

## PLAGIARISM HYPOTHETICALS

To help you avoid plagiarism and learn appropriate attribution, consider the following hypotheticals. In each of the hypotheticals, is the student guilty of plagiarism?

The answers are provided on page 2.

1. A student turned in the first submission of the two-draft office memorandum. The professor found incomplete citations, unacknowledged use of full sentences, and missing quotation marks either at the beginning or end of a quotation. The student said she had just thrown it together the night before and planned to correct the errors; the professor insisted that any plagiarism is an attempt to pass off another's work as her own.

Guilty?

Not guilty?

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2. A first-year law student's paper contains three paragraphs of wording almost identical to another student's in her study group. She insists that because they studied together, their thoughts would naturally be similar, and she made sure that every third word was changed and that the paragraphs were not in the same order.

Guilty?

Not guilty?

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3. A student writes a paper for law school without any attribution, and the professor recognizes that it is plagiarized. The student rather proudly admits the material is not his, explaining that in Legal Research and Writing the professor had told them nothing is new in legal research, and everything must come from some authority other than themselves. He had worked very hard on every law school paper to do just that, and had succeeded: he could not understand why this paper differed from his others or why the committee called it plagiarism.

Guilty?

Not guilty?

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4. A trial brief contains three major ideas taken from a non-identified Internet source. The student insists that the material is public knowledge and does not have to be attributed.

Guilty?

Not guilty?

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**ANSWERS:** Although the students in the hypotheticals did not intend to plagiarize, they are all guilty of plagiarism, defined as “taking the literary property of another, passing it off as one’s own without appropriate attribution, and reaping from its use any benefit from an academic institution.”<sup>1</sup> The punishment for the plagiarism, however, may vary depending upon the specific circumstances in each case.

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<sup>1</sup> Legal Writing Institute, *Law School Plagiarism v. Proper Attribution 2* (2003), <http://www.lwionline.org/publications/plagiarism/policy.pdf>.