

Definition and Examples of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of theft. Plagiarism can take two forms: flagrant plagiarism occurs when portions of a text are copied directly, without the use of quotation marks, or without acknowledging the source; disguised plagiarism occurs when only minor changes are made to the wording.

Original Text

"A convenient biotic subdivision within an ecosystem is a community, which is formed by interactions among populations of living animals and plants. An ecosystem is the interaction of many communities with the abiotic physical components of its environment. For example, in a forest ecosystem, a specific community may exist on the forest floor while another community functions in the canopy of leaves high above. Similarly, within a lake ecosystem, the plants and animals that flourish in the bottom sediments form one community, whereas those near the surface form another. A community is identified in several ways - by its physical appearance, the number of species and the abundance of each, the complex patterns of their interdependence, and the trophic (feeding) structure of the community." (Christopherson 1995, p. 477)

Example of flagrant plagiarism:

- An ecosystem is the interaction of many communities with the abiotic physical components of its environment.

(This should be in quotation marks and referenced.)

Correct text:

- "An ecosystem is the interaction of many communities with the abiotic physical components of its environment" (Christopherson 1995, p. 477).

(The quotation marks make this an acceptable use of the original text; however, you should avoid using direct quotations in science writing.)

Examples of disguised plagiarism:

- A community can be identified by its physical appearance, the number of species and the abundance of each, the complex patterns of their interdependence, and the trophic structure of the community.

(A few words are changed, but most are drawn from the original text, and the sentence structure is the same as the original text.)

Seemingly correct text:

- A community can be identified "by its physical appearance, the number of species and the abundance of each, the complex patterns of their interdependence, and the trophic structure of the community" (Christopherson 1995, p.477).

(The quotation marks around the words from the original text make this acceptable, but not desirable; avoid using direct quotations in science writing.)

- For example, in a lake ecosystem, the weeds and bottom-dwelling fish that occupy the lake sediments form one community, while the fish and algae that inhabit the surface waters form another community.

(In this example, the sentence structure is the same and the writer used synonyms and extra words to replace most of the original text. This type of plagiarism often results in pompous language and lengthier text.)

Correct text:

- For example, several communities can exist within a single lake ecosystem because they occur at different depths.

(This text is acceptable because it is a full paraphrase of the original text, it summarizes the original text, it uses new text and sentence structure, and it is an idea that is common knowledge in the field of ecology. In this example, no reference is required.)