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Exploring Public Speaking: 2nd Revision

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Exploring Public Speaking: The Free Dalton State College Public Speaking Textbook



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Chapter 3

Ethics in Public Speaking



Learning objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- ◇ Understand the legal, cultural, philosophical, and social origins of ethics in public speaking;
- ◇ Explain the difference between plagiarism and correct appropriation of source materials;
- ◇ Understand the value of ethics in building a solid reputation as a speaker;
- ◇ Correctly use source material in a presentation.

Chapter Preview

3.1 – Sources of Ethical Stances on Communication and Public Speaking

3.2 – Credibility and Ethics

3.3 – Plagiarism

3.1 – Sources of Ethical Stances on Communication and Public Speaking

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are many reasons to take a public speaking course. Among its numerous benefits, a public speaking course will create more self-confidence; the creation of good arguments will build your critical thinking and research skills; and you will meet new people in your class in a different way and be exposed to their ideas. Also, the course will prepare you for presentations you will be expected to give in later classes (and believe us, there will be many) and for your eventual career.

Another very important reason to take a public speaking course such as this one goes beyond these immediate personal benefits. Public speaking, or “rhetoric” as it was originally called, has long been considered a method in Western culture of building community, allowing self-government, sharing important ideas, and creating policy. In fact, that is the reason the ancient Athenian Greeks emphasized that all citizens should be educated in rhetoric so that they can take part in civil society. Aristotle said that if a man was expected to defend himself physically, he should also be able to defend his ideas rhetorically (that is, through persuasive public speaking).

Therefore, public speaking has a social as well as a personal purpose and function. For that reason, the ethics of public speaking and communication in general should be addressed in any study of public speaking. A public speaker, whether delivering a speech in a classroom, board room, civic meeting, or in any other venue must uphold certain ethical standards to allow the audience to make informed choices, to uphold credibility as a source of information, and to avoid repercussions of bad ethical choices.

Ethics

the branch of philosophy that involves determinations of what is right and moral

To this end, we are dealing with the subject of ethics. **Ethics** refers to the branch of philosophy that involves determinations of what is right and moral. On a personal level, it is your own standard of what you should and should not do in the various situations or in all situations. Although ethics are personal decisions, they are influenced by factors outside of you. Over the next few pages, we will look at various ways ethics, particularly ethics related to speech, have been thought about. In reading, you should seek to determine how you would explain your own ethical standard for communication. Along with being able to articulate what you would not do, you should have an appreciation for why doing the right thing is important to you.

One of the most important ways that we speak ethically is to use material from others correctly. Occasionally we hear in the

news media about a political speaker who uses the words of other speakers without attribution or of scholars who use pages out of another scholar's work without consent or citation. Usually the discussion of plagiarism stays within the community where it occurred, but there is still damage done to the "borrower's" reputation as an ethical person and scholar.

Why does it matter if a speaker or writer commits plagiarism? Why and how do we judge a speaker as ethical? Why, for example, do we value originality and correct citation of sources in public life as well as the academic world, especially in the United States? These are not new questions, and some of the answers lie in age-old philosophies of communication.

Legal Origins of Ethics in Public Speaking

The First Amendment to the Constitution is one of the most cherished and debated in the Bill of Rights. "Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech . . . or of the press" has been discussed in many contexts for over two hundred and thirty years. Thomas Emerson, a Constitutional scholar and Yale Law Professor, asserted that freedom of expression is more than just a right. It is a necessity for having the kind of society we want as Americans.

One of the bases of the First Amendment is an essay written by John Milton in the 1600s, *Aereopagitica*. This essay on freedom of speech is where the phrases "free marketplace of ideas" and "truth will arise from debate of all ideas" originated. In the twentieth century, "freedom of speech" has been generalized into a freedom of expression. This was especially true in the important Supreme Court cases on the First Amendment in the 1960s; for example, burning a draft card, which was originally considered illegal (destroying government property), was interpreted as a form of expression (because it was a protest about the War in Vietnam), not just an action.

