

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

GUIDANCE FOR ERASMUS AND OTHER VISITING STUDENTS ON AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Please be aware that the School, and the University of Aberdeen as a whole, has strict rules regarding plagiarism, with which all students, including visitors from abroad, are expected to comply. This handout offers guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism by citing properly and acknowledging fully the sources you have used in your written work.

Our rules regarding intellectual acknowledgement and principles of citation may differ significantly from those you are used to in your home institution, so it is essential that you familiarise yourself with the guidelines set out below. In particular, your attention is drawn to the rules on paraphrase: what may be acceptable practice in your home institution might not be acceptable here, so you may find it necessary to adjust your tactics. Problems have occurred in the past where visiting students have not made this adjustment and consequently been penalised for infringement of our plagiarism rules. If in doubt, ask your tutor.

Plagiarism and Paraphrase

The School, along with the University as a whole, regards plagiarism as a serious breach of intellectual honesty. While ideas are common property (and you may, of course, independently share an idea with a critic), their expression is not. Your essay should be your own and your debts to others properly acknowledged.

You are plagiarising if you adopt another's words, phrases, sentence patterns, and definitions, and intentionally mislead your reader into thinking that they are your own; or when you cannot provide the necessary documentation of indebtedness. There may be aberration or negligence here. The solution to this aberration is to think independently for yourself.

Another form of plagiarism is the paraphrasing of material, i.e., although you do not quote verbatim and without due acknowledgement, you surreptitiously borrow ideas and arguments from an uncited source and present them as your own.

All borrowed items should be documented: observing the following rules will help to protect you from charges of intellectual dishonesty.

1. Place all phrases, sentences, and definitions taken from another text within quotation marks and footnote them.
2. Footnote all ideas and arguments you have paraphrased (a reference in the bibliography is not sufficient).
3. List in your bibliography background information and data useful to you although not directly quoted from or paraphrased in your essay.
4. If you consult another student's paper and use his/her ideas, in whole or in part, give him/her due credit for it.

Here are some examples of plagiarism, in the form of unacknowledged paraphrases, followed by some examples of adequate documentation:

Original Material

Estragon, who was once a poet, is predominantly the withdrawn inner self. On the stage he several times attempts to go to sleep and dream; when woken up by Vladimir he loses his temper and with a gesture towards the universe exclaims 'This one is enough for you?' He has given up the struggle ('Nothing to be done'), and twice he suggests that they both hang themselves; in fact we learn that years ago he tried to drown himself in the Rhone but Vladimir rescued him. The suicidal impulses of the inner self are often countered by the pseudo-self which is more closely identified with the body than is the other... In his role as the inner self we find that Estragon is the cold member of the pair, who refuses the embrace of his more warm-hearted companion and is generally more surly and even occasionally cruel.

G.C Barnard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1971), pp 90-91

Version A (Unacceptable)

Estragon and Vladimir are complementary and mutually dependent personalities. Estragon, once a poet, is predominantly the withdrawn inner self whose suicidal impulses are often countered by the pseudo-self which is more closely identified with the body. He contemplates suicide in Waiting for Godot, but does not bring it off. Years ago, he tried to drown himself in the Rhone but Vladimir rescued him. Vladimir may be seen to be the pseudo-self: he attends to external reality, looks after Estragon's material needs and tries to cheer him up.

A blatant example of plagiarism. The above borrows literally from the original material, to the extent of using its phrases and sentence patterns, without any acknowledgement whatsoever.

Version B (Unacceptable)

In contrast to Vladimir, Estragon is predominantly the withdrawn inner self. Of the pair, he is the less likeable, the more self-centred and the less thoughtful. He has no sense of time and cares little for orthodox, external reality. In the course of the play, Estragon several times attempts to go to sleep and dream, but loses his temper when woken up by Vladimir.³

³G.C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead & co., 1971), pp 90-91.

Although the source is cited, this version is also an example of plagiarism. The source has been copied from, i.e., words and phrases lifted from it, but no indication of this is available in the footnote. The footnote itself is ambiguous in relation to the paragraph. Is the reader to infer that only the final sentence came from Barnard, or the whole paragraph? If the student is so enamoured of the critic's ideas that he/she wishes to borrow so much of them this should be indicated earlier (e.g. "In contrast to Vladimir, Estragon, as G.C Barnard says...").

Version C (Acceptable)

In this austere and sparsely populated play, there are differences in character between Estragon and Vladimir. Frequently, Estragon retreats to his private world, one in which temporal events play no part. Thus he has no memory of their recent encounter with Pozzo and Lucky. He contemplates suicide in the play; we learn too that he was rescued by Vladimir when he once tried to drown himself. As G.C Barnard sees it, Estragon is 'Predominantly the withdrawn inner self', whose suicidal impulses are 'often countered by the pseudo-self which is more closely identified with the body than is the other.'³

³Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., p 90)

This version is acceptable. The writer has named the source, quoted key phrases, and has been honest in his/her approach to his/her source material.

Version D (Acceptable)

G.C. Barnard provides sound reasons for viewing Estragon as the withdrawn 'inner self'. Besides being disposed to dreaming and sleeping (suggesting retreat to a private world), Estragon is prone to suicidal impulses, and contemplates suicide several times in the play. Reflecting the inner self, these impulses are often countered by the 'pseudo-self' which, unlike the inner self, is more a part of the body.³

³Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1971), pp90-91.

This version is equally acceptable. The writer has used his/her own words; he/she has also paraphrased Barnard, but Barnard's definitive phrases, 'pseudo-self' and 'inner self', are scrupulously retained within quotation marks. Because the ideas and examples were not his/hers originally, he/she provides an unambiguous footnote for the source.