What is Plagiarism?

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like “copying” and “borrowing” can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary, to “plagiarize” means

1) to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
2) to use (another's production) without crediting the source
3) to commit literary theft

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. In the United States and many other countries, the expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions.

Types of Plagiarism

1) “The Denny’s Sampler”
   The writer tries to disguise plagiarism by copying from several different sources, tweaking the sentences to make them fit together while retaining most of the original phrasing.

2) “The Ghost Writer”
   The writer turns in another's work, word-for-word, as his or her own.

3) “The Photocopy”
   The writer copies significant portions of text straight from a single source, without alteration.

4) “The Remix”
   Although the writer has retained the essential content of the source, he or she has altered the paper’s appearance slightly by changing key words and phrases.

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not