

Plagiarism, Fabrication and Sourcing

When you plagiarize or fabricate, you violate two of the most important standards we uphold as journalists: honest and accuracy. This is true whether you have intentionally plagiarized or the plagiarism is the result of carelessness or lack of understanding. In other words, you will suffer the penalties regardless of how it occurred, so it's essential for you to read and understand this document, which uses a range of examples to help you avoid getting in trouble.

Keep in mind this rule when submitting *any* work in *any* format for *any* Cronkite class: **Your work is required to be 100 percent your own.** If you submit **any portion** of someone else's work without crediting that source, you will be in violation of the school's Academic Integrity policy.

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism consists of using someone else's words, phrases, sentences or ideas without giving credit. This is true whether you do it intentionally or inadvertently.

Students most often get into trouble when they cut and paste information from the Internet. There are two main ways to avoid this and other kinds of plagiarism:

- Quote and attribute. When using the exact words from another source put the words in quotation marks and give credit to the source.
- Paraphrase and attribute: Use your own words, but still credit the source.

In general, there are only three circumstances under which a journalist **does not** have to provide attribution:

- **Common knowledge:** When information is commonly known to a majority of people you do not have to attribute it. For example, *The World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001.*
- **Background information:** When information is undisputed factually and is available from a wide variety of reliable sources, you don't have to attribute it. For example: *The Phoenix metropolitan area now hosts a total of 15 teams each year for MLB Spring Training.*
- **Observation:** When you witness something first hand, you don't have to attribute the information. For example, if you are covering a protest and you see that passing motorists are honking and waving in support of the protestors, you can report that without quoting anyone or attributing the information to another source.

Here are some more examples to help you understand how to avoid plagiarism:

You are writing a story about how federal funds have been used to improve checkpoints for trucks along the Arizona-Mexico border. During your research, you find the following sentence in a Cronkite News story:

The federal government spent nearly \$200 million over the past four years to add booths and other infrastructure to speed up commercial traffic coming into Arizona from Mexico. So far, the investment appears to be working, according to officials on both sides of the border.

You want to use this information in your story, so you:

- Cut and paste the sentences into your story exactly as they appeared in Cronkite News.

You have plagiarized because you have stolen the idea and the words.

- Use the sentences exactly as they appeared, but attribute them to a report in Cronkite News. You write: *The federal government spent nearly \$200 million over the past four years to add booths and other infrastructure to speed up commercial traffic coming into Arizona from Mexico. So far, the investment appears to be working, according to a Cronkite News report.*

You have plagiarized because you did not put quotes around the words, which are not your own.

- Put quotes around the sentence and attribute it to a report in Cronkite News. You write: *“The federal government spent nearly \$200 million over the past four years to add booths and other infrastructure to speed up commercial traffic coming into Arizona from Mexico,” a Cronkite News report said. “So far, the investment appears to be working, according to officials on both sides of the border.”*

This isn’t good journalism because you should do your own reporting, but at least it’s not plagiarism because you have quoted and attributed the information.

- Paraphrase the sentence in your own words and attribute it to The New York Times. You write: *Over the past four years, the federal government has invested nearly \$200 million to improve the flow of truck traffic between the U.S. and Mexico, according to a Cronkite News report. And some say the investment is making a difference.*

This isn’t good journalism because you should do your own reporting, but at least it’s not plagiarism because you attributed the source and did not use the exact words.

To use another example: You are writing a story about a dispute between Republican lawmakers in Arizona. During your research, you find the following quotation in a New York Times story:

“Reagan once said Republicans shouldn’t speak ill of one another,” said Shawna L. M. Bolick, a conservative exploring a run for the state Legislature. “I’ve had a very hard time keeping my mouth shut.”

