Some Notes on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is best defined as a deliberate activity—the conscious copying from the work of others. The concept of plagiarism has become an integral part of North American and Western European countries. It is based on a number of assumptions that may not hold true in all cultures. One is a rather romantic assumption that the writer is an original, individual, creative artist. Another is that original ideas and expressions are the acknowledged property of their creators (as is the case with a patent for an invention). Yet another is that it is a sign of disrespect—rather than respect—to copy without acknowledgment from the works of published authorities. This even includes the use of images and figures that you have downloaded from the internet, but for which you give no source.

Of course, borrowing the words and phrases of others can be a useful language learning strategy. Certainly you would not be plagiarizing if you borrowed items that are frequently used in academic English (skeletal phrases) or that are common knowledge, such as these examples.

Paris is the capital of France.

An increase in demand often leads to an increase in price.

The results from this experiment seem to suggest that 

These results are statistically significant.

Indeed, if you can never use standard phraseology and expressions of your field or academia in general, it would be difficult to improve your writing. The key is knowing the difference between language used by most writers to present their own perspectives and new ideas and language that expresses someone else's unique content and ideas. For instance, let's look at a text that we provided in Unit Two.

1 The increasing popularity of electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) is attributed to the savings in fuel costs compared to conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. 2 EVs and PHEVs save energy due to the employment of reverse regenerating braking during the deceleration cycle. 3 This energy is typically stored in batteries and ultracapacitors (UCs). 4 The incorporation of on-board energy storage systems (ESS) and generation in PHEVs has been facilitated and dictated by the market demands for enhanced performance and range.

5: Writing Summaries

In this text, we believe there is language in Sentence 1 that you can borrow.

1 The increasing popularity of ______ is attributed to ______.

So, you might write this new sentence for a completely different topic.

2 The increasing popularity of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) can be attributed to its low cost.

In Sentence 4, we think it would be fine to use this language. Can you complete the sentence using information from your field? We offer an example to get you started.

4 The incorporation of ______ in ______ has been facilitated by ______.

The incorporation of corpus data in academic writing courses has been facilitated by the availability of large corpora on the internet.

It would not, however, be acceptable to take the original sentences in their entirety and use them in your own text—unless you placed quotation marks around them. Copying sentences without quotation marks amounts to passing off someone else's work as your own.

You should also be aware that you should not borrow "famous" phrases without at least putting them in quotation marks. Here, for example, is a famous quotation by Louis Pasteur, which was originally in French.

Chance favors the prepared mind.

If you wanted to use this phrase, you should recognize its special status. We would encourage you to borrow standard phraseology of your field and skeletal phrases when appropriate, but not special expressions such as the Pasteur quote (unless these are placed in quotation marks).
**TASK THREE**

Here are some approaches to writing, beginning with a plagiarizing approach and ending with an acceptable quoting technique. Where does plagiarism stop? Draw a line between the last approach that would be considered plagiarism and the first approach that would produce acceptable original work.

1. Copying a paragraph as it is from the source without any acknowledgment.
2. Copying a paragraph making only small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with synonyms.
3. Cutting and pasting a paragraph by using the sentences of the original but leaving one or two out, or by putting one or two sentences in a different order.
4. Composing a paragraph by taking short standard phrases from a number of sources and putting them together with some words of your own.
5. Paraphrasing a paragraph by rewriting with substantial changes in language and organization, amount of detail, and examples.
6. Quoting a paragraph by placing it in block format with the source cited.

University plagiarism policies are readily available on the internet. We recommend that you find and read through the plagiarism policy of your institution and become familiar with it, even if you do not agree with all of it.

Let’s now look more closely at the summary writing process by working with a text from Mechanical Engineering.