

How to Avoid Accidental Plagiarism

Importance of This Document

Even if you follow all of the rules and guidelines of the manuals for your particular style of documentation and read through and follow the handouts for the UAIS Extended Essay workshops, you still can find yourself in the unfortunate position of being accused of accidental plagiarism. Oftentimes, it is the result of one careless, seemingly insignificant error, that when repeated, blows up into a major academic incident. Our job is to make sure that you avoid this happening! The best way to avoid ever being accused of accidental plagiarism is to play it safe. The rules below should help you shut out any doubt as to your intentions.

1. Provide key phrases and clauses before a paraphrasing or summarizing sentence to show intent.

Since paraphrasing is your most common form of in-text citation, begin with the following:

- According to _____,
- The 1987 study conducted by _____ illustrates...
- Westcott argues that...

These key phrases will remind you that you are paraphrasing or summarizing and need to use documentation.

2. Before you submit your final version, reread each sentence. If it is not your idea, it must be cited.

Always play it safe. It is better to mistake something for a paraphrase when it's not than the other way around. If you don't cite a paraphrase or summary, you can be accused of plagiarism. If you cite something that's your idea, it's simply a minor mistake.

3. Make sure your citations or footnotes follow the appropriate sentences.

Frequently, a student will write a sentence that is paraphrased or summarized and follow it with a sentence that analyzes the paraphrase, but place the footnote after his own idea because he/she sees it as one complete thought. Two errors are committed: the student is paraphrasing a sentence that doesn't need it and accidentally claiming the paraphrase or summary as his/her own idea. This can be disastrous for the student's extended essay.

4. Make sure you have a bibliographical entry for each source.

Some students get into the bad habit of starting their extended essay without a complete bibliography because it comes "last." Others find other sources later but forget to add them in. They cite their sources correctly in the body with parenthetical documentation or footnotes but have nothing listed in the bibliography to attach it to. This constitutes plagiarism, according to the IBO Extended Essay handbook.

5. Place the correct location number in your footnote or parentheses.

In the footnote or parentheses, some students will ignore repeated reminders to include page numbers, volume numbers, issue numbers, and so on, in their in-text citations. To do so constitutes plagiarism, even if this carelessness isn't truly accidental. More accidentally, some students get caught up in the idea that page numbers are the magical solution to documenting every source when they don't: only books and novels really follow this rule. Magazines, newspapers, periodicals, the Bible, atlases, interviews, web sites, and most all others require other specific information.

The following online game can help you avoid mistakes:

The Cite is Right—Rutgers University Libraries Plagiarism Game:
(<http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/citeisright.html>)