You want to use this quote in your story, so you:

- Cut and paste the quote into your story as is. You write: *“Reagan once said Republicans shouldn’t speak ill of one another, but I’ve had a very hard time keeping my mouth shut,” said Shawna L. M. Bolick, a conservative exploring a run for the state Legislature.*

You have plagiarized because you did not interview Ms. Bolick and have stolen the work of another reporter.

- Use the quote as is but attribute it to a report in The New York Times. You write: *“Reagan once said Republicans shouldn’t speak ill of one another, but I’ve had a very hard time keeping my mouth shut,” Shawna L. M. Bolick, a conservative exploring a run for the state Legislature, told The New York Times.*

This isn’t good journalism because you should do your own reporting and get your own quotes, but at least it’s not plagiarism because you have disclosed where you got the quote.

- Call up Shawna L. M. Bolick and ask to interview her. She’s too upset, and tells you that you can use what The New York Times has already printed. You take this as permission to quote her directly, so you write: *“Reagan once said Republicans shouldn’t speak ill of one another, but I’ve had a very hard time keeping my mouth shut,” said Shawna L. M. Bolick, a conservative exploring a run for the state Legislature.*

You have plagiarized because Ms. Bolick did not say these words to you. You are taking words from another publication without attributing them to that publication.

Attributing information from press releases:

Press releases are a common way for journalists to get information. A good reporter will use the press release as a starting point, going on to do his own reporting and gathering his own quotes. If you do use information from a press release, however, the rules of attribution apply.

Example: The Tohono O’odham Nation has issued a press release criticizing museums for displaying items sacred to Native American tribes. The press release includes the following quote:

“They don’t belong stashed in some shelf in a museum or a university or somewhere else,” said Joseph Joaqui, the tribe’s cultural resource specialist.

You have been unable to reach Joaqui for a quote, so you:

- Use the quote exactly as it appears in the press release.

You have misled your readers into thinking the source spoke these words to you.

- Paraphrase the excerpt, writing: *Joseph Joaqui, cultural resource specialist for the Tohono O’odham Nation, said Native American artifacts are sacred objects and should not be displayed in museums.*

You still are being dishonest about the source of the information.

- Use the excerpt but disclose the source: *“They don’t belong stashed in some shelf in a museum or a university or somewhere else,” Joseph Joaqui, the tribe’s cultural resource specialist, said in a prepared statement.*

This is better. You have told your readers the information came from a written statement or press release rather than leading them to believe you spoke with the source yourself.

Using email information:

It’s always better to interview someone in person or, if that’s not possible, by phone. In an email interview, there’s the potential that the subject isn’t who he or she says he or she is and the reporter has much less control over the interview. Moreover, the way someone writes something is rarely the way he or she would speak it. In the event that you have no other choice but to do an email interview, you must disclose that fact to your readers.

Example: You are doing a story about an ASU professor who is developing a new, powerful telescope to be used in space. The professor, James Rhoads, is available only through email. You ask him to explain his research and he writes:

The telescope will collect data, hopefully leading to discoveries about the expansion of the universe.

In your story, you:

- Quote the professor as follows: *“The telescope will collect data, hopefully leading to discoveries about the expansion of the universe,” Rhoads said.*

You have misled your readers into thinking that Rhoads spoke these words to you.

- Quote the professor but specify that it was through email: *“The telescope will collect data, hopefully leading to discoveries about the expansion of the universe,” Rhoads said in an email interview.*

This is better. You have specified that the communication was written, not spoken.

Attributing information in the text of the story:

When attributing information in a story remember these rules:

- Credit the source in the text of a story. Unlike academic citations, it is not sufficient to list sources at the end. Neither is it sufficient to list the source elsewhere on a Web page.
- Credit the source immediately after referencing the information. If you use information from a source more than once in a story, provide credit each time.

Example: You are doing a travel story on Bisbee, Ariz. You find the following information on the Bisbee website:

Old miners’ boarding houses have been refurbished into many charming small bed and breakfast establishments, of which no two are alike. Former saloons are now quaint shops, antique stores or art galleries, cafes and restaurants.

