Avoiding Plagiarism and "Borrowed Language"

Engaging in plagiarism is a violation of the Tippie College of Business Honor Code. To avoid violating the Honor Code, you must understand how to recognize plagiarism and borrowed language. You must also employ practices that will help ensure that your work is free of plagiarism and borrowed language.

What is plagiarism?

The Tippie College of Business Honor Code defines plagiarism as:

- presenting the work of others without proper acknowledgement
- claiming the words and ideas of others as one's own
- failure to properly cite and specifically credit the source of both text and web materials in papers, projects, and other assignments
- copying of source codes, graphs, programs, and spreadsheets
- copying answer keys and solution manuals without the authorization of the course instructor

What is "borrowed language"? How can I avoid it?

"Borrowed language" occurs when a writer uses the actual language of the source material (without attribution) instead of his or her own. Consider the following source material and student versions.

Source material: Illegitimate tax shelters, however, often arise when sections of the tax code, or multiple sections of the code, are used for purposes not originally intended by Congress or the IRS. In that way, illegitimate shelters may conform "technically" with the code, and yet violate the "spirit" of the code. As the tax code has become more and more complex, "technical" manipulation of the code has become more and more problematic.
Source: "Frontline: Tax Me If You Can," Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tax/shelter/faqs.html

Student's "borrowed" version: The problem is that illegitimate tax shelters often arise when sections of the tax code are used for purposes not originally intended by Congress or the IRS. Such shelters may conform technically with the tax code and yet violate the spirit of the code.

In the example above, the language is almost identical to that of the original source. It's not an exact match, but it's too close. Without attributing the statement to the original source, the student has plagiarized. Attributing the source in the above example would remove any intent to deceive, but the student is still guilty of inappropriately borrowing language from the original source and in effect claiming the language as his or her own. Unless you use quotation marks, you are essentially claiming the words in your paper are your own. It would be better for the student to rewrite the original idea in his or her own words.

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Student's original (not borrowed) version: As the tax code grows increasingly complex, tax professionals have learned to exploit the loopholes in our tax laws to create illegitimate tax shelters. Although these tax shelters are not technically illegal, tax professionals should work to avoid them to satisfy the intent of the law.

Here, the student expresses the idea in his or her own words, using the relevant information without borrowing exact sentences from the original source. The student also issues a call to action—"tax professionals should work to avoid them in the future"—which is not at all in the original source. The student has expressed an original idea in his or her own words.

How do I avoid plagiarism and "borrowed language"?

Your job as a writer is not simply to restate your source material; you must integrate your source material into a consistent and convincing whole. Techniques for achieving this goal and avoiding the pitfalls of plagiarism and borrowed language include:

> **Prewrite**
> As you read your source material, make notes about important points in your own words. Use your own language even at this early stage in the writing process. Prewriting makes you more likely to "digest" the sources and their connections to each other and therefore to write an assignment that is cohesive and logical. You are also less likely to cut and paste sections of the sources into your writing, a tactic that creates a choppy document.
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> **Research a topic rather than individual sources**
> If you focus on examining your topic rather than focusing on collecting sources, your writing is likely to reflect the thoughtfulness and inclusiveness of this approach. The more informed you are about your topic, the less likely you are to reply on the words and ideas of others.
>
> **Have a good reason for using a quotation or citation**
> Your challenge is to strike an appropriate balance in how you use your outside material. On the one hand, you should not make unsupported assertions: if there is a point you wish to make, back it up with a supporting reference from your sources. On the other hand, you shouldn't rely too much on your research materials. Using too many quotations or citations may weaken your credibility as a writer.
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> **Know what to change**
> A good tactic for avoiding borrowed language is to change verbs, modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), and sentence structures from the source material. Nouns may stay the same.

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