Plagiarism is the intentional—or unintentional—use of someone else’s work without adequate documentation. Whenever writers want to include another’s ideas, key terms, or copied text into their own papers, they must always use that borrowed information accurately and ethically.

Documentation, an agreed upon style of providing credit to others’ work, is necessary in order to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious offense in college-level writing, for it is intellectually dishonest, robbing authors of their property.

All documentation styles include internal citations, a works cited list, and quotation marks around copied terms and information.

To consider: As we would never borrow one of our neighbor’s possessions without asking permission, we should never use someone’s words or ideas without permission. Correctly documenting someone else’s material permits us legal use of words and ideas not belonging to us.

It should be obvious that buying papers, using someone else’s papers, and similar activities are plagiarism at its worst.

Each instructor will determine penalties for plagiarized work.

Tip: As many documentation styles exist (MLA, APA, and Chicago are used in colleges and universities), be certain to ask your professor which type of documentation style is required for the class.

Document when

- You use someone’s ideas from any traditional or web source
- You copy sentences and phrases from a source
- You copy a key term from a source
- You use information from an interview or survey
- You copy pictures, charts, and diagrams from sources
- You use information you did not originate