

# What Is Plagiarism and How Do You Avoid Infringing It?

By Craig Lock

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We hope that the following article (which was extracted from a lesson on our Online Creative Writing Course) may be informative and helpful on your web site or in your ezine. Please feel free to use them. If it help others "out there" in cyberspace in\* any way, then we're happy.

\* enough "ins" - bad grammar, Craig!

## WHAT IS PLAGIARISM AND HOW DO YOU AVOID INFRINGING IT?

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### PLAGIARISM:

Wow . What a big word, like "marmalade". Hope I spelt it correctly!

PLAGIARISM is deliberately copying someone else's work and putting your name to it. A couple of years ago, there was a celebrated case in my former homeland, South Africa. A university lecturer had copied extracts from American author, Joseph Leyleveld's excellent book, MOVE YOUR SHADOW. ( An excellent book, by the way!). A big extract was taken word for word and he was discovered (and was forced to resign his prestigious position). Naughty naughty! Currently there is a bit of a furore (nice word!) with celebrated American historian Stephen Ambrose using another writer's work - word for word. Rather humiliating and embarrassing for him getting "caught out" (can I end a sentence with a "preppie"?).

Plagiarism seems to be quite prevalent amongst songwriters, like George Michael, but bet there are many writers too. "Prima donnas"!

A final few words in summary on the subject of plagiarism...

When deciding whether you are perhaps infringing copyright and/or plagiarism, ask yourself this question:

1. "If I was the author, how would I feel about someone 'copying my hard-worked for writing' "? Sometimes "word-for-word".

2. "Has the writer made a genuine effort to put the material into his/her own words?"

and

3. "Has he/she just copied or borrowed my ideas and other points from my writing?"

I think "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"! Still don't plagiarise my work, please!

#### DEFAMATION:

DEFAMATION (not a bodily function - OOPS, ER ! ).. but if you do, you will soon be really deep in the "rich brown stuff".

Always keep a good name. Avoid libel suits (must replace mine someday the lot/financial fortunes of the writer!).

Never defame anyone in your writing, especially after they've "fallen off their perch" (ie. after they are deceased - thanks Monty Python).

As writers we are very privileged people, who can directly influence public opinion. Most other people don't have the opportunity to defend themselves through the avenue of publicly written words.

So it's a heavy responsibility we writers have to convey the truth (is that subjective or absolute? - that's an entire essay in itself).

Well our opinion of it, anyway!

If you haven't a kind word to say against someone, don't say it at all. "Mr Goody Goody two-shoes" (but in my crazy travel book about my European adventures HERE, THERE and EVERYWHERE, you'll find out why I only had one!). Hard sometimes, when you are reporting the facts, as you saw them and want to market your work sometimes; because controversy always sells...like bad news headlines sell newspapers.

Most of the above information is based on pure common-sense (what's that?) and using your discernment. However, many writers don't have an abundance of the aforementioned qualities in making judgements.

A word (or two or three) of my advice...

In writing follow the following (sounds "funny" that!) creeds:

When in doubt about what course to take (not English III), just ask yourself this:

If you were the author, would you like someone else copying your work, or saying 'those things' about you.

Use judicious judgement (note alliteration) and when in doubt, rather err on the side of caution.

Even if you have been badly hurt by someone in the past, don't be tempted to retaliate and take vengeance for "the sordid past" through your words. Everyone has made mistakes they may regret in life, so think the best of people. At least try!

Enough moralising and back to my original topic. A final few words to conclude on the subjects of plagiarism and defamation. Always write with ABSOLUTE HONESTY (from your particular perspective), in utmost GOOD FAITH and INTEGRITY...and as the proverb wisely advises:

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you."

Then you CAN'T GO WRONG in your writing.

Phew! Finished this lesson in a hurry this morning, sitting out in the hot NZ sun. My business partner wanted it by 1 pm, because it's a long weekend. Another glorious day in Godzone. What paradise.

What a life as a writer!

Craig Lock

About the author:

Craig Lock is an author of numerous books and the creator of the "original" online creative writing course.  
[">http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.html](http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.html)

- Craig's brand new manuscript HOW TO WRITE AND BE PUBLISHED  
- ALL I KNOW ABOUT WRITING is now available at  
[">http://www.bridgeniche.com/CLOCK/zaniestbooks.htm](http://www.bridgeniche.com/CLOCK/zaniestbooks.htm)  
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