

## **Examples of Proper and Improper Student Writing.**

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### **Original Text:**

(American Museum of Natural History Expeditions: Black Smokers<sup>6</sup>  
[http://www.amnh.org/nationalcenter/expeditions/blacksmokers/black\\_smokers.html](http://www.amnh.org/nationalcenter/expeditions/blacksmokers/black_smokers.html))

“You've probably seen or heard of natural hot springs on land, like Old Faithful at Yellowstone National Park. Similar phenomena occur under the oceans within *midocean ridge* volcanoes and are called deep-sea *hydrothermal* (hot water) vents. They are known as *black smokers*, like the ones seen above. These black smokers are chimneylike structures made up of sulfur-bearing minerals or *sulfides* that come from beneath Earth's crust. They form when hot (roughly 350°C), mineral-rich water flows out onto the ocean floor through the volcanic lava on a mid-ocean ridge volcano. Sulfide minerals grow or crystallize from the hot water directly onto the volcanic rocks at the place where the hot, mineral-rich water flows from the ground. This *crystallization* forms a hollow, chimneylike sulfide structure through which the hot water continues to flow. As the hot, mineral-rich water rushes out of this chimney and mixes with the cold ocean bottom water, it precipitates a variety of minerals as tiny particles that make the vent water appear black in color. This is why these sulfide chimney structures are called black smokers.”

### **Improper Writing:**

Black smokers are chimneylike structures made up of sulfur-bearing minerals or *sulfides* that come from beneath Earth's crust. They form when hot, mineral-rich water flows out onto the ocean floor through the volcanic lava on a mid-ocean ridge volcano. Minerals grow or crystallize from the hot water directly onto the volcanic rocks at the place where the hot, mineral-rich water flows from the ground. The *crystallization* forms a hollow, chimneylike structure through which the hot water continues to flow. As the hot water rushes out of this chimney and mixes with the cold ocean water, it precipitates a variety of minerals that make the vent water appear black in color, so these sulfide chimney structures are called black smokers.

### **Reasons it is Improper:**

This is barely disguised copying. Believe it or not I received this paragraph from a student who claimed that she had done all her own writing and “hadn't even had the website open” while she was doing it. I did not believe her. A few sentences have been removed, a few adjectives have been deleted, and the last two sentences have been combined into one with the addition of the word

“so.” An 8-year old could produce this and not understand one fact about black smokers. One of the reasons plagiarism is unacceptable in student papers is that it can be done without any understanding of the topic at all.

Students who write like this usually know they are cheating, and are hoping not to get caught. They will be.

### **Another Example of Improper Writing:**

Black Smokers form at deep-sea hydrothermal vents, when hot (roughly 350°C), mineral-rich water flows out onto the ocean floor through the volcanic lava on a mid-ocean ridge volcano. They are similar to natural hot springs on land, like Old Faithful at Yellowstone National Park. Black smokers are made up of sulfur-bearing minerals or *sulfides* that come from beneath Earth's crust, and have chimneylike structures. The minerals crystallize directly from the hot water onto the volcanic rocks, and form hollow, chimneylike structures through which the hot water continues to flow. They are called Black Smokers because as the hot, mineral-rich water rushes out of this chimney and mixes with the cold ocean bottom water, it precipitates tiny mineral particles that make the vent water appear black in color.

### **Reasons it is improper:**

This student made a greater effort at editing, rearranging sentences, combining sentences, and placing the content in a different order. Ultimately, however, he didn't write anything. The phrases and the sentences are all copied, again, from the website. Rearranging does not constitute writing, and this paragraph is every bit as illegal as the previous one.

I have lots of students who turn in this type of work and they usually tell me that they thought this was acceptable. Somehow along the line they have gotten the impression that this type of work is what research and writing are all about. They are very, very wrong.

## **Proper Paraphrasing:**

1. Black smokers are a sort of underwater volcano. Along the midocean ridge, mineral rich water is pushed through the volcanic lava and out into the cold ocean water. This turns the sulfide minerals into crystals where they attach to themselves forming a hard chimney structure around the vent. As the mineral water is pushed out through the vent the minerals are turned into dark pieces mixing with the water and making it look black. Certain areas along the 50,000 kilometer midocean ridge are home to black smokers releasing their black mineral water.
2. A mid-ocean ridge is the longest mountain range in the world. Along the edges it contains hydrothermal vents which are also called black smokers. They are made up of sulfides that come from inside of the earth. When hot magma is pushed through the mid-ocean ridge so are the sulfides. These sulfides come out the black smokers at high temperatures. From this action the chimney-like shape is formed. This is known as crystallization because once the heat is gone it forms a hard base that is built on to form underwater volcanoes. When the hot sulfides meet the cold water of the ocean it precipitates making the water black in color which is how black smokers got their name. Since these reactions occur so often sulfur mounds form next to the volcanoes that range from the size of a ping pong table to a small house.
3. Black smokers are deep-sea hydrothermal vents found within mid-ocean ridge volcanoes. These vents release sulfur-bearing minerals that originate from beneath the Earth's crust. As a result, upon mixing directly with the hot water, it forms sulfide crystals that deposit onto the volcanic rocks. The vast amount of sulfide crystallization form into a hollow structure in which the hot water is allowed to flow through. The mixture of the hot-water containing minerals and the cold-water of the deep-ocean floor form a precipitate that appear black in color. These vents are found on sulfide mounds.

## **Reasons they are Proper:**

The authors of these paragraphs have done well putting the information into their own words. The information clearly came from the source, and there is a lot of match of ideas, but in each case the text is clearly the student's own. There are some grammar mistakes; I have not changed anything in these original submissions. Notice that some of the terminology stays the same. It is hard to define black smokers without using the words "deep-sea hydrothermal vent" and "chimney-like." The phrasing, the sentence structure, and the paragraph structure are all individual. Number 2 is the most unique and the best writing of the three.

Each of these still requires a citation, properly acknowledging the source of the information.

## **Proper use of Quotation:**

It is possible to use quotations in your writing, and sometimes that is the best way to give a complex definition. In the example below, the student used a direct quote to define Black Smoker, and put it in quotation marks, with the reference following. He then went on to explain the definition in his own words.

A black smoker is a “chimneylike structure made up of sulfur-bearing minerals or *sulfides* that come from beneath Earth’s crust.” (ANMH Website) They got their name because they look like chimneys and they appear to be belching dark smoke. However, they are not actually burning. Black smokers form on the ocean floor near the mid-ocean ridges. The hot magma heats up the water underground, and when that hot water leaks out it is full of dissolved sulfides. These crystallize either at the vent, forming part of the chimney, or in the water as small black particles, forming the smoke.

Be careful using quotations. Although it is proper to use them with quotation marks and citation, they should be a minor part of the writing as a whole. Most (>90%) of the paper should be in your own words.

## **References:**

6: Used with permission, AMNH