Time, New York Times

7. Encyclopedia articles (poor)

8. Web sites (unknown - see discussion below)

9. Disreputable magazine and tabloid newspaper articles (bad)

10. Vanity press books and articles (very bad) publications paid for by the author with no review or published by political or industry groups.

A research paper is expected to use the best possible sources. In many cases, the primary limitation will be your ability to read and interpret technical material. The more reliance is made on original sources, the more impressive and convincing the work. However, this is only true if you understand the primary sources. In some cases, you will need the help of an interpreter to put the primary source into language you can understand.

**Finally, a good rule of thumb for identifying the sources to use for a research paper is to use only those which give explicit references to other literature.**

Use of Internet Resources

The Internet is a major resource for scholars and writers and the search tools available at sites like Google, Google Scholar, Wikipedia, and Bing are invaluable ways to locate information. However, considerable caution must be used in employing the results of such research. The Internet is completely unregulated. Anyone with a Web site can post any content they wish. There is no one who checks to see that postings are valid. Thus all web based information requires a high degree of skeptical examination.

You are welcome to use the Internet as a research tool in this course. There may be times when you will be specifically restricted from using web sources in your final bibliography. The following rules should always be used in using Web sources.

1. Do not use a site in any way if it does not have an author identified. The exception are federal government agencies which may not identify the author of all government publications. However, the fact that it is a government publication gives it authority.

2. Do not use a site as a major source if you cannot identify the affiliation of the author and their credibility as a source of information on the topic.

3. Has the document been published in print form? If so, reference the print reference as the primary source with a secondary reference to the web source. Printed material has often been through a more thorough review in most cases than material available only on the web.

4. Wikipedia is a source of unknown reliability. There have been several instances of fraud on the part of contributors. It is a reasonable place to use as a starting point, and often contains very good information. But it should only rarely be used as a primary reference. The better Wikipedia entries have references, which should be consulted and used as the actual reference in your work.

1. This document contains original material produced at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in 1967 by an anonymous author. It has been edited and updated at Trinity to produce the present form. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday New York: Blue Ribbon Books, Inc., 1931, p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)