

Unit 15: A law must be passed!

Reading Practice

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THAT'S PLAGIARISM?

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If a teacher or your boss called you aside and said that he or she suspected you of plagiarism, how would you react? You'd probably be honestly confused. Nowadays, there are so many sources of information available that you can copy from with a single click. Many people don't even realize that they're committing plagiarism. Whether it's intentional or not, using someone else's information is stealing, and stealing is definitely a big deal.

The confusion about ownership comes from the fact that articles, photos, blogs, and social media posts are so easy to access – and just as easy to copy. When you see the same article on various websites, it's fairly natural to assume that it's public property. If a resource like Wikipedia offers material that can be critiqued and changed by its readers, that must be free for the taking, right? But that simply is not the case. Everything that has been written, drawn, photographed,



or recorded, and released to the public, belongs to someone. Even your friends' comments on your social media page belong to them, not to you.

To avoid plagiarism, here are a few basic points to keep in mind. When writing a paper, if you get ideas or wording from someone else's writing, you must include the name of the writer or the source. If you find a few articles that you want to use, and you

think taking a few points from each article and combining them makes the content yours, it's just not the case. This kind of "masked" plagiarism is very easy to spot, and it will get you into trouble. But really, just asking yourself a simple question should be enough: "Are all of these words my own?" If the answer is yes, you're in the clear.

In the end, the best approach is to write down the source for any material you quote from directly, and to assume that if it's public, it isn't yours. Plagiarism is a serious problem and can have serious consequences – even if it's totally accidental. Besides, putting ideas into your own words can make you a better writer, and a better thinker as well.

Exercise 1: Look at the following situations.

Do you think they are describing plagiarism or not? If they are, do you think it was accidental or intentional?

1. Stacy copied a paragraph from a travel website and pasted it into her essay about Aruba. She put it into quotation marks and included the name and link for the website.
2. John works for a bank. He copied a paragraph from a website. He changed some words and rearranged some of the sentences. He did not indicate where it came from. He used it in a brochure for the bank.

3. Julie read an article online and later wrote her own essay about the same subject. Some of her wording was exactly the same as the online article.

4. Mitch borrowed a friend's essay to get some ideas for his own. Their teacher said that their essays were almost identical.