Notes on How to Avoid Plagiarism

Background:
An excellent resource for college report writing comes to us from Purdue University OWL (Online Writing Laboratory)
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

The following link will take you to a section of the OWL web pages dedicated to defining and avoiding plagiarism:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/.
The remaining information presented here was gleaned from these pages, last revised by **Karl Stolley,** Sept. 2007.

Definition of Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is "the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else's words or ideas."

Stolley goes on to say:
> *While some cultures may not insist so heavily on documenting sources of words, ideas, images, sounds, etc., American culture does. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university or loss of a job, not to mention a writer's loss of credibility and professional standing.*

Here's a brief list of what needs to be credited or documented:

- *Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium*
- *Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing*
- *When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase*
- *When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials*
- *When you reuse or repost any electronically-available media, including images, audio, video, or other media*

> *Bottom line – document (give credit to the originator of) any words, ideas, or other productions that originate somewhere outside of you.*

There are, of course, certain things that do not need documentation or credit, including:

- *Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject*
- *When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments*
- *When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.*

- *When you are using "common knowledge," things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but not historical documents)*
- *When you are using generally-accepted facts, e.g., pollution is bad for the environment, including facts that are accepted within particular discourse communities, e.g., in the field of composition studies, "writing is a process" is a generally-accepted fact.*
- *Generally speaking, you can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources. Additionally, it might be common knowledge if you think the information you're presenting is something your readers will already know, or something that a person could easily find in general reference sources. But when in doubt, cite; if the citation turns out to be unnecessary, your teacher or editor will tell you.*

How to Properly Include Paraphrases or Summaries

- *Use a statement that credits the source somewhere in the paraphrase or summary, e.g., According to Jonathan Kozol, ...*
- *If you're having trouble summarizing, try writing your paraphrase or summary of a text without looking at the original, relying only on your memory and notes*
- *Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text; correct any errors in content accuracy, and be sure to use quotation marks to set off any exact phrases from the original text*
- *Check your paraphrase or summary against sentence and paragraph structure, as copying those is also considered plagiarism.*
- *Put quotation marks around any unique words or phrases that you cannot or do not want to change, e.g., "savage inequalities" exist throughout our educational system (Kozol).*

How to Properly Include Direct Quotations

- *Keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote*
- *Mark the quote with quotation marks, or set it off from your text in its own block, per the style guide your paper follows*
- *Quote no more material than is necessary; if a short phrase from a source will suffice, don't quote an entire paragraph*
- *To shorten quotes by removing extra information, use ellipsis points (...) to indicate omitted text, keeping in mind that three ellipsis points indicates an in-sentence ellipsis, and four points for an ellipsis between two sentences*
- *To give context to a quote or otherwise add wording to it, place added words in brackets, []; be careful not to editorialize or make any additions that skew the original meaning of the quote—do that in your main text, e.g., **This is OK**: Kozol claims there are "savage inequalities" in our educational system, which is*

obvious. **This would be WRONG**: *Kozol claims there are "[obvious] savage inequalities" in our educational system.*

- *Use quotes that will have the most rhetorical, argumentative impact in your paper; too many direct quotes from sources may weaken your credibility, as though you have nothing to say yourself, and will certainly interfere with your style*
- *Proofread and cross-check with your notes and sources to make sure that anything coming from an outside source is acknowledged in some combination of the following ways:*
  - § *In-text citation, otherwise known as parenthetical citation*
  - § *Footnotes or endnotes*
  - § *Bibliography, References, or Works Cited pages*
  - § *Quotation marks around short quotes; longer quotes set off by themselves, as prescribed by a research and citation style guide*
  - § *Indirect quotations: citing a source that cites another source*

Read the complete coverage of this topic at:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/.