

# METHODOLOGY CENTER PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT GUIDELINES

## Guidelines document 2 CITING APPROPRIATELY AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

### 2.1 Introduction

It is unlikely that anyone in the Center would deliberately represent someone else's work as their own. However, many cases of plagiarism are unintentional. As scientists we all have to weave other people's ideas into our writing and show how our ideas are related to them. This document discusses how to avoid plagiarizing inadvertently.

### 2.2 Citing appropriately

Good science requires that an author acknowledge the intellectual roots of his or her work. The roots may go back decades or may appear in a recent article by a Center colleague. In these cases it is probably obvious that you must cite the original sources. If work you do was inspired by a conference presentation, technical report, or unpublished manuscript, these must be cited as well. It may help to contact the conference presenter or author of the technical report or unpublished manuscript to ask how he or she prefers to be cited. It is usually not enough simply to include a citation into an article; at least a brief account of how your work is related to the previous work often is required.

Remember that the roots of your research may exist in another discipline. For example, if you are publishing in a statistics journal and your work can be traced back to, say, an article that appeared in *Psychological Methods*, that previous work must be cited. Also, applications that motivate theoretical statistical work should be cited.

### 2.3 Avoiding plagiarism

In writing we may find ourselves lifting phrases or sentences out of another document and inserting them into our own without appropriate quotation marks. Note that this practice represents plagiarism even if a citation is given. For example, the following is plagiarism:

As I was walking I thought how two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by (Frost, 1920).

Instead it should read

As I was walking I thought how “two roads diverged in a wood, and I – /I took the one less traveled by” (Frost, 1920).

The Center uses the following operational definition of plagiarism: *If four or more words in a row are taken from another document, it is plagiarism unless appropriate quotation marks and citations are used.*

It is also plagiarism if you just take a thesaurus and change words, for example:

As I was walking I thought how more than one street parted in an autumn forest,  
and I – I decided on the one with less foot traffic.

To avoid plagiarism, concentrate on integrating ideas and making a coherent argument, then put the argument in your own words without relying directly on the source. If you are having trouble doing this (and at some point everyone has trouble with this, particularly with technical material), talk it over with your supervisor or a co-author. Also, if you have any doubts about whether something is plagiarism or not, discuss it with the Director or Scientific Director.

Often in technical work, for example, when presenting a series of equations, it can be difficult to avoid plagiarism as defined above. When appropriate, be sure to cite relevant presentations of mathematical equations that have appeared in the literature.

Remember that copyright laws require permission from the publisher before figures or tables can be reproduced in another article. This is true even when the original figures or tables appeared in your own work.

Occasionally, a graduate student and advisor will publish a manuscript related to the student's dissertation material prior to the student's Ph.D. defense. Great care must be taken by the student to not plagiarize the advisor's contribution to the manuscript. The student and advisor should discuss this situation thoroughly and often as the dissertation work progresses.

#### Reference List

Frost, R. (1920). 1. The road not taken. In *Mountain Interval*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.