

**Beyond Plagiarism:
 Doing Justice to Your Sources**

Problem Observed	Suggested Solutions
<p>1. Problems summarizing or interpreting a source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material misstatement of an author’s position or results • Inflating findings • Improperly equating correlation with causation • Failure to provide critical context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define and use “key terms” in the same manner as the source (or explain the difference) (e.g., “pain” and the “existence of amyloid deposits” are not the same thing; “animal liberation” and “animal rights philosophy” are not the same thing) • choose the correct “signal phrase” to introduce an author or summarize a source (e.g., did the author “note” something or “refute” it?)(Note: <i>A Pocket Style Manual</i>, by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers contains an excellent list of signal phrases) • recognize the difference between <i>correlation</i> and <i>causation</i> (e.g., polio cases traditionally spiked during the summer and sales of ice cream also spiked during the summer—but despite the correlation, consumption of ice cream did not cause polio) • be wary of “red-flag” words (e.g., <i>most, many, majority, few, likely, probably</i>, etc.); those kinds of words usually require scientific or factual backup • read to the end of a source; (Note: Jonathan Lethem’s essay “The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism” (<i>Harper’s</i>, Feb. 2007) is a prime example of why one must read to the very end) • craft a “fair” summary of an author’s ideas (in other words, would a reader unfamiliar with the source understand the author’s main claim?) • DO NOT “pluck” a quotation or idea out of context (Ask yourself: Does the reader need more explanation to understand the author’s meaning? Is the quotation representative of the author’s main point or position?) • DO NOT exaggerate an author’s position or findings (e.g., 47% ≠ most)
<p>2. Problems with paraphrasing or “patchwriting”*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to put language into the student’s own words <p>*term coined by Rebecca Moore Howard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn what “patchwriting” or “unacceptable borrowing” is (See exercises from Diane Hacker and Nancy Sommers’ <i>A Pocket Style Manual</i>) • use good “research hygiene” (e.g., distinguish between actual quotations and summaries even during the note-taking stage) • learn how to take advantage of software (such as <i>Zotero</i>) to help file and track sources and make double-checking easier • double check before you turn in your work: Does your language track the source too closely?

Problem Observed	Suggested Solutions
<p>3. Conflation problems (failure to distinguish “who” is speaking):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student v. source • 1st source v. 2nd source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVOID using one source to quote another source (Note: this is like asking the reader to look through two sets of lenses and dramatically increases the risk of misstating an author’s position or findings) • be sure to signal a shift between a source and an original idea (and vice versa) (in other words, do not inadvertently claim credit for someone else’s idea or accidentally give credit to a source for your own idea) (See Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. <i>They Say, I Say</i>. NY: W.W. Norton (2006).
<p>4. Miscellaneous citation problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to indicate deleted or added language • Failure to maintain original punctuation • Failure to provide an accurate “local” or “pin” page citation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarize yourself with rules on how to use an ellipsis and/or brackets to indicate a change • remember that changing punctuation can change meaning (Suggested reading: Austen, Ian. “The Comma That Costs 1 Million Dollars (Canadian).” <i>nytimes.com</i>. New York Times, 25 Oct. 2006. Web. 10 Feb. 2014) • ALWAYS double check a quotation (including language and local page cite) • ALWAYS double check numbers and statistics • ALWAYS double check that every work cited in the body of a paper is included on the Works Cited page
<p>5. Source selection problems involving the quality or nature of sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citing a nonscientific source for a scientific fact • Citing to an unreliable or non-academic source • Citing old data • Citing a potentially biased source (w/o revealing the potential bias) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn what is (and is NOT) an academic source & how each should be used (e.g., a non-academic source could be used in an introduction or to provide general background, but probably not as an “argument” source)(enlist the help of a librarian to identify and locate academic sources) • learn the parts of a scientific article (e.g., abstract, previous literature, methods, findings, etc.)(Note: stress that a student should never quote from an abstract or other summary) • learn the differences between various kinds of sources (e.g., a report of a recent randomized controlled study v. a meta-analysis of existing data; an op-ed essay v. a researched paper on an issue, etc.) • learn how to recognize (and disclose) an author’s potential bias (check the author’s bio: does he or she work for an interested party?; check the history of the publication: have the editors historically taken a certain position on an issue?; who owns the publication?; can you identify any other potential conflict of interest?) • ALWAYS check whether the underlying information and data is still current (in other words, has anyone published anything more recently that contradicts your assumptions or evidence?)(Note: one way to do this is to do an advanced search restricting results to the time period beginning after the date of your last source)