Although these foundations may not seem relevant to your public speaking class, they are relevant to a public speaking class because they explain why public speaking is important and the responsibility you have to your classmates and instructor to present serious, honest, factual, and well-supported speeches as a matter of respect to your listeners. Likewise, although the First Amendment to the Constitution is usually interpreted by the Supreme Court and lower courts to mean almost no restrictions are allowed on freedom of expression, there are a few instances in which the government is held to have a "compelling interest" in

controlling, stopping, or preventing certain types of free expression.

One of these instances has to do with threats on the life of the President of the United States, although threats of physical harm against anyone might result in penalties. Another instance of restrictions on freedom of expression is in those cases where the speaker has the opportunity and means and likelihood of inciting an audience to violence (this is the old “yelling ‘fire’ in a crowded theatre” example). The government has also allowed local governments to have reasonable requirements to avoid mobs or public danger, such as permits for parades or limiting how many people can meet in a certain size of building.

Defamatory Speech

a false statement of fact that damages a person’s character, fame, or reputation

Another type of restriction on freedom of speech is **defamatory speech**, which is defined in the United States as:

a false statement of fact that damages a person’s character, fame or reputation. It must be a false statement of fact; statements of opinion, however insulting they may be, cannot be defamation under U.S. law. Under U.S. defamation law, there are different standards for public officials [and public figures] and private individuals. (U.S. Department of State, 2013)

With the Internet and social media, these issues become more complicated, of course. In the past someone could express himself or herself only in limited ways: standing on a street corner, attending a public meeting, putting the words onto paper, or maybe getting on radio or television (if allowed or if wealthy). Today, almost anyone with a laptop, a webcam, an ISP, and technical know-how can be as powerful in getting a message to the masses as someone owning a newspaper one hundred years ago. While most people use technology and the Internet for fun, profit, or self-expression, some use it for hurt—bullying, defamation, even spreading terrorism. The legal system is trying to keep up with the challenges that the digital age brings to protecting free expression while sheltering us from the negative consequences of some forms of free expression.

Cultural and Religious Origins of Ethics in Communication

It is hard to separate life aspects such as legal, cultural, religious, and social. Many Americans would say they hold to the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” The Golden Rule is seen as a positive expression of fairness, equity, and trust. Even if there is no legal ruling hanging over us, we expect honest communication and return it. We also value

straightforwardness; respect for the individual's freedom of choice; getting access to full information; consistency between action and words; taking responsibility for one's own mistakes (sometimes necessitating an apology and accepting consequences); and protection of privacy. We fear public humiliation and do not want to violate community norms.

What matters is how a person internalizes the norms and makes them work for him or her. Upbringing and family teachings, religious values, experiences, peers, and just plain old "gut reaction" contribute to and are sometimes far more important to the individual than the First Amendment or historical values.

Philosophers and Communication Ethics

Philosophers throughout history have also written on the subject of communication and public speaking ethics. In fact, one of the first philosophers, Plato, objected to the way rhetoric was practiced in his day, because "it made the worse case appear the better." In other words, the professional public speakers, who could be hired to defend someone in court or the assembly, knew techniques that could deceive audiences and turn them from truth. Aristotle responded to this concern from his teacher Plato in his work, *Rhetoric*. Later, Quintilian, a Roman teacher of rhetoric, wrote that rhetoric was "the good man speaking well," meaning the speaker must meet the Roman Republic's definition of a virtuous man.

In more modern times, English philosophers John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) introduced utilitarianism, which presents the ethic of "The greatest good for the greatest number;" that is, whatever benefits the most people is right. A related philosophy, pragmatism, was first discussed by Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914). Pragmatists judge actions by their practical consequences. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) proposed what was been called the Categorical Imperative: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it would become a universal law." To paraphrase, any behavior we engage in should be what we think everyone else on the planet should do ethically. In the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre and others called "existentialists" emphasized that the ability and necessity to freely choose our actions is what makes us human, but we are accountable for all our choices.

This very brief overview of ethics in general and in communication specifically is designed to let you know that the best minds have grappled with what is right and wrong when it comes

to expression. But what is the practical application? We believe it is respect for your audience, who in the case of this course are your classmates, potential friends and peers and your instructor. Whether you take the Categorical Imperative approach, the pragmatic philosophy, the Judeo-Christian view of “thou shalt not lie” and “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), the Golden Rule, freedom with accountability, or some other view, respect for your audience means that you will do your best to present factual, well-documented information designed to improve their lives and help them make informed, intelligent decisions with it.

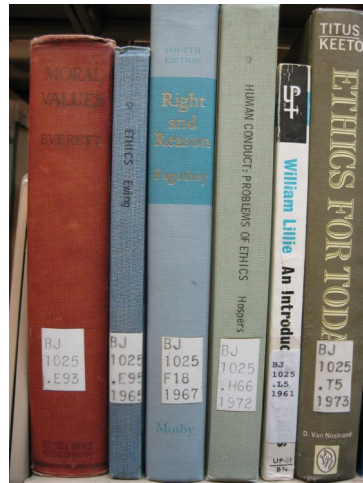
In addition to respect for the humanity, intelligence, and dignity of your audience, you should be conscious of two other aspects related to ethics of communication: credibility and plagiarism.

3.2 – Credibility and Ethics

When Aristotle used the term *ethos* in the 5th century B.C.E. to describe one of the means of persuasion, he defined it as the “wisdom, sagacity, and character of the rhetor” (see Chapter 13 for more coverage of *ethos* and Aristotle’s other artistic proofs). Modern scholars of communication and persuasion speak more about “credibility” as an attitude the audience has toward the speaker, based on both reality and perception. Audience members trust the speaker to varying degrees, based on the evidence and knowledge they have about the speaker and how that lines up with certain factors:

- **Similarity:** does the speaker have experiences, values, and beliefs in common with the audience? Can the audience relate to the speaker because of these commonalities?
- **Character:** does the speaker, in word and action, in the speech and in everyday life, show honesty and integrity?
- **Competence:** does the speaker show that he/she has expertise and sound knowledge about the topic, especially through firsthand experience? And does the speaker show competence in his/her ability to communicate that expertise?
- **Good will:** does the audience perceive the speaker to have ethical intentions toward the audience?

In addition to these key areas will be the audience’s perceptions, or even gut feelings, about more intangible characteristics of the speaker, such as appearance, friendliness, sense of humor, likability, poise, and communication ability. Many of these traits are conveyed through nonverbal aspects, such as



facial expression, eye contact, good posture, and appropriate gestures (see Chapter 11 on Delivery).

Understandably, the same speaker will have a different level of credibility with different audiences. For example, in regard to presidential campaigns, it is interesting to listen to how different people respond to and “trust” different candidates. Donald Trump entered the presidential race as a Republican nominee and quickly became a frontrunner in many of the early polls and primaries, eventually winning the Electoral College votes, to the surprise of many. Those who voted for him often stated that they value his candor and willingness to say what he thinks because they perceive that as honest and different from other politicians. Others thought he made unwise and thoughtless statements, and they saw that as a lack of competence and demeanor to be the national leader. Donald Trump was the same person, but different audiences responded to his behavior and statements in various ways.

The point is that character and competence are valued by those who like and those who dislike Donald Trump and contribute to his credibility (or lack of it), but in different ways. When trying to develop your own credibility as a speaker with an audience, you have to keep in mind all four of the factors listed above. To portray oneself as “similar” to the audience but to do so deceptively will not contribute to credibility in the long run. To only pretend to have good will and want the best for the audience will also have a short-term effect. Credibility must always be backed up with evidence and action.

Not only does a speaker’s level of credibility change or vary from audience to audience, it is also likely to change even during the presentation. These changes in credibility often coincide with

where the speaker is in the speech, and have been labeled as **initial, derived, and terminal credibility**.

Initial Credibility

a speaker's credibility at the beginning of or even before the speech

Derived Credibility

a speaker's credibility and trustworthiness (as judged by the audience members) throughout the process of the speech, which also can range from point to point in the speech

Terminal Credibility

a speaker's credibility at the end of the speech

Initial credibility is, as you would imagine, the speaker's credibility at the beginning of or even before the speech. There are a number of factors that would contribute to the initial credibility, even such matters as the "recommendation" of the person who introduces the speaker to the audience. Any knowledge the audience has of the speaker prior to the speech adds to the initial credibility. The initial credibility is important, of course, because it will influence the receptivity of the audience or how well they will listen and be open to the speaker's ideas. Initial credibility can be influenced also by the perception that the speaker is not well dressed, prepared, or confident.

Derived credibility is how the audience members judge the speaker's credibility and trustworthiness throughout the process of the speech, which also can range from point to point in the speech. Perhaps you have seen those videos on a news program that show a political speaker on one pane of the video and a graph of the audience's response in real time to the speaker's message, usually noted as "approval rating" as the politician speaks. This could be based on the perception of the speaker's presentation style (delivery), language, specific opinions, open-mindedness, honesty, and other factors. The point of the derived credibility is that credibility is an active concept that is always changing.

Finally, **terminal credibility** is, as you would think, credibility at the end of the speech. The obvious importance of terminal credibility is that it would factor into the audience's final decision about what to do with the information, arguments, or appeals of the speaker; in other words, his or her persuasiveness. It would also determine whether the audience would listen to the speaker again in the future. The terminal credibility can be seen as a result of the initial and derived credibility.

Terminal credibility may end up being lower than the initial credibility, but the goal of any speaker should be to have higher credibility. From an ethics standpoint, of course, credibility should not be enhanced by being untruthful with an audience, by misrepresenting one's viewpoint to please an audience, or by "pandering" to an audience (flattering them). One of the primary attributes of credibility at any stage should be transparency and honesty with the audience.

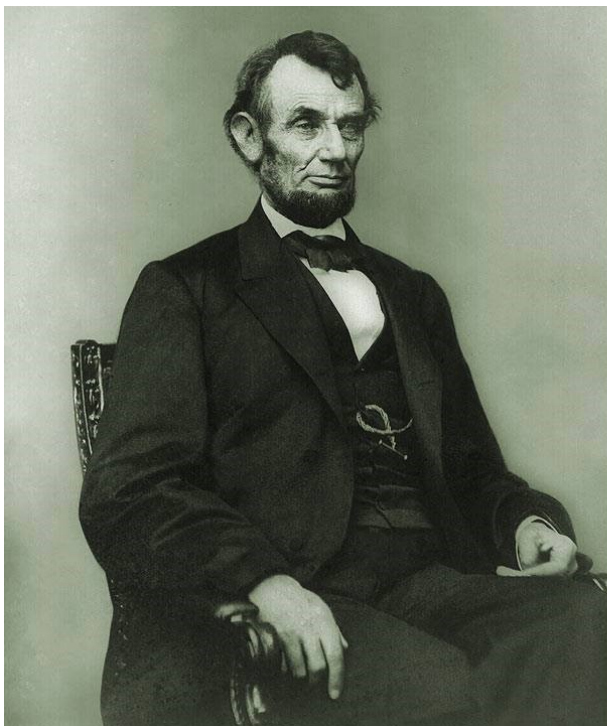
3.3 – Plagiarism

Although there are many ways that you could undermine your ethical stance before an audience, the one that stands out and is committed most commonly in academic contexts is **plagiarism**. A dictionary definition of plagiarism would be “the act of using another person’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). According to the student help website Plagiarism.org, sponsored by WriteCheck, plagiarism is often thought of as “copying another’s work or borrowing someone else’s original ideas” (“What is Plagiarism?”, 2014). However, this source goes on to say that the common definition may mislead some people. It also includes:

- 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
- Giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- 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.

Plagiarism

the act of using another person’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person



“The problem with quotes on the internet is that it is difficult to verify their authenticity.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Plagiarism exists outside of the classroom and is a temptation in business, creative endeavors, and politics. However, in the classroom, your instructor will probably take the most immediate action if he or she discovers your plagiarism either from personal experience or through using plagiarism detection (or what is also called “originality checking”) software. Many learning management systems, perhaps such as the one used at your institution, now have a plagiarism detection program embedded in the function where you submit assignments.

In the business or professional world, plagiarism is never tolerated because using original work without permission (which usually includes paying fees to the author or artist) can end in serious legal action. The Internet has made plagiarism easier and thus increased the student’s responsibility to know how to cite and use source material more.

Types of Plagiarism

In our long experience of teaching, we have encountered many instances of students presenting work they claim to be original and their own when it is not. We have also seen that students often do not intend to plagiarize but, due to poor training in high school, still are committing an act that could result in a failing grade or worse. Generally, there are three levels of plagiarism: *stealing*, *sneaking*, and *borrowing*. Sometimes these types of plagiarism are intentional, and sometimes they occur unintentionally (you may not *know* you are plagiarizing), but as everyone knows, “Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking it.” So let’s familiarize you with how plagiarism occurs in order to prevent it from happening.

Stealing

There is a saying in academia: “If you steal from one source, that is plagiarism; if you steal from twelve, that is scholarship.” Whoever originated this saying may have intended for it to be humorous, but it is a misrepresentation of both plagiarism and scholarship.

No one wants to be the victim of theft; if it has ever happened to you, you know how awful it feels. When a student takes an essay, research paper, speech, or outline completely from another source, whether it is a classmate who submitted it for another instructor, from some sort of online essay mill, or from elsewhere, this is an act of theft no better or worse than going into a store and shoplifting. The wrongness of the act is compounded by the fact that then the student lies about it being his or her own. If you are tempted to do this, run the other way. Your instructor



will probably have no mercy on you, and probably neither will the student conduct council.

Most colleges and universities have a policy that penalizes or forbids “self-plagiarism.” This means that you can’t use a paper or outline that you presented in another class a second time. You may think, “How can this be plagiarism or wrong if I wrote both and in my work I cited sources correctly?” The main reason is that by submitting it to your instructor, you are still claiming it is original, first-time work for the assignment in that particular class. Your instructor may not mind if you use some of the same sources from the first time it was submitted, but he or she expects you to follow the instructions for the assignment and prepare an original assignment. In a sense, this situation is also a case of unfairness, since the other students do not have the advantage of having written the paper or outline already.

Sneaking

Some sources refer to this kind of plagiarism as “string of pearls” plagiarism or “incremental plagiarism” (Lucas, 2015). Instead of taking work as a whole from another source, the student will copy two out of every three sentences and mix them up so they don’t appear in the same order as in the original work. Perhaps the student will add a fresh introduction, a personal example or two, and an original conclusion. This “sneaky” plagiarism is easy today due to the Internet and the word processing functions of cutting and pasting.

In fact, many students do not see this as the same thing as stealing, because they think “I did some research, I looked some stuff up and added some of my own work.” Unfortunately, this approach is only marginally better than stealing and will probably

end up in the same penalties as the first type of plagiarism. Why? Because no source has been credited, and the student has “misappropriated” the expression of the ideas as well as the ideas themselves. Interestingly, this type of plagiarism can lead to copyright violation if the work with the plagiarism is published.

Most of the time students do not have to worry about copyright violation because in academic environments, “fair use” is the rule. In short, you are not making any money from using the copyrighted material, such as from a published book. You are only using it for learning purposes and not to make money, so “quoting” (using verbatim) with proper citation a certain amount of the material is acceptable for a college class.

If, however, you were going to try to publish and sell an article or book and “borrowed” a large section of material without specifically obtaining permission from the original author, you would be guilty of copyright violation and by extension make your organization or company also guilty. When you enter your career field, the “fair use” principle no longer applies and you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holder to use all or portions of a work. For more information on this very important subject, visit the [Creative Commons website](#) and the [Library of Congress](#).

One area where students are not careful about citing is on their presentational slides. If a graphic or photo is borrowed from a website (that is, you did not take it or design it), there should be a citation in small letters on the slide. The same would be true of borrowed quotations, data, and ideas. Students like to put their works cited or references on the last slide, but this really does not help the audience or get around the possibility of plagiarism.

Borrowing

The third type of plagiarism is “borrowing.” In this case, the student is not stealing wholesale. He or she may actually even give credit for the material, either correctly or incorrectly. He might say, “According to the official website of . . .” or “As found in an article in the *Journal of Psychology*, Dr. John Smith wrote . . .” Sounds good, right? Well, yes and no. It depends on whether the student has borrowed in a “sneaky way” (cutting and pasting passages together but this time indicating where the sections came from) or if the student is using the ideas but not the exact wording. In other words, has the student adequately, correctly, and honestly paraphrased or summarized the borrowed material, or just “strung the pearls together” with some “according to’s”?

Ethically Crediting Sources

In using source material correctly, a speaker does three things:

1. He or she clearly cites the source of the information. It is here that the oral mode of communication differs from the written mode. In a paper, such as for literature, you would only need to include a parenthetical citation such as (Jones 78) for Modern Language Association (MLA) format, indicating that a writer named Jones contributed this idea on page 78 of a source that the reader can find on the Works Cited Page. In a paper for a class in the social sciences, an American Psychological Association (APA) format citation would be (Jones, 2012) or (Jones, 2012, p. 78). The first would be used if you summarized or paraphrased information from the source, and second (with the page number) is used to indicate the words were quoted exactly from a source; obviously, in that case, quotation marks are used around the quoted material. In both cases, if the reader wants more information, it can be found on the References Page.

A speech is quite different. Saying “According to Jones, p. 78,” really does very little for the audience to understand the type of information being cited, how recent it is, the credibility of the author you are citing and why you think he or she is a valid source, or the title of the work. It is necessary in a speech to give more complete information that would help the audience understand its value. The page number, the publishing company, and city it was published in are probably not important, but what is important is whether it is a website, a scholarly article, or a book; whether it was written in 1950 or 2010; and what is the position, background, or credentials of the source.

So, instead of “According to Jones, p. 78,” a better approach would be,

“According to Dr. Samuel Jones, Head of Cardiology at Vanderbilt University, in a 2010 article in a prestigious medical journal...”

Or

“In her 2012 book, *The Iraq War in Context*, historian Mary Smith of the University of Georgia states that...”

Or

“In consulting the website for the American Humane Society, I found these statistics about animal abuse compiled by the AHS in 2012...”

This approach shows more clearly that you have done proper research to support your ideas and arguments. It also allows your audience to find the material if they want more information. Notice that in all three examples the citation precedes the fact or information being cited. This order allows the audience to recognize the borrowed material better. The use of a clear citation up-front makes it more noticeable as well as more credible to the audience.

2. The speaker should take special care to use information that is in context and relevant. This step takes more critical thinking skills. For example, it is often easy to misinterpret statistical information (more on that in Chapter 7), or to take a quotation from an expert in one field and apply it to another field. It is also important to label facts as facts and opinions as opinions, especially when dealing with controversial subjects. In addition, be sure you understand the material you are citing before using it. If you are unsure of any words, look their definitions up so you are sure to be using the material as it is intended.
3. The speaker should phrase or summarize the ideas of the source into his or her own words. **Paraphrasing**, which is putting the words and ideas of others into one's own authentic or personal language, is often misunderstood by students. Your instructor may walk you through an exercise to help your class understand that paraphrasing is *not* changing 10% of the words in a long quotation (such as two or three out of twenty) but still keeping most of the vocabulary and word order (called syntax) of the source. You should compose the information in your own "voice" or way of expressing yourself.

In fact, you would be better off to think in terms of summarizing your source material rather than paraphrasing. For one thing, you will be less likely to use too much of the original and be skirting the edge of plagiarism. Secondly, you will usually want to put the main argument of an article or large portion of a source in your own words and make it shorter.

Here is an example of an original source and three possible ways to deal with it.

Original information, posted on CNN.com website, October 31, 2015:

"The biggest federal inmate release on record will take place this weekend. About 6,600 inmates will be released, with 16,500 expected to get out the first year. More than 40,000 federal felons could be released early over the next several years, the U.S. Sentencing Commission said. The sentencing

Paraphrasing

putting the words and ideas of others into one's own authentic or personal language

commission decided a year ago to lower maximum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and to make the change retroactive, with the inmate releases effective November 1, 2015. Sentences were reduced an average of 18%, the commission said. Early release will be a challenge for the inmates as well as the judicial bureaucracy” (Casarez, 2015).

With that as our original source, which of the following is truly paraphrasing?

The CNN News website says the federal government is releasing 40,000 felons from prison in the next few years.

According to report posted on CNN’s website on October 31 of 2015, the federal government’s Sentencing Commission is beginning to release prisoner in November based on a decision made in 2014. That decision was to make maximum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders shorter by an average of 18%. Over the next several years over 40,000 federal felons could be let go. However, this policy change to early release will not be easy for the justice system or those released.

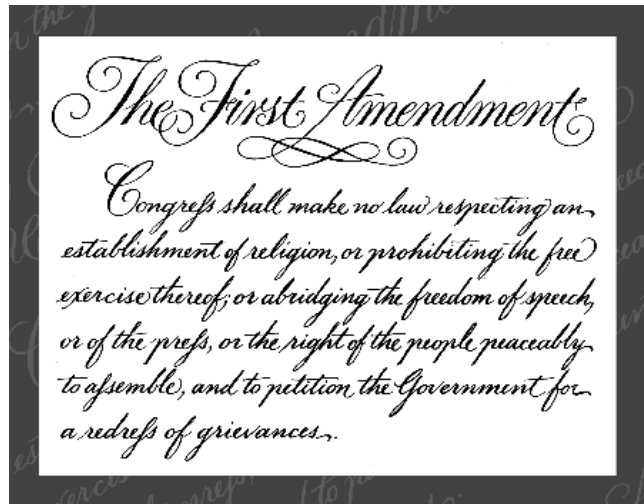
The largest release ever of federal inmates will take place in early November. At first 6,600 inmates will be released, and then over 16,000 over the first year. The U.S. Sentencing Commission says it could release over 40,000 federal felons over the upcoming years because the sentencing commission decided a year ago to lessen maximum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and to make this happen for those already in jail. When the Sentencing Commission says that when it made that decision, the sentences were reduced an average of 18%. Early release will be a challenge for the felons as well as the judicial system. This came from a story on CNN News website in later October 2015.

If you chose the second citation, you would be correct. The first version does not really interpret the original statement correctly, and the third choice imitates the original almost entirely. Choice 2, on the other hand, is in completely different language and identifies the source of the information clearly and at the beginning.

This exercises may raise the question, “Should I always paraphrase or summarize rather than directly quote a source?” There are times when it is appropriate to use a source’s exact wording, but quoting a source exactly should be done sparingly—sort of like using hot sauce! You should have a good reason for it, such as that the source is highly respected, has said the idea in a compelling way, or the material is well known and others would recognize it.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, students often have not been trained to use source material correctly and plagiarize unintentionally. But like the old saying goes, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse.” You will still be held accountable whether you understand or not, so now, in your early college career, is the time you should learn to cite source material correctly in oral and written communication.



Something to Think About

In Appendix B you will find more information about plagiarism.

Why do you think it is so hard for students to learn to cite sources appropriately?