

Plagiarism in Scientific Writing

Taking Text:

Students seem to justify taking text from a paper or most often a Wiki page and pasting it into their manuscript by adding a citation to the Wiki page. (In the worst cases even this citation is missing.) This is the same as selling a product called Coca Cola in a Coca Cola bottle with a footnote mentioning that the idea came from a company in Atlanta. (Or you could consider an analogy of taking the computer code for MS word and selling it as MS Word with a footnote indicating that it is a copy of MS Word.)

The act of copy and paste of text is not legal.

If you find you need to use someone's words in your manuscript you need to 1) ***obtain written permission from the publisher***, 2) ***you need to put the text in quotation marks and make them italic*** so it is clear that you do not intend to steal the words, 3) ***you need to note in a footnote the source of the text and that the text is being used with written permission of the publisher***. I have seen quotation marks in scientific manuscripts in probably one or two instances out of hundreds of thousands of papers (with the exception of some books that use quotations to introduce chapters). For any class at UC you should forgo the use of quotation marks and copied text in anything that you write for a scientific or technical audience.

The rule is that you should ***NEVER*** use copy and paste in your manuscript writing for scientific or technical documents. The act of using copy and paste is an act of plagiarism and the general punishment for plagiarism is expulsion from the academic or industrial institution. There are no exceptions in theory.

Taking Photographs, Drawings, Graphics, Tables:

You need to follow the same rules as for text: 1) ***obtain written permission from the publisher***, 2) ***in the caption to the graphic you need to note that it is reproduced from ... (give a formal citation) and that it is reproduced with written permission of the publisher***.

If you simply redraw the graphics you do not need to get formal permission from the publisher. But you need to note in the caption that the graphic is ***“reproduced” from ... (Give a formal citation)***.

If you do not exactly reproduce the graphic you should say in the caption ***“after” or “following” or “modified from” ... (give a formal citation)***.

You can find the proper format in review articles where graphics are reproduced or modified for the review.

Using graphics is much more common than copying text in scientific or technical writing.