

Avoiding Plagiarism

DePauw University Writing Center¹

The DePauw University Student Handbook defines plagiarism as

Using the words or idea of another writer without attribution, so that they seem as if they are your own. Plagiarism ranges from copying someone else's work word for word, to rewriting someone else's work with only minimal word changes (mosaic plagiarism), to summarizing work without acknowledging the source. (82-83)

Below is original material, followed by three student versions of it, two of which would be called plagiarism.

Original Material

The world as Rabbit knows it is filled with nothing but oppression and hurts, and this is the condition which dictates his peculiar kind of isolation; to everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith he is a perfect rogue. His absolute quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning.¹

¹ Galloway, David. The Absurd Hero in American Fiction. Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1966. 36.

Student Version A:

In *Rabbit Run*, the hero knows the world is filled with nothing but oppression and hurts, and this knowledge results in his peculiar kind of isolation. He is a perfect rogue to everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith. His absolute devotion to a quest of meaning produces his absolute aloneness in a society that knows nothing about meaning.

This is plagiarism in its most deplorable form. The writer has substituted a few words, and rearranged the second sentence, but retained the original phrasing. He gives no documentation whatsoever, implying that these sentences are entirely his own thoughts and words.

¹ Adapted from material originally compiled by Kitty Steele who writes, "This material comes from the handbook which accompanies McCrimmon's Writing with a Purpose. Neither the wording nor the ideas are original with me."

Student Version B:

The world as Rabbit sees it is filled with nothing but oppression and pain; this dictates his peculiar brand of isolation. To everyone but Tothero and Mrs. Smith, he is a virulent rogue. In a society which knows nothing about meaning, Rabbit's absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness.¹

¹ Galloway, David. The Absurd Hero in American Fiction. Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1966. 36.

This is also plagiarism even though the writer documents his/her source. She has obviously copied directly from the original text, dropping and changing only a few words and reversing the order of the third sentence. Her version is neither a summary nor a proper paraphrase.

Student Version 3:

In describing Rabbit Angstrom's alienation, David Galloway insists that Rabbit – who seems to be a “perfect rogue” to everybody except Tothero and Mrs. Smith - knows a world filled with “oppression and hurts.” Galloway argues further that Rabbit's “absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictated his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning.”¹ It is this fruitless quest which finally leads Rabbit away from his family and friends and into a future of constant searching.

¹ Galloway, David. The Absurd Hero in American Fiction. Austin, TX: U of Texas P. 1966. 36.

This version satisfactorily handles the source. The student identifies the source in her first sentence and directly quotes key words and an important idea, using the appropriate footnote technique. Her third sentence repeats the key word “quest” and contains her own summary of the novel's theme.

The advent of the internet has made plagiarism an even greater issue. Be aware that there are methods for citing on-line sources and that these are to be treated like you would any print source: you must tell your reader where your information originated.

For more information about plagiarism, see the DePauw University Writing Center website: <http://www.depauw.edu/admin/arc/plag.html>