

# © IS NOT FOR CAT.

## What is plagiarism?

Simply put, plagiarism is the use of another's original words or ideas as though they were your own. Any time you borrow from an original source and do not give proper credit, you have committed plagiarism and violated U.S. copyright laws. (See our What is Plagiarism? page for more detailed information on plagiarism.)

## What are copyright laws?

Copyright laws exist to protect our intellectual property. They make it illegal to reproduce someone else's expression of ideas or information without permission. This can include music, images, written words, video, and a variety of other media.

At one time, a work was only protected by copyright if it included a copyright trademark (the © symbol). According to laws established in 1989, however, works are now copyright protected with or without the inclusion of this symbol.

Anyone who reproduces copyrighted material improperly can be prosecuted in a court of law. It does not matter if the form or content of the original has been altered -- as long as any material can be shown to be substantially similar to the original, it may be considered a violation of the Copyright Act.

## Are all published works copyrighted?

Actually, no. The Copyright Act only protects works that express original ideas or information. For example, you could borrow liberally from the following without fear of plagiarism:

Compilations of readily available information, such as the phone book

- Works published by the U.S. government
- Facts that are not the result of original research (such as the fact that there are fifty U.S. states, or that carrots contain Vitamin A)
- Works in the public domain (provided you cite properly)

## If I change the words, do I still have to cite the source?

Changing only the words of an original source is NOT sufficient to prevent plagiarism. You must cite a source whenever you borrow ideas as well as words.

## What is "fair use," anyway?

The United States government has established rough guidelines for determining the nature and amount of work that may be "borrowed" without explicit written consent. These are called "fair use" laws, because they try to establish whether certain uses of original material are reasonable. The laws themselves are vague and complicated. Below we have condensed them into some rubrics you can apply to help determine the fairness of any given usage.

- The nature of your use.
- The amount you've used.
- The effect of your use on the original

We recommend the following sites for more information on "Fair Use" and Copyright laws:

[www.umuc.edu/library/copy.html](http://www.umuc.edu/library/copy.html)

[www.utsystem.edu/ogc/intellectualproperty/ccmcguid.htm](http://www.utsystem.edu/ogc/intellectualproperty/ccmcguid.htm)

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