

Plagiarism Examples By Dr. Betsy Meinz

Let's say you read an article by Siegler and Yu (2008) that describes a study conducted to investigate cross-cultural (Chinese vs. American) differences in mathematical skills among young children. You want to talk about this study in your APA Style paper for one of your Psychology classes.

If you are writing a literature review (or an Introduction), you will probably want to summarize the *method* and *results* of the study, and you might start by simply talking about the Siegler and Yu's (2008) goals for their study. The last paragraph of the Introduction of the Siegler and Yu paper is presented below:

The current study is the first to examine Chinese kindergartners' proficiency on the number-line-estimation task. We hypothesized that Chinese preschoolers' practice at arithmetic and counting would improve their understanding of numerical magnitudes, even on unpracticed tasks such as number-line estimation. Consider how the most common early addition strategy, counting fingers, could contribute to knowledge of numerical magnitudes. With this strategy, the larger the sum, the more fingers children put up, the more fingers they see, the more numbers they count, and the more time they take to reach the sum. For example, solving $4 + 4$ by counting fingers requires putting up and seeing twice as many fingers, saying twice as many numbers, and taking roughly twice as much time as counting fingers to solve $2 + 2$. These kinesthetic, visual, verbal, and temporal cues provide broad-based support for a sense of numerical magnitudes. Thus, the greater arithmetic and counting experience of Chinese children, relative to U.S. children, was expected to produce superior number-line estimation, despite the fact that neither Chinese nor U.S. children have experience with this task. The same logic implies that within each society, individual differences in arithmetic skill and number-line estimation should correlate positively: Children who are more experienced and skilled at arithmetic should be better at the unpracticed number-line task as well. Thus, this experiment tested three main predictions: (a) that Chinese kindergartners' number-line estimates would be more accurate, be more linear, and have slopes closer to 1.00 than those of American peers; (b) that Chinese kindergartners' arithmetic skill would exceed that of their American peers; and (c) that in both the Chinese and the American samples, individual children's number-line proficiency would correlate positively with their arithmetic skill. (p. 760-761)

QUOTING:

In your literature review, you wish to summarize the goal(s) of this study. One option would be to use a quote:

The goal of Siegler and Yu's (2008) study was "to examine Chinese kindergartners' proficiency on the number-line estimation task" (p. 760).

Note that the part of the text taken directly from the article is in quotes, a correct citation (authors, date) is given, *and* the page number is given. Therefore, this is not plagiarized. However, it's not really a very good use of a quote. Quotes should only be used for profound statements that can't really be paraphrased.

PARAPHRASING:

Paraphrasing is summarizing the work of others, while providing a correct citation. A correct citation for a paraphrase in APA Style is the authors and the year of publication. But just what is "summarizing"? You cannot simply take another's work and change a few words or rearrange sentences.

Example 1: Siegler and Yu (2008) predicted that Chinese preschoolers who received practice at arithmetic and counting would improve their mathematical understanding, even on unpracticed tasks.

This is plagiarism. Why?

Although the source is cited, the author just took Siegler and Yu's (2008) second sentence and changed some words.

Example 2: They had three hypotheses (Siegler & Yu, 2008). The first was that Chinese kindergartners' number-line estimates would be more accurate (linear and higher slopes) than Americans. The second was that Chinese kindergartners would have better arithmetic skill than Americans. The third was that both Chinese and American children's number-line proficiency would be positively correlated with their arithmetic skill.

This is plagiarism. Why?

Although the source is cited, the author just took Siegler and Yu's (2008) last sentence and reformatted it, changing some words.

Example 3: Siegler and Yu (2008) designed a study to investigate whether Chinese children would outperform American children on a novel mathematical task (number line estimation). They reasoned that Chinese children would perform better because of their superior mathematical skills gained through early math practice.

This is not plagiarism. Why?

The source is cited correctly. The author read the entire passage and summarized the goal of the study in words not taken directly from the passage. Note also that considerably less detail is given than in Example 2. Carefully consider how much detail is necessary. It's likely that if you're just summarizing the method and results of a study, you wouldn't need to detail each of the hypotheses.

Consult your instructor or the Psychology department website for more information on plagiarism.

Siegler, R. S. & Yu, M. (2008). Chinese children excel on novel mathematics problems even before elementary school. *Psychological Science*, 19, 759-763.