

Avoiding Plagiarism

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others and presenting them as your own. Plagiarism is a type of intellectual theft. It can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement.

Whenever you use the words or ideas of another person in your work, you must acknowledge where they came from. You can avoid plagiarism by following the suggestions outlined in this guide.

One of the contradictions of academic writing is that while you are expected to read, research and refer to experts and authorities, you are also expected to produce 'original' work. However, it is important to recognise that all scholarship involves understanding, researching, and expanding on the work of others to some degree. Most of the academic work undergraduate students do at university will be based on the words, information and ideas of other writers. In this case, an original contribution might consist mainly of selecting, ordering, summarising and interpreting what others have said. So, it is important to learn how to reference properly—that is, how to specify clearly and precisely what your debts are and how to acknowledge them. Then your own contribution can be clearly identified and appreciated.

Common Forms of Plagiarism*

- **Downloading an assignment from an online source and submitting it as your own work.**
- **Buying, stealing or borrowing an assignment and submitting it as your own work.**
- **Copying, cutting and pasting text from an electronic source and submitting it as your own work.**
- **Using the words of someone else and presenting them as your own.**
Copying a section of a book or an article and submitting it as your own work (that is, without acknowledgement) is plagiarism.
- **Using significant ideas from someone else and presenting them as your own**
Putting someone else's ideas into your own words and not acknowledging the source of the ideas is plagiarism.
- **Copying the written expressions of someone else without proper acknowledgment**
Quoting from a source 'word for word', without using quotation marks is plagiarism. Lifting sentences or paragraphs from someone else, even with proper acknowledgment, gives the impression that the idea or information comes from the source cited, but that the phrasing, the choice of words to express it, is your own contribution.
- **Relying too much on other people's material**
Avoid repeated use of long quotations. Too many direct quotations (even with quotation marks and with proper acknowledgment) result in your sources speaking for you, meaning your own contribution is minimal. Use your own words more and rely less on quotations.

* We are indebted to the UNSW School of Political Science for this discussion of plagiarism

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Be Aware of What Constitutes Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others and presenting them as your own. The best way to avoid plagiarising is to know what it is and how to avoid doing it. Many students plagiarise unintentionally as a result of not knowing how to acknowledge or incorporate sources of information, or from careless note-taking or 'cutting and pasting' of electronic sources. Both intentional AND unintentional plagiarism are violations of UNSW regulations.

Plan Your Work

Plan ahead and begin writing your assignments well before they are due.