Plagiarize:
to steal or pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own;
to use (a created production) without crediting the source

Tips for avoiding plagiarism:
The Writing Center at UNC-W offers the following suggestions for avoiding plagiarism:

- Put direct quotes of more than three words in quotation marks to distinguish the author's ideas from your own.
- Paraphrase a source by summarizing the ideas, but be sure to cite the source of the information.
- As you do your research, be sure to keep track of all the sources you use. Make note of author, title, and page numbers.
- Paraphrase properly. "Don't just insert synonyms for the author's words--alter the order of thoughts and change the author's language to suit your audience and the rest of your essay. Be sure to cite the paraphrased information."
- Handwrite your notes instead of using the cut and paste function on a word processor.
- People are sources too. Cite your classmates, professors and experts just as you would a written source.
- Use a citation style guide such as the MLA Guide or the APA Manual of Style.

Examples:

Original passage
Mary had a little lamb with fleece as white as snow. Everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go. He followed her to school one day, which was against the rules. It made the children laugh and play to see a lamb at school. [Goose, M. (1968). Mary had a little lamb. Imagination, FL: Glad and Big Publishing.]

Acceptable paraphrase
According to Goose (1968), Mary had a lamb that followed her wherever she went. Although pets were forbidden at school, it followed her there one day, much to the amusement of Mary's friends (p. 5).
Acceptable paraphrase with quotations

In a scene more suited to film noir than the nursery, we learn of Mary, a girl possessed of a doppelganger in the form of a young sheep. This ubiquitous sheep, pale as a proverbial ghost with “fleece as white as snow,” relentlessly pursues Mary wherever she goes. She cannot even get away from it by taking sanctuary at school, where the lamb appears one day, frolicking with Mary’s school chums. Mary suffers severe discipline from her teachers, as it was “against the rules” to have such a creature at school (Goose, 1968, p. 5).

Unacceptable paraphrase

Mary possessed a small lamb with wool as white as snow. Everywhere that Mary went the lamb went too. He even followed her to school once, even though it was against the rules. But all the children laughed and played to see the lamb at school.

Why is this unacceptable?

- synonyms inserted for author’s words
- the author’s original sentence structure and tone is still there
- the passage is not cited in any way
- distinctive phrases such as “white as snow” should be in quotation marks

Additional information:

What is Plagiarism?
Readable, fun, and geared toward students. From Georgetown University.  
http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html

Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It  
Straightforward; explains acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing; also explains common knowledge. From Indiana University, Bloomington.  
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml

How Not to Plagiarize  
Arranged in a type of FAQ format. From the University of Toronto.  
http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize

A Plagiarism Tutorial  
An easy to read guide with quizzes and examples. From the University of Southern Mississippi.  
http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php