

5 How much have you understood ? (identifying and avoiding plagiarism)

The following is a self-test to help you evaluate whether you are able to apply what you have learned about avoiding plagiarism. You should not look at the "answers" until you have completed each part of the test. This is, of course, your choice but if you do cheat you may never know whether you are a potential plagiarist!

Texts A and B are source texts which have been used to provide information for writing the student texts (labelled 1 to 5).

Here is what you have to do:

1. Read source texts A and B to get a picture of the source information.
2. For each of the student texts one by one:
 - i) read the text
 - ii) decide if it is guilty of plagiarism
 - iii) identify exactly what is wrong (or right)
 - iv) think of ways to correct the problems
 - v) check the comments on the text (at the end of the notes)

Source Text A

Mickey Mouse is a well loved symbol of the greatness of America. He represents a long carefree era when everything in the world has gone well for the most prosperous nation on earth. He symbolises the prosperity of Americans throughout a period when they have dominated the world both economically and politically.

It is significant that a creature often viewed in other countries as a pest to be eradicated can rise in the United States of America to become a movie star and a household name. This symbolises the American dream where everyone (including apparently rodents and quite possibly many other non-human personalities) can expect freedom of speech, freedom of actions and freedom to make an honest living. It is important to note in this context that the rise to fame and/or riches of an underdog has long been a popular theme in the folk lore of western countries in general but of America in particular.

Not content to make a hero out of one rodent, the American public has also idolised Mickey's partner Minnie. It is interesting to note that Mickey and Minnie frequently demonstrate behavior not unlike human courtship behavior. It is also interesting to note that this happily unmarried couple remain perpetually in this state of innocent bliss. This state seems to capture the innocence of childhood that children do not know they have and adults reminisce about incessantly.

In addition to their role as a platonic couple Mickey and Minnie demonstrate socially acceptable inter-personal behavior with their collection of animal friends. These characters have developed as vehicles for teaching young children the key elements of social behavior. Parents of today have grown up on the antics of Mickey Mouse and his friends and are happy for their children to do so.

It is quite likely that Mickey Mouse originated from a lucky idea by Walt Disney with no intention to create role models for the young (or the young at heart). However, he has developed into an important figure in American, and perhaps global, society. He has played and continues to play an essential part in the formation of well balanced members of society both through film and the now international Mickey Mouse Club.

Extracted from: Symbols of America by R.O. Dent 1988 p53

Source Text B

Mickey Mouse, the charming little mouse from Walt Disney, is known around the world. He is considered a playful character who often gets into trouble but inevitably comes out on top. His resourcefulness and wit are regarded as symbolising all that is best about America and the Americans (Dent 1988). While it is true that Mickey Mouse symbolises America this should not be regarded as a positive but rather a negative feature of the small rodent's character.

The fame of Mickey Mouse has spread around the world in the same way that Coca Cola and MacDonalDs have arrived in even the most obscure corners of the earth. It has been promoted by the American publicity machine. This is a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past. In their era the Europeans were unstoppable just as Mickey Mouse and all that follows is unstoppable. The important difference is that European colonialism was immediately noticeable and, therefore, more possible to resist.

It is true that European colonialism was not easy to defeat in the short term simply because it had behind it what was at the time the world's strongest military powers. Mickey Mouse colonialism has an equal, if not greater, power supporting its advance. However, it is infinitely more difficult to defeat in the short or long term because it becomes part of the social fabric of its colonies in a way that earlier versions of colonialism never could.

For nine tenths of the world Mickey Mouse is not, in fact, the loveable underdog who manages to succeed in the land of plenty. He is not the role model who shows children how to interact socially with groups of friends and with individuals of the opposite sex. He is, by contrast, a dictator who moulds children to social behaviour patterns which are alien to their society. He fosters rampant consumerism among nations who are economically unready for it, thus, creating bankrupted dependent client states. He also contributes to linguistic colonisation.

Despite the claims from within the United States of America it is necessary to view the effect of Mickey Mouse, and all that followed after him, in a global sense. It is clear that his role has been as a forerunner for the American colonisation of much of the world. There are many parts of the world today where culture and society have suffered irreparably as a result of this colonisation.

Extracted from: *Insidious Icons of Our Times* by Michel Souris 1990 p109

Student Text 1

Mickey Mouse is a well loved symbol of the greatness of America because he represents a long carefree era when everything in the world has gone well for the most prosperous nation on earth. The fame of Mickey Mouse has spread around the world in the same way that Coca Cola and MacDonaldis have arrived in even the most obscure corners of the earth. He symbolises the prosperity of Americans throughout a period when they have dominated the world both economically and politically. Mickey Mouse has become a movie star and a household name. This symbolises the American dream where everyone (including apparently rodents and quite possibly many other non-human personalities) can expect freedom of speech, freedom of actions and freedom to make an honest living.

