

Illustrations of Proper and Improper Citation

The examples below illustrate the difference between proper and improper uses of source materials. They are based on the following passage, which appears on page 94 of George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

Jefferson's successes and failures were of epic proportions, also typifying those of his nation. His ideological fervor and self-confidence gave a steely strength to his diplomacy.

One form of plagiarism involves the failure to enclose borrowed wording in quotation marks:

George C. Herring writes that President Jefferson's successes and failures were of epic proportions. His ideological fervor and self-confidence gave a steely strength to his diplomacy(Herring, p. 94).

In this example, plagiarism has occurred even though the student cites the source and page from which the passage is taken. The fact that the borrowed passage is not enclosed in quotation marks falsely indicates that it was written by the student, not by the cited author. By misusing source materials in this way, the student has violated the Academic Honesty Policy and is accordingly liable to grade and administrative penalties.

Plagiarism can also take place when a cited passage is paraphrased:

Thomas Jefferson's successes and failures were epic in magnitude, as was typical for his nation. His ideological intensity and self-confidence imparted a steely strength to his diplomatic efforts(Herring, p. 94).

In this example, even though some words have been changed, the passage retains most of its original structure and distinctive wording. As before, the absence of quotation marks falsely indicates that the passage is the work of the student rather than the cited author. This is still plagiarism, and as such it can still result in a charge of academic dishonesty.

To avoid plagiarism, either *quote passages exactly and enclose them in quotation marks*, or else *write entirely in your own words*. Either way, it is essential that you cite the source and page number from which your ideas and information are drawn. The following examples illustrate these two different ways of using sources properly.

Example 1. Quote passages exactly and place them in quotation marks. Use ellipsis (...) to indicate any words removed from the original:

In the words of one commentator, "Jefferson's successes and failures were of epic proportions....His ideological fervor and self-confidence gave a steely strength to his diplomacy" (Herring, p. 94).

Example 2. Use your own words to explain an idea or argument, but provide a source citation to indicate the author from whom you have drawn the idea or argument:

Jefferson's personal self-confidence and strong ideological convictions help account for his resistance to diplomatic compromise (Herring, p. 94).

Additional information on using and quoting from source materials can be found in guides such as the *Little, Brown Handbook* or Diana Hacker's *Rules for Writers*. These works are readily available in the Dinand Library reference section.