1. Problems summarizing or interpreting a source:	Sample Teacher Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misstatement of author’s position or plucking a quotation out of context: • Misstatement of results due to problems with “key terms”: • Improperly equating correlation with causation: • Other misstatements or overstatements of an author’s position or findings: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On page four you state that Dr. Smith “recognizes the need for change in the global warming controversy.” A more careful reading of Smith’s letter to the editor (which, by the way, does not qualify in this instance as an “academic” source) reveals that Smith is suggesting that the journal stay out of the debate. • On page five you cite Jones for a proposition that she only mentions in passing <i>in a footnote</i>. More important, Jones does not actually support that proposition, but merely notes that it is an <i>issue</i> that will require more research. Be careful not to pluck quotations from sources and present them out of context. • On page four you state that the study found that “pain” was “noticeably increased in birds subjected to stressful environmental conditions.” But the authors of the study do not say that. What they say is that the incidence of amyloid deposits (i.e., a pathological alteration) was noticeably increased in those animals. In other words, “pain” and “amyloid deposits” are not the same thing. Be careful not to overstate a researcher’s results. And be sure to define and use key terms in the same manner as the source. • On page four you state that Harris claims that “animal liberation” does not serve the greatest good. Putting aside the fact that the Harris source appears to be a letter to the editor (which, by the way, should have been described that way on the Works Cited page), what Harris said was that the animal rights philosophy (which is not the same thing as “animal liberation”) does not serve the greatest good. • On page five you state that increased levels of AEF “can cause” Alzheimer’s, but the only source you cite for this proposition is an abstract of an article that found AEF activity in the brain of Alzheimer’s patients. Putting aside the problem of improperly citing <i>an abstract</i> as scientific evidence, you make an unsupported logical leap and wrongly equate <i>correlation</i> with <i>causation</i>. • On page three you state that Smith and Jones “argue for” the sex-negative position. But that source merely reported a correlation between pornography and abuse. Although I appreciate your efforts to connect pornography with sex offenders, you must not confuse <i>correlation</i> with <i>causation</i>, which are two very different concepts. Thus, it is not accurate to say that Smith and Jones “argue” for that position. Be careful to choose the correct signal phrase. • On page three you state that Burns “notes” that water with high nitrate levels “may cause” spontaneous abortions. First, you need to make it clear that Burns did not conduct a study (but rather, simply summarized others’ anecdotal observations). <i>Anecdotal reports</i> are not the same as <i>controlled studies</i>. Second, Burns did not say that high nitrate levels “caused” the abortions. What she said was that there were anecdotal reports of spontaneous abortions among women

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccurate summary of an author’s position or main purpose (possibly resulting from a superficial or incomplete review of a source): 	<p>consuming high nitrate water. Be specific and do not confuse <i>correlation</i> with <i>causation</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On page three, you cite Peters et al for the proposition that the long-term effects of air pollution (from hog waste) can “trigger potentially fatal respiratory distress.” But according to those researchers, respiratory distress was seen <i>only</i> in persons <i>with existing respiratory problems</i>. In the future, be careful about accurately summarizing others’ work. • On page five you cite Thompson for the proposition that PETA’s most recent legal action “<i>is</i>” more about publicity than about prevailing in the courts. But the original text said that the legal action “<i>may be</i>” more about publicity—an important distinction. By ignoring the conditional nature of the original prose, you overstate the author’s position. • On page six you state that Peters “noted” something, when he was actually “questioning” an assumption. Be careful to choose the correct signal phrase. It is a subtle point, but important difference. • On page six you say that Jerris et al “propose that we increase fish production,” which implies that this was the study’s main conclusion. In that study, however, Jerris and his colleagues: (i) were actually looking at a variety of alternatives, including increasing poultry production, and (ii) finally concluded that increasing animal production should probably be rejected due to the “cost” to the animals. Next time, be sure to read to the end of a source. • On page four you state that the fear of invasion of a particular snake was so great that the “the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation” was prepared to shut down all water access. But what the Department actually concluded was that shutting down the waterways was usually not appropriate. Be sure to read to the end before you attempt to summarize an author’s position.
<p>2. Problems with Paraphrasing or Patchwriting:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sample Teacher Responses</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patchwriting: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a couple of places where you changed just enough of the original language so that it might not be considered outright plagiarism, but still considered “patchwriting.” On page two, for example, you say that: <p style="padding-left: 40px;">[Smith noted that monkeys] “form long-term <u>affectionate and supportive relationships between family members</u> that can last <u>throughout life</u>.”</p> <p>However, the original text stated something almost identical:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">[Smith also observed] “<u>affectionate and supportive relationships between monkey family members</u>—bonds that often lasted <u>through the monkeys’ lives</u>.”</p> <p>And you had similar problems on pages six and seven. In the future, I suggest that you either use quotation marks or revise your paraphrasing to make it significantly different from the original text. It may help to distinguish between quotations and summaries <i>even during the note-taking stage</i>.</p>

