

START:

Is some of the language in the article copied from another source?

NO

YES

Is the language attributed to the original source?

YES

NO

Is the string of unattributed language more than 7-10 words in one sentence?

NO

YES

PLAGIARISM
If the unattributed language runs longer than seven words in multiple sentences, you've probably caught someone trying to pass their work off as someone else's. Check their work for previous examples of theft — there might be more cribbing lurking in the archives.

PATCHWRITING

If a journalist has mirrored the language of another author save for a few word substitutions, they may be guilty of patchwriting. This is a lesser charge than plagiarism if the original author is credited.

YES

Is the language identical to wording in another article, save a few jumbled-up words?

NO

Is it PLAGIARISM?
(a flowchart)

NOT PLAGIARISM

If what you've found is a small, isolated similarity that runs less than seven words in a single sentence, don't sweat it — the copying was probably incidental. Just to make sure, run some other sentences through a search engine.

IDEA THEFT

If the journalism in question is merely a retread of someone else's work using the same sources and concepts, it's not plagiarism — but it's not original work, either.

YES

Did the author write about this subject before and submit another article as completely original work?

NO

YES

Is the article a complete retread of another story, with little new insight?

NO

NOT PLAGIARISM

If the language and the central ideas in the articles are original, it's not plagiarism.

SELF-PLAGIARISM

Submitting a stale article in the guise of a new work is a form of plagiarism called self-plagiarism. This is a lesser crime than cribbing from another writer.

Is the journalism in question published on an aggregated blog?

NO

YES

EXCESSIVE AGGREGATION

If the article is a total rewrite of someone else's story, it's not plagiarism, but it's still a form of theft — even if the original author is credited.

SOURCES:

Kelly McBride
Plagiarism.org

Infographic by Benjamin Mullin