- In your story you paraphrase the information: *Bisbee is known for old miners’ boarding houses that have been turned into bed and breakfasts and saloons that have become shops, art galleries and eating establishments.* You include a textbox with your story that includes the Web site www.bisbearizona.com.

This is not sufficient. You must attribute the information to the website immediately after the reference.

- You paraphrase the information and name the website where you got it from: *Bisbee is known for old miners’ boarding houses that have been turned into bed and breakfasts and saloons that have become shops, art galleries and eating establishments, according to the website Bisbearizona.com.*

This is sufficient.

Multimedia Guidelines

Plagiarism and fabrication are not limited to text. You also can get into trouble when you use someone else’s photos, video or sound without attribution.

How to Avoid Plagiarism in Multimedia:

- Do not pass off somebody else's work as your own. It's always best to use your own material. Your instructor will make clear to you whether any other material is acceptable.
- Before using multimedia that you find on the Internet, check to see what restrictions are placed on its use. Most material on the Internet is copyrighted and cannot be used without permission -- even if you disclose where you got it. Copyright information can most often be found at the bottom of a page or in background information about the site or media. Look for "Creative Commons" licenses, which often allow the use of material with attribution, though they may prohibit commercial uses of the material. Sites with few restrictions include flickr.com <<http://flickr.com>>, stock.xchbg <<http://www.sxc.hu/>>, iStock photo <<http://www.istockphoto.com>> and FreeFoto.com <<http://www.freefoto.com/>>) Err on the side of caution: If you are unsure whether it is permissible to use a piece of multimedia, don't use it.
- The rules are no different for YouTube or other video sites. If a video posted online carries a copyrighted designation, it is against the law to use it without permission of the creator. Even if there is no copyright restriction and the creator is posting it for anyone to use, you are obligated as a journalist to give credit to the video's creator. Always err on the side of caution: If you are unsure whether it is permissible to use a piece of video, don't use it.
- Always get permission before using file tape or other content produced by TV or radio stations, production houses or other sources. This includes using a portion of a show taped off TV or using one file photo that is not yours in a longer video piece. Once permission is obtained, credit the material to the original creator.
- Do not submit any video as your own which contains portions shot by another student or person, even if most of the video was shot by you or you were present at the time the video was shot. (See example below.) The exception is if you must be seen in the shot for a standup. In these instances, check with your instructor on how you should handle providing credit.
- Be careful when editing video or sound. It is acceptable to get input or technical help from instructors, professionals or other students, but the actual editing must be done by you.
- School equipment (cameras, video cameras, etc.) should be used only for class assignments unless you get special permission. All equipment and all content captured is the sole property of the Cronkite School. The content may not be sold or used for any other purpose without the express consent of your instructor or administrator.

Here are some examples to help you understand these guidelines:

You are shooting video at a dog festival with a friend who is helping to carry your equipment. It is noon on a hot July day and you are tired, sweaty and feeling faint. You:

- *Set up the camera and tell your friend exactly what to film, including when to zoom and pan and what to get in the shot. You go and sit in the shade to cool off for a while and drink some water.*

This is not acceptable. Even though you dictated the shots you wanted, you didn't take them. If you turn in the work as your own, you have plagiarized.

- *You take a break in the shade and drink some water, then go back and shoot the remaining shots.*

This is better. The work is your own.

You are creating a graphic that lists key elements in a new bill. You need a background of the state capitol building. You:

- *Google "State Capitol" and use the first picture you find, which happens to be on a blog site. You don't think you need to attribute it because it is going to be a semi-transparent background for your graphic.*

This is questionable practice. First, you don't know if the photo is copyrighted and by whom. Not only do you not have permission to use the photo, but you do not have permission to alter the photograph by using it in a graphic.

