

Plagiarism vs. Lack of Paraphrasing

A recent trend in my courses has been a lack of paraphrasing. While different from plagiarism, the spirit of the written assignment is still compromised. In other words, a lack of paraphrasing translates to a lack of original thought in a student's research paper. The examples below are designed to help students paraphrase and not be penalized for high match percentages from turnitin.com.

The following passage comes from a journal article by Fried & Fried, 1996...

School is supposed to be a place that offers safety and security to all children. Children should be able to attend school daily and count on being respected by peers at all times. This is not the case for many children. The reality is that for a significant number of children bullying is a daily occurrence. The statistics on bullying are staggering. Everyday, approximately 160,000 students miss school due to fear of attack or intimidation by a bully.

Fault: Plagiarism

School is meant to be a place that offers safety and security to all children. Kids should be able to attend school daily and count on being respected by peers at all times. This is not the case for most children. The reality is that for many children bullying is a daily occurrence. The statistics on bullying are staggering. Everyday, approximately 160,000 students miss school due to fear of attack or intimidation by a bully.

Notice that all the writer has done here is to change one word in each of the first 3 sentences and substituting the word "many" for "a significant number" in the fourth sentence. The last two sentences are copied verbatim, with a lack of quotation marks and author citations. The entire passage is plagiarized. This passage was submitted to turnitin.com and resulted in a match percentage of 94%.

Fault: Lack of Paraphrasing

"School is supposed to be a place that offers safety and security to all children. Children should be able to attend school daily and count on being respected by peers at all times. This is not the case for many children. The reality is that for a significant number of children bullying is a daily occurrence. The statistics on bullying are staggering. Everyday, approximately 160,000 students miss school due to fear of attack or intimidation by a bully." Fried & Fried (1996, p.14).

Here is the problem I've seen occurring more and more frequently. The entire paragraph is copied from the original authors, but the student has surrounded the paragraph with quotes and credited Fried and Fried at the end of the last sentence.

The student is avoiding plagiarism by quoting and citing the authors. Unfortunately, the paragraph still lacks original thought and resulted in the exact same high match percentage on turnitin.com as the plagiarized sample.

Fix: Paraphrase

Children should be allowed to attend school to learn without having to be concerned about their safety and security. Unfortunately, the reality of bullying is a frequent occurrence on most every school campus across the country. The problem of bullying has no boundaries across race, gender or socio-economic status. Recent estimates indicate that nearly 160,000 students are truant from school as a result of the fear of violence from bullying (Fried & Fried, 1996).

Each sentence in the example above is written in the student's own words, while still conveying the message from the original authors. Note that even though the last sentence is paraphrased, Fried and Fried are still cited because a statistic from their study is reported. This passage was submitted to turnitin.com and resulted in a match percentage of exactly 0%. Paraphrasing is not difficult, it just takes a little more thought and effort than cutting and pasting!