

HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

It has been my experience that many students who commit plagiarism do so unintentionally. The consequences of even unintentional plagiarism can be very severe, and I want to ensure that you never fall foul of the regulations. There is an excellent resource on the web, www.plagiarism.org, which I recommend you visit.

Merriam-Webster online defines plagiarize as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source." So, it's actually really simple to avoid – if you use someone else's work, give credit to that person.

There are two ways to do this, and what you do depends on what it is from the other person that you are using.

- 1) If you use someone else's IDEAS, cite the source.
- 2) If you use someone else's WORDS, include them in quotation marks and cite the source.

It is that simple.

An example. You read a scientific article as part of your research, and you find these two sections that are relevant to your topic :

The uphill boundaries of species distributions were significantly clustered on both the Sonadora and Mameyes transects (Table 1, Figure 2). On the Sonadora, the upper boundaries formed three distinct peaks at 500, 700 and 900 m, suggesting discontinuities in the forest community immediately above those elevations. On the Mameyes, only one distinct cluster was present, at 850 m, with smaller peaks at 700 and 750 m. In contrast, the lower boundaries of species ranges were not significantly clustered on either the Sonadora or the Mameyes. Overall, there were fewer lower boundaries than upper boundaries, as many species continued further down the mountain than our lowest plots.

The analyses of five vegetation transects from four neotropical sites showed that tropical montane forests have considerable metacommunity structure, though there was some variation in this structure across sites. All five transects showed significant clustering of species boundaries, though the patterns differed. Three transects had clustering of upper boundaries but not lower, one transect exhibited the reverse pattern, and the final had clustering of both upper and lower boundaries. Such

Now, you want to refer to the upper boundaries of woody plant communities on the two transects studied, to compare it to your findings. You would do it like this:

Barone et al. (2008), working in the Luquillo Mountains of Puerto Rico, found that upper species distribution boundaries were clustered, but at different elevations on the two transects they studied.

Or like this:

Upper species distribution boundaries were clustered, but at different elevations on two transects in the Luquillo Mountains of Puerto Rico (Barone et al. 2008) .

When you come to sum up your work, you think that the words used in the article by Barone et al. were just so wonderful, that you decide to quote them verbatim. This is how you would do that:

One review showed that "The analyses of five vegetation transects from four neotropical sites showed that tropical montane forests have considerable metacommunity structure, though there was some variation in this structure across sites." (Barone et al. 2008, pg 530).

The difference is obvious. If you paraphrase or quote an article (or a web page, or a book), immediately give the citation. At the end of your paper, you will list all the sources you cited, thus¹:

Barone, J. A., J. R. Thomlinson, P. Anglada Cordero, and J. K. Zimmerman. 2008.
Metacommunity structure of tropical forest along an elevation gradient in Puerto Rico.
Journal of Tropical Ecology 24:525-534.

You don't need to repeat the citation for every sentence in which you refer to it. I recommend you cite at the end of the first sentence in which you refer to an article, and then, perhaps, at the end of the last sentence that refers to it in a paragraph. In general, if it seems obvious to the reader that you are referring to the same article, you don't need to repeat the citation every time.

¹: Different journals use different citation style. If you are writing a term paper, find out if there is a preferred style, if not, just be sure to be consistent.