While it is true that Mickey Mouse symbolises America this should not be regarded as a positive but rather a negative feature of the small rodent's character. He has been promoted by the American publicity machine. This is a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past. In their era the Europeans were unstoppable just as Mickey Mouse and all that follows is unstoppable. The important difference is that European colonialism was immediately noticeable and, therefore, more possible to resist.

Mickey and Minnie Mouse demonstrate socially acceptable inter-personal behavior with their collection of animal friends. These characters have developed as vehicles for teaching young children the key elements of social behavior. Parents of today have grown up on the antics of Mickey Mouse and his friends and are happy for their children to do so. However, some people think he is not the role model who shows children how to interact socially with groups of friends and with individuals of the opposite sex. But he is a dictator who moulds children to social behaviour patterns which are alien to their society. He fosters rampant consumerism among nations who are economically unready for it, thus, creating bankrupted dependent client states. He also contributes to linguistic colonisation.

Is this text guilty of plagiarism? If so, what exactly is wrong? How can you correct it? Your comments:

Student Text 2

R.O. Dent says that Mickey Mouse is a well loved symbol of the greatness of America. He represents a long carefree era when everything in the world has gone well for the most prosperous nation on earth. He symbolises the prosperity of Americans throughout a period when they have dominated the world both economically and politically.

Michel Souris says Mickey Mouse, the charming little mouse from Walt Disney, is known around the world. He is considered a playful character who often gets into trouble but inevitably comes out on top. His resourcefulness and wit are regarded as symbolising all that is best about America and the Americans. While it is true that Mickey Mouse symbolises America this should not be regarded as a positive but rather a negative feature of the small rodent's character.

R.O. Dent also says that it is significant that a creature often viewed in other countries as a pest to be eradicated can rise in the United States of America to become a movie star and a household name. This symbolises the American dream where everyone (including apparently rodents and quite possibly many other non-human personalities) can expect freedom of speech, freedom of actions and freedom to make an honest living. It is important to note in this context that the rise to fame and or riches of an underdog has long been a popular theme in the folk lore of western countries in general but of America in particular.

Michel Souris also says that the fame of Mickey Mouse has spread around the world in the same way that Coca Cola and MacDonalds have arrived in even the most obscure corners of the earth. It has been promoted by the American publicity machine. This is a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past. In their era the Europeans were unstoppable just as Mickey Mouse and all that follows is unstoppable. The important difference is that European colonialism was immediately noticeable and, therefore, more possible to resist.

He also says that for nine tenths of the world Mickey Mouse is not, in fact, the loveable underdog who manages to succeed in the land of plenty. He is not the role model who shows children how to interact socially with groups of friends and with individuals of the opposite sex. He is, by contrast, a dictator who moulds children to social behaviour patterns which are alien to their society. He fosters rampant consumerism among nations who are economically unready for it, thus, creating bankrupted dependent client states. He also contributes to linguistic colonisation.

Is this text guilty of plagiarism? If so, what exactly is wrong? How can you correct it? Your comments:

Student Text 3

Dent (1988) has said that Mickey Mouse is 'a well loved symbol of the greatness of America' (p53) who symbolises the best aspects of life from the American viewpoint. In defining this symbolism he refers to the prosperity and the power, both political and economic, of the United States of America and its people throughout the last fifty years. He also mentions the fact that the rise to fame and fortune of a cartoon character, particularly of such a weak figure as a mouse, is a phenomenon unique to American culture. He links this symbolism to the aspects of the way of life in America which offer its citizens the freedom to lead their lives as they please.

Souris (1990) is aware of earlier arguments (Dent 1988) regarding the symbolism of Mickey Mouse and also comments on this aspect of the cartoon character. He says that the power of this symbolism when released globally is 'a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past' (p109). It is also much more difficult to overcome because it integrates itself more fully into the society it invades. Souris (1990) says that, when taken outside the American context, Mickey Mouse is not a good role model for children but, in contrast, encourages behaviour which is unacceptable in their own societies. It is also opined that Mickey Mouse encourages consumerism and facilitates the establishment of English as a universal language to the detriment of local languages.

Is this text guilty of plagiarism? If so, what exactly is wrong? How can you correct it? Your comments:

Student Text 4

Dent (1988) says that Mickey Mouse is 'a well loved symbol of the greatness of America' (p53) who symbolises the best aspects of life from the American viewpoint. In defining this symbolism he refers to the prosperity and the power, both political and economic, of the United States of America and its people throughout the period of Mickey Mouse's existence (approximately the last fifty years). During this period America has increase its status as a world power through participation in wars and the space race as well as through generous overseas aid and maintenance of a strong dollar.

