Recognizing Plagiarism

Plagiarism is taking another’s words or graphics and presenting them as new and original. We know that plagiarism is wrong because it is stealing someone else’s work and passing it off as our own. It is literary theft. As responsible journal authors, we know plagiarism is unethical, whether it involves stealing material from HPS publications or from any other source.

And there’s another reason it’s wrong: plagiarism breaks the contract between you the writer and your readers. As Miguel Roig (2015) states, “A general principle underlying ethical writing is the notion that the written work of an author . . . represents an implicit contract between the author of that work and his/her readers.” According to this contract, “the reader assumes that the author is the sole originator of the written work and that any material, text, data, or ideas borrowed from others is clearly identified as such by established scholarly conventions, such as footnotes, block indented text, and quotation marks.”

Plagiarism is bad—and it’s also easy. Today, so much information is available from so many obscure places that it is very tempting to copy a few sentences from the regulatory guidance or to lift a paragraph or two from a pertinent website. And it is easy to forget that we have read something somewhere else—unconscious plagiarism even has a name: cryptomnesia.

But you need to be careful. Just because you find information on the web, doesn’t mean it’s free or allowable for all to reuse. And just because you don’t remember where you saw it, doesn’t mean you can use it freely. If it’s on the web, take the time to find the original source—it’s easy: just type the suspect phrase into your search engine. You have no excuse for not remembering where you saw it, and others can easily search in the same way to find out exactly where you stole uncited information from.

Please be aware also that Health Physics uses iThenticate plagiarism software to screen submitted manuscripts against previously published works.

Avoiding Plagiarism

When you find the perfect words that someone else has written, you have two choices, both of which uphold the contract with your reader. First, you can take the original material and completely rewrite it in your own words. Or you can put the original material in quotation marks. Either way, you must cite the source of the original material—more on that later.

- **Rewriting Original Material.** Rewriting, or paraphrasing, is not just changing a word here or there; nor is it just changing the order of the sentences. It is using your own words and your own writing style to summarize the original material. If you’re having trouble coming up with a new way
of expressing someone else’s thoughts, try this: make an outline of the original material with just
the main points, then put the original away for a while. Later, come back to the outline, rearrange
it to make the most sense to you and your article, and then connect the main points with your own
words.

• **Quoting Original Material.** If you find there is no other way to express the original author’s
thoughts, then use the material verbatim and enclose it in quotation marks. But be very careful to
copy the material exactly. If you must change the original words by leaving out irrelevant bits,
indicate the omission with an ellipsis . . . that’s three periods, each surrounded by a space. If you
need to add a word or phrase to make sense of the quotation, put the addition in square brackets
([]). Be very careful not to change the author’s meaning—manipulating someone else’s meaning
is akin to manipulating their data. That violates the stipulation that “no inaccurate or misleading
data, opinions, or statements [should] appear in *Health Physics* . . .” (Wolters Kluwer Health
2017). It is unethical; it breaks the contract with your reader.

**Self-Plagiarizing**
Maybe the perfect words were already written—by you. Can you recycle them? The answer is “maybe.”

If you lead readers to believe that they are reading your original work, then you may not recycle words
you have already written for another publication. If you do, that is self-plagiarism and it breaks the
contract with your readers.

If, however, you tell readers that you first presented the material at such-and-such a conference, that you
already published the method in such-and-such a journal, or that you previously prepared the literature
review for such-and-such a paper, you may reuse your own words. For example, as noted this article is
based on a presentation at the 2017 Health Physics Society Annual Meeting (Wahl 2017).

So with proper citations, you may reuse your own words. That is assuming, of course, that you own the
copyright to the previously used material or have permission to reuse it.

**Respecting Copyrights**
When you publish in *Health Physics* or *Operational Radiation Safety*, you transfer copyright to HPS. After
that, your material “must not be published elsewhere in similar form, in any language, without the consent
of [Wolters Kluwer]” (Wolters Kluwer Health 2017). The exception is if you opt to publish your article as
open access. Additional information is available in *Health Physics* Author Guidelines.

What about using other people’s copyrighted material, even if you correctly attribute the source? Authors
who borrow others’ copyrighted material must submit written permission from the copyright owner and
complete details about the source to use direct quotations, tables, or illustrations that have appeared in
copyrighted form elsewhere. Any permission fees that might be required by the copyright owner are the
responsibility of the authors requesting use of the borrowed material, not the responsibility of HPS or
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If someone else is the copyright holder, authors can obtain permission through the RightsLink website. In
the upper right corner, enter the name of the journal that holds the copyright, click on “Get Permissions,”
then follow the online instructions to obtain written permission to use the material.
Using Graphics and Photos
And don’t forget to get approval to use others’ graphics and photos. Give credit for those too. While it’s really easy to detect plagiarism using any search engine, it’s also possible to find copyrighted graphics and photos that have been used without written permission. When you get approval to use graphics and photos, keep the written approval, just in case you need it later.

Referencing Sources
No matter which you choose, to rewrite or to quote, you must acknowledge the source of the original material. If you’re not sure that the material you’re using is common knowledge (that is, information that your readers would accept without independent confirmation), err on the side of caution and cite your source.

There are lots of ways to reference sources. In HPS journals, the preferred formats for various types of references are provided in the guidelines for authors (Wolters Kluwer Health 2017). To cite a source in the text of your article, use the author’s last name and the year the document was published. Use footnotes to identify unpublished sources, like personal communications. Then list all published sources in the reference list following the journal’s preferred format.

Writing Responsibly
If you are found guilty of plagiarism, the punishment can be as severe as expulsion (if you are a student) or dismissal (if you are a professional). Plagiarism can even lead to criminal charges. Why run the risk? It takes just a little extra time to make sure you are writing in an ethical and professional manner—definitely worth the effort to avoid plagiarism and copyright infringement.

References