3. Conflation Issues	Sample Teacher Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arising from using one source to quote another source: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a number of places, you seemed to be using one party to quote another person or entity’s words or ideas. On page three, for example, you attribute a statement to PETA, but a close reading of the source reveals that that was PETA <i>quoting the FBI</i>. You need to make it clear “who” is speaking. And in another spot on that same page, you state that PETA claims that a police study in Australia revealed something. But PETA specifically stated that it was relying on a New South Wales newspaper for that information—so it was not accurate to say that PETA made the claim. However, even if you manage to separate the voices, it is generally not advisable to use one person as a source for another person’s words or ideas. • As I mentioned in class, academic writers need to be wary of relying on one writer to summarize or quote <i>another writer’s</i> position or words. But you repeatedly ask your reader to rely on Smith’s summary of <i>four</i> other philosophers. Had you done your own research, you might have been able to go into more depth about those various philosophers’ theories. Moreover, it is a bit unfair to ask the reader to rely on Smith’s summary of their positions—especially since you tell the reader nothing about Smith’s credentials or reputation. • Be careful about citing correctly. At the top of page three, for example, you cite Smith for the idea that “a lifetime of suffering for a nonhuman animal” is more important than “the gastronomic preference of a human being.” But a close reading reveals that Smith appeared to be quoting someone else. Be careful about attributing a quotation to the wrong person. • On page three, you cite Smith but appear to be quoting Singer. As I mentioned in class, it is generally not advisable to rely on one author for another author’s words or ideas. Similarly, on page six, you cite Loman, but appear to be quoting Smith. And on page four, you attribute a source and a position to The Humane Society, but the Works Cited page gives credit to Forman. The Humane Society may have published the work, but unless it specifically endorsed the work (or unless Forman was speaking in an official capacity(s) as a representative of the Society), you should refer to the actual author.
4. Problems Involving the Quality or Nature of Sources	Sample Teacher Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a nonscientific source for a scientific fact: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On page seven, you cite the bible as evidence that animals are sentient beings. This is the type of claim that requires scientific evidence (i.e., a better source).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citing to non-academic sources: • Citing old data: • Citing to a biased source (without revealing the bias): • Misunderstanding of the “parts” of a scientific article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of your eight sources, one was a “non-substantive” letter to the editor, one was an “abstract” of an article reporting on a study (as opposed to the actual results of the study), and one was a summary of an article from a table of contents in a magazine. These are not scholarly or academic sources. (Note: a letter to the editor, if substantive and published in a peer-reviewed journal, can be considered a scholarly or academic source.) • On page six you cite <i>an editor’s summary</i> of an article as evidence of a claim in <i>Science</i> magazine. In the future, be sure to read and cite to the actual article. • Some of the data you cite is from 2002, which seems very old for scientific information, particularly in this emerging crisis. • On page two, you cite to a “legal case,” which implies that you are referring to a court opinion. But what you are actually citing appears to be a page from the <i>plaintiff’s brief</i>—a fact that the reader needs to know so that he or she can evaluate any built-in bias. • On page six you state that Smith and Jones found that the other studies were “dated.” However, Smith and Jones simply noted the earlier studies as part of <i>their review of the existing literature</i>. That is a standard component of a scientific article and does not imply that the authors believed that the prior studies were “dated.”
<p>5. Miscellaneous Citation Issues</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sample Teacher Responses</p>
<p>Accuracy (dropped words, added words, different punctuation):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a number of places (see pages five, eight, and nine), you dropped words or otherwise had errors in the quoted language. Be careful to quote precisely. When readers see mistakes they start to distrust the writer. • In a number of places, I could not locate the quoted language on the page you cited. • On page eight, you dropped a word in a quoted phrase and on page six, I couldn’t find the quoted language on the page you cited. Keep in mind that accuracy and attribution are critical in the academic world.