Souris (1990) agrees that Mickey Mouse is symbolic of certain features of American life, however, he takes a more negative view of this symbolism which he sees as 'a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past' (p109). He argues that the European colonialism of the nineteenth century was easier to combat whereas the insidious 'Mickey Mouse colonialism' (p109) is much more difficult to overcome because it integrates itself more fully into the society it invades. It is important to note that while Dent (1988) refers only to the American context Souris (1990) extends his arguments to a global context.

Dent (1988) says that the rise to fame and fortune of a cartoon character, particularly of such a weak figure as a mouse, is a phenomenon unique to American culture. He links this symbolism to the aspects of the way of life in America which offer its citizens the freedom to lead their lives as they please. This freedom is guaranteed under the American constitution and is, therefore, an important feature of life in America. Souris (1990) does not dispute this argument but says that, when taken outside the American context, Mickey Mouse is not a good role model for children but, in contrast, encourages behaviour which is unacceptable in their own societies. Souris (1990) also says that Mickey Mouse encourages consumerism and facilitates the establishment of English as a universal language to the detriment of local languages.

Is this text guilty of plagiarism? If so, what exactly is wrong? How can you correct it? Your comments:

Student Text 5

Dent (1988) claims with little evidence that Mickey Mouse is 'a well loved symbol of the greatness of America' (p53) who symbolises the best aspects of life from the American viewpoint. In attempting to define this symbolism he refers to the prosperity and the power, both political and economic, of the United States of America and its people throughout the period of Mickey Mouse's existence (approximately the last fifty years). During this period America has increase its status as a world power through participation in wars and the space race as well as through generous overseas aid and maintenance of a strong dollar.

Souris (1990) agrees that Mickey Mouse is symbolic of certain features of American life, however, he takes a more negative view of this symbolism which he shows is 'a form of insidious colonialism that is far more evil than the European colonialism of the past' (p109). He demonstrates that the European colonialism of the nineteenth century was easier to combat whereas the insidious 'Mickey Mouse colonialism' (p109) is much more difficult to overcome because it clearly integrates itself more fully into the society it invades. It is important to note that while Dent (1988) refers only to the American context Souris (1990) shows that the arguments extend inevitably to a global context.

Dent (1988) suggests that the rise to fame and fortune of a cartoon character, particularly of such a weak figure as a mouse, is a phenomenon unique to American culture. He attempts to link this symbolism to the aspects of the way of life in America which appear to offer its citizens the freedom to lead their lives as they please. This freedom seems to be guaranteed under the American constitution and is, therefore, considered as an important feature of life in America. Souris (1990) does not dispute this argument but makes clear that when taken outside the American context, Mickey Mouse is not a good role model for children but, in contrast, encourages behaviour which is unacceptable in their own societies. Souris (1990) also shows that Mickey Mouse encourages consumerism and wider use of the English language. It seems likely that Mickey Mouse has contributed to the establishment of English as a universal language to the detriment of other national languages.

Is this text guilty of plagiarism? If so, what exactly is wrong? How can you correct it? Your comments:

COMMENTS ON THE TEXTS

TEXT 1

COMMENTS

This is the worst possible kind of plagiarism. It 'steals' large chunks of text from both the source texts without any acknowledgement. In fact, very little of this text is written by the student writer. It is mostly copied from the sources although the order has sometimes been changed. In addition, some of the pieces of copied text are used in a way that does not make clear the original view of the author. For example, the second sentence (beginning "The fame of...") is taken from source text B where it is used to express a negative view of the spread of Mickey Mouse's fame. However, the way it has been incorporated here (i.e. out of context) it tends to reinforce the positive view expressed by source text A.

OUTCOME

The writer of this text would at least be asked to re-write the assignment. If it was a repeat offence the writer might be asked to leave the course.

TEXT 2

COMMENTS

This text indicates the sources of information used. Also the text has been structured reasonably well so that the relevant points from each source appear together. However, there are two main faults. Firstly, it is not clear from the text how much of it is directly copied and how much is paraphrased. In fact, if we look carefully we see that virtually the entire text is copied from one or other of the sources. This is far too much direct copying. Secondly, the writer has added nothing. There are no explanations, comparisons, contrasts or opinions about what the sources say.

The writer has done a minimal job and is still guilty of plagiarism because there is no indication of direct copying (and there is too much copying anyway).

OUTCOME

The teacher may ask the writer to resubmit the work or may award a low (or even fail) grade.