- *Search "Creative Commons" on Flickr until you find a photo that specifies it can be used and altered for non-commercial purposes. You then put a clear credit line in the bottom corner of your graphic that credits the photo to the original photographer, Flickr or both.*

This is better. Using a site (there are many) with free use or limited-use images with clearly stated copyright policies is the best way to find images for use in projects.

How to Avoid Fabrication in Multimedia:

Fabrication with multimedia involves altering the media to misrepresent or falsify the facts, intent or meaning of a story or idea. Digital editing systems, such as Photoshop and Final Cut make it easy to alter images, and it's usually hard to detect what has been edited and how. This doesn't make it right. Edit photos and videos carefully: Your goal is to replicate as accurately as possible the scene you photographed or videotaped.

Here are some guidelines to follow to avoid getting into trouble when editing video, photographs and sound.

- Basic lighting and color correction (white balancing, adjusting contrast and levels, etc.) are acceptable. Other corrections such as altering colors (making the colors more vibrant) or intensifying lighting effects (dodging or burning)

should be used with extreme caution, taking care not to misrepresent the original scene.

- More complex alterations, such as adding or removing elements of an image, combining multiple photographs into one or significantly altering color or lighting should never be done unless you are creating an illustration and label it as such. (See example below.)
- Do not stage scenes unless you are shooting a portrait and it's clear to the viewer that the photo has been set up. Never ask someone to perform an action – or even repeat an action that you missed – such as asking protestors to yell or a politician to stand at a podium and pretend to give a speech. (See example below.)
- When cropping a video or still image take care that the cropping does not distort the truth. If you are shooting a story about how the economy is affecting restaurants, it would be unethical to crop out a crowd of customers to make it look like there are fewer people in the restaurant.
- Do not use any sound effects or natural sounds that you did not collect at the scene at the time of the recording. (See example below.)

Here are some examples to help you understand these guidelines:

You have taken a photograph of a firefighter at the scene of a raging fire in the early morning. You were facing the sun and captured a beautiful silhouette of the firefighter, but the color of the sky is a brownish grey. You don't believe this captures the intensity of the scene. You:

- *Adjust the colors of the sky to a vibrant red-orange, thus replicating the feeling of danger at the scene.*

This is fabrication. A photographer at The Charlotte Observer made similar adjustments to a photograph that ran on the front page and he was fired from his position.

- *Make slight adjustments to the levels and contrast, but retain the color of the sky. Or, you choose a different image that you feel better captures the scene.*

This is better. You have not altered reality.

You are producing a video package about emergency medical services. You interview a paramedic outside a local hospital, but the video isn't very compelling. You:

- *Ask the paramedic and his partner to pretend they are wheeling someone into the hospital so you can shoot it.*

This is fabrication because you are staging an event and presenting it as if it occurred without your intervention.

- *Ask the paramedic if you can ride in the ambulance with him on the next call. Alternately, you decide to wait for the next ambulance to arrive so you can capture new video.*

These are good options. You are capturing events as they occur.

You are doing a story on highway fatalities on Interstate 10. You film some traffic on the freeway, but when you get back, you realize you forgot to turn on your mic to capture sound. You:

- *Walk to the nearest busy street and record some audio of cars. You think, "Traffic is traffic. No one will ever know."*

This is a misrepresentation. The viewers will believe that the traffic they hear is the traffic on I-10. That is not the case.

- *Go back and re-record your video, making sure the mic is turned on.*

This is accurate. Viewers will hear the actual sound that matches the scene they are watching.

Your equipment fails during an interview for a radio story. You're on deadline, so you:

- *Write down what your subject says and later ask a friend to voice the soundbite for you.*

This is fabrication. The voice listeners hear is not the voice of the person you interviewed.

- *You turn in the story without soundbites, paraphrasing what the subject said.*

This is the journalistically honest course of action.

Cronkite faculty members Steve Elliott, Mark Lodato and Kristin Gilger contributed to these guidelines, as did Cronkite graduate Jennifer Matthews and Phoenix attorney Daniel C. Barr.