Explanation of Plagiarism

(Note: The following explanation comes from David Skwire and Frances Chitwood's Student's Book of College English, 3rd ed., New York: Macmillan, 1981, pp. 656-58. I have modified it slightly.)

Remember the following rules--not guidelines, rules:

1. The language in your document must either be your own or a direct quotation from the original source.
2. Changing a few words or phrases from another writer's work is not enough to make the writing "your own." Remember Rule 1. The writing is either your own or the other person's; there are no in-betweens.
3. Citations acknowledge that the fact or opinion expressed comes from another writer. If the language comes from another writer, quotation marks are necessary in addition to a citation.

Now for a detail example.

**ORIGINAL PASSAGE:**
Certainly there was nothing genteel about Dreiser, either as man or novelist. He was the supreme poet of the squalid, a man who felt the terror, the pity, and the beauty underlying the American dream.

**STUDENT VERSION #1:**
There was nothing genteel about Dreiser, either as man or novelist. He was the supreme poet of the squalid, a man who felt the terror, the pity, and the beauty underlying the American dream.

**COMMENT:**
Obvious plagiarism: word-for-word repetition without acknowledgement.

**STUDENT VERSION #2:**
There was nothing genteel about Dreiser, either as man or novelist. He was the supreme poet of the squalid, a man who felt the terror, the pity, and the beauty underlying the American dream (Freedman, 1975, p. 104).

**COMMENT:**
Still plagiarism. The citation alone does not help. The language is the original author's, and only quotation marks around the whole passage plus a citation would be correct.

**STUDENT VERSION #3:**
Nothing was genteel about Dreiser as a man or as a novelist. He was the poet of the squalid and felt that terror, pity, and beauty lurked under the American dream (Freedman, 1975, p. 104).

**COMMENT:**
Still plagiarism. A few words have been changed or omitted, but by no stretch of the imagination is the student writer using his own language.

**STUDENT VERSION #4**
"Nothing was genteel about Dreiser as a man or a novelist. He was the poet of the squalid and felt that terror, pity, and beauty lurked under the American dream" (Freedman, 1975, p. 104).

**COMMENT:**
Not quite plagiarism, but incorrect and inaccurate. Quotation marks indicate exact repetition of what was originally written. The student writer, however, has changed some of the original wording and thus is not entitled to use quotation marks.

**STUDENT VERSION #5**
As one critic noted, "Certainly there was nothing genteel about Dreiser, either as man or novelist. He was the supreme poet of the squalid, a man who felt the terror, the pity, and the beauty underlying the American dream” (Freedman, 1975, p. 104).
COMMENT:
Correct. The quotation marks acknowledge that the words belong to the original writer. The citation is also needed, of course, to give the reader specific information about the source of the quotation.
(Note: The quoted passage also needs to be framed: “As one critic noted ….”)

STUDENT VERSION #6
By 1925 Dreiser's reputation was firmly established. The reading public viewed Dreiser as one of the main contributors to the downfall of the "genteel tradition" in American literature. Dreiser, "the supreme poet of the squalid," looked beneath the bright surface of American life and values and described the frightening and tragic elements, the "ugly realities," so often overlooked by other writers (Freedman, 1975, p. 104).

COMMENT:
Correct. These sentences are a combination of paraphrases and partial quotations.