TEXT 3

COMMENTS

This text indicates its sources in a correct manner and we can see from studying the original texts that most of the time it is not copying directly but paraphrasing the information. On the two occasions when direct copying takes place it is done correctly. The paraphrasing has allowed the writer to show an understanding of the source texts, for example, we see that the writer has clearly understood the contrastive nature of the two sources.

As **descriptions** of what the writer has read in the sources these two paragraphs are well written. However, they do not go far enough. The writer has not exploited the contrast to the full, has included almost no explanation of points and has included absolutely no opinion.

OUTCOME

As a well written text covering the main points of the topic this text would receive an average mark. After spending a lot of time producing well polished sentences the writer would be disappointed with this mark. To do better the writer needs to demonstrate an ability to manipulate the information.

TEXT 4

COMMENTS

This text acknowledges its sources correctly and clearly indicates which pieces are copied directly and which pieces are paraphrased. The second half of the final sentence of the piece appears to be a paraphrase, however, it tends to attribute more to Souris than he actually wrote. It is, rather, an interpretation and extrapolation of what Souris wrote.

The structuring of the text is good. Related views from different sources (either agreeing or disagreeing) are linked together. The links are indicated by "Souris (1990) agrees....., however,..." and also by "Souris (1990) does not dispute this information but..."

In addition, some explanations are added where the writer feels the audience may need further clarification. Some examples of this are:

- the last sentence of paragraph one
- the use of "nineteenth century" to clarify "in the past" in paragraph two
- the third sentence in paragraph three

The only thing missing from this text is that the writer expresses no views about the points of information. In fact the second half of the final sentence might be an opinion which the student writer has (perhaps shyly and certainly wrongly) attributed to a published source.

OUTCOME

This text is well written and uses the source texts correctly. It also structures the information well. It should receive an above average mark.

TEXT 5

COMMENTS

This is a well written text. It acknowledges its sources and shows clearly which pieces have been copied directly. The final sentence reflects more clearly how much is attributable to Souris and how much is the student writer's own opinion.

It explains points which may need further clarification and shows clearly contrasts between the different source authors' views.

Most importantly, it includes the views of the writer. These views are not expressed clumsily in terms of "My opinion is..." but rather in the subtleties of how the views of the different source authors are represented. For example, in the first sentence "Dent (1988) claims with little evidence....". This shows that the writer is reporting what Dent

has said but does not find it convincing. The best way of seeing how the writer's opinion has been included is to compare text 5 with text 4. The texts are identical except for the changes shown in table 1 (and the final sentence). All of these changes reflect the writer's opinion about the information from his sources.

Paragraph / Sentence	Wording in Text 4	Wording in Text 5
1 / 1	says	claims with little evidence
1 / 2	defining	in attempting to define
2 / 1	sees as	shows is
2 / 2	argues	demonstrates
2 / 2	integrates	clearly integrates
2 / 3	extends his arguments	shows that the arguments extend inevitably
3 / 1	says	suggests
3 / 2	links	attempts to link
3 / 2	offer	appear to offer
3 / 3	is guaranteed	seems to be guaranteed
3 / 3	an important feature	considered as an important feature
3 / 4	says	makes clear

TABLE 1: Differences between Text 4 and Text 5

The changes in wording show that the writer is sympathetic to the views of Souris but not to the views of Dent. Nevertheless, the text still accurately represents what the two source authors said.

OUTCOME

This text deserves a high mark for demonstrating a knowledge of the information and also for demonstrating the ability to manipulate the information to make the points which the writer thinks are important.

FINAL NOTES:

If working through this self-test has made you think about what you write and the way you write it then it has served its purpose. It is not supposed to give you a “quick fix” but to get you thinking.

If you want to learn more about the way people express opinion in their writing, look at the way it is done in everything you read. If you find reporting verbs or sentence structures you like then use them in your own writing.

Finally, a confession. All the source texts and the student texts used in this self-test were made up just for the test. I needed something short and simple enough to illustrate my points which you could work with easily and quickly. I hope you don't feel deceived. I certainly don't feel guilty because I think the texts have done their job.

6. About The Author

I have been at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) since January 1991. I work in the English Centre where I teach English for Academic Purposes and Professional and Technical Communication. I also do some teaching for the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) where I give courses to postgraduates on thesis writing, study skills and avoiding plagiarism.

I wrote *Plagiarism and How to Avoid It* because I found a lot of my students in Hong Kong (and other places before that) were committing plagiarism accidentally. They were getting confused about how to make use of the information in the books they were reading (the sources) and they were getting frustrated because they knew they were doing a bad job of their academic writing.

I hope you find this booklet useful. If you do please let me know, we all need encouragement in our work. If you do not find it useful, also let me know and I'll see what I can do to fix it.

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