

Lost my words!!!!



Ever heard of Kaavya Vishwanathan! The author of famous novel ‘How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life’. As per an article on Rediff India abroad, by Arthur J Pais in New York on April 25, 2006, it was her debut novel, which she wrote at a very young age of 17 and which earned her a two-book contract for \$500,000!^[1] Well, it is a gaping amount. But, this is not why I mentioned her name.

Then what drove me to quote her name? This student of Harvard University gained attention by many newspapers and TV channels for her work in 2006, when some parts of her novel were cited as being plagiarized! The lady was not only criticized extensively, but also got detention from Harvard University. The whole incidence was quiet disturbing. Although each of us would agree that the girl was very young to know the seriousness of this matter and, definitely, despite what happened, we cannot underestimate her talent that started budding in her at such a young age. But this ignorance of the issue has forced her to keep her hands off of the field that she is good at and loves to do. Presently, she is studying law at Georgetown University.^[2]

Plagiarism is an important issue, not only for the literary work, but also in the scientific world, where scientists like us work hard, day in and day out, for cheering out one *eureka* to the whole world, only to find out that their work has been retracted from the journals, just because they have quoted few words from an article written by someone else! Oh world! Please don’t despise us and shun us away, for we are not authors but scientist!

But praying this doesn’t help. Despite being scientists and not authors, we need to know what plagiarism is. We cannot let anyone demean the significance of our work simply because we *lost our words* while writing and expressing our views on our research, can we?

An editorial by the journal *Nature*, titled ‘Copy and Paste’, where the title is a beautiful set of words aptly describing plagiarism.^[3] The article has described the increasing retractions because of plagiarism by reiterating an example of Wegman report. The issue was associated with the climatology department and the retracted article was published in a statistical journal in 2008.

By virtue of both aforementioned issues – that of Kaavya Vishwanathan and Wegman report and many other such incidents – it is clear that plagiarism not only undermines the value of author’s work, but also the prestige of the University/organization to which the said author is associated with. Not to mention the defamation of the journal publishing such work, if someone points it out. It is agitating even for editors and reviewers, who have to reject some of the very good work, because of the ethicality associated with this literary theft – a theft of words!

Think of it this way. If after all your hard work and all your thought process that you have invested, someone else quotes your words and your work, without giving a credit to you, won’t you feel cheated? Well, I would! The same way, if you quote someone else’s work, without giving them a credit, you are cheating the other person. This is the same as piracy in film industry – a loss for those who actually worked on the original work, without crediting them, isn’t it?

So, how can we deal with this? Writing an article doesn’t look like a piece of cake. To add, no one can deny that after working so hard in laboratory and also, because we are not authors, scientists can face “writer’s block”, when it becomes really difficult to find the right words. But, one thing is for sure, we can’t be ignorant about the issue. It is important not just to understand but also to bring it into practice – to write articles that are not plagiarized and maintain the originality/ novelty of our work. After all, we sweat for so long and sacrifice so many entertaining moments of our life for this work, we can’t just let it down, simply because we lack the words to describe our work in a proper scientific language.

One good thing about our work is that we know our work – we are the masters, the creators of our piece of article. We are the ones, who can best define and describe our work, so why not use our own feelings and thoughts? Why not let the world be acquainted with our thought process through the

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medium of our work? What is wrong in that? At least it is original and novel, so no one can point a finger on us ever for theft. Moreover, you can express a topic better, if you pick your own words. And then, you never know when your words may start inspiring others. So, why be hesitant to give it a try? But, even then, if one's thoughts are not sufficient and the author start *losing words*, and it becomes utmost important to take some of the work from other person, then definitely, it won't harm us, to atleast give the credit, for his/her originality, to the author, whose words are being used in our article. This is morally ethical and legally justifiable.

A proper referencing of your article can relieve you of so many of the unwarranted tension. The evidences of a properly referenced article are considered as being strong and no one can doubt the reliability of the work as well. It also gives the impression of you being aware of your area of work, with a strong grip on it and having a unique thought about it. This is highly appreciable by everyone. But, this definitely does not permit one to take every third sentence from someone else's work and reference it. Neither it means that one can quote exact words from someone else's work and be relieved by referencing it. Most internationally recognized journals permit only 20-30% of your article to be based on someone else's work and the remaining has to be the author's own thoughts, with proper referencing where necessary. Emphasizing again, that your article could be based on someone else's work, but it cannot or should not take the exact words of other article. Paraphrase what others have tried to say in a summarized way and reference it properly to credit the other person but please do not 'copy and paste' it, in any case.

Every paper that is submitted to a journal, the first thing that the journal tries to address is plagiarism – how much

has been copied? In this techno-world there are many types of software that can help us in this regard to check for plagiarism, not to forget the biggest tool and the one that is most easily accessible - Google.com. Even if, by any chance, the journal publishes these plagiarized articles, the author of the original work has the right to challenge the journal, with proper evidence, and the author can address the editor of the journal. In this case, the journal can retract the plagiarized article. And the author of plagiarized article can be restricted for further publications depending on the terms and conditions of the journal.

On an end note, before I start '*losing my words*', I am quoting a very common layman maxim in Hindi - '*Nakal k liye bhi akal chahiye*', which means you need brains even to copy. That said, I hope, readers will understand this issue and submit some original writing.

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Announcement

Android App



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