

## Preventing Plagiarism

Angela D. Klimaszewski, MSN, RN

**N**urse scientists submit research results to professional nursing journals to disseminate new information. Oncology nursing professionals may submit an idea for a journal article or book on their own initiative, or be recruited by editors, publishers, or employers to write a review of the literature for publication (Nicoll, 2011).

When writing, professionals need to take appropriate steps to prevent plagiarism, which is “appropriating any material—ideas, writings, images, or portions of those—and claiming to be the original creator” (Gilmore, 2009, p. 7), “knowingly taking and using another person’s work and claiming it, directly or indirectly, as your own” (Neville, 2010, p. 30), and “a species of intellectual fraud” (Posner, 2007, p. 106). For the purpose of this article, plagiarism is defined in general terms as taking credit for the creative, expert, or scientific work of someone else.

### Types of Plagiarism

Many types of plagiarism exist and one or more of those may be committed in a single work. Intentional plagiarism is when an author deliberately reports or quotes the work of someone else without crediting the original author (Gennaro, 2012; Gilmore, 2009). Unintentional plagiarism, or accidental plagiarism (Berkey, 2011), occurs when an author overlooks crediting the work of another (Posner, 2007). Unintentional plagiarism occurs for many reasons, including the author’s unfamiliarity with citations and reference styles, failure to accurately proofread manuscripts, lack of focus, or laziness (Gilmore, 2009). Although neither form of plagiarism is acceptable, intentional plagiarism may have more severe consequences and can damage the plagiarizing author’s career.

### History

Plagiarism was not a concern until the creation of the printing press in 1455 (Francis, 2005). The printing press produced large quantities of a manuscript, which meant more people could read someone’s ideas (Francis, 2005). Later, as writers were compensated, ownership of creative work became an issue. In the late 1600s, creative work was considered to be intellectual property (Francis, 2005). Copyright law was enacted in the United States by Congress in 1790; it evolved from the understanding that creative work was an author’s property and protects the specific works of an author (U.S. Copyright Office, 2011b). Breaking that copyright law became known as plagiarism (Neville, 2010; Posner, 2007).

### Copyright Law

The Internet has only compounded the possibilities of plagiarism because it offers virtually unlimited access to sources of information that were challenging to locate or previously not well known. Everything on the Internet is either copyrighted or in the public domain, and authors need to know how to determine the difference. Copyright protection is extendable to “original works that are fixed in any tangible medium of expression . . . from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device” (U.S. Copyright Office, 2011a, p. 8). Ideas, general knowledge, facts, procedures, processes, slogans, principles, or discoveries cannot be copyrighted (U.S. Copyright Office, 2011b). Copyright grants authors the right to determine how their published or unpublished original works are reproduced, used, and distributed (Brent, 2011; U.S. Copyright Office, 2012), which enables the copyright

holder to require a fee for reprints of all or parts of a work, and requires that the copyright holder is cited in subsequent publications. Posner (2007) clarified that “copyright law does not forbid the copying of ideas . . . or of facts. Only the form in which the ideas or facts are expressed is protected” (pp. 12–13). Therefore, reprinting or adapting a table or figure from a copyrighted work requires permission to do so from the copyright holder, possibly for a price.

### Fair Use

Copyright infringement is always illegal. Copyright law does not offer details about the amount of copyrighted material (i.e., the number of words or lines) an author may use without permission, presenting a challenge to every author. According to the U.S. Copyright Office (2012), “acknowledging the source of the copyrighted material does not substitute for obtaining permission.” The doctrine of fair use serves as a guideline for the use of copyrighted material.

Fair use is a doctrine that provides an exception to copyright law. It stipulates specific circumstances when the reproduction of a short excerpt of copyrighted material with accurate citation is considered fair. Those include news reporting, teaching, research, scholarship, criticism, and comment (Brent, 2011; U.S. Copyright Office, 2012). For example, the “quotation of excerpts in a review or criticism for purposes of illustration or comment,” and, when properly cited, the “quotation of short passages in a scholarly or technical work, for illustration or clarification of the author’s observations,” qualify as fair use (U.S. Copyright Office, 1961, p. 24). In those instances, quotations from the copyrighted article require an in-text citation and reference in a standard reference style. If copyrighted material does not fall under fair use, permission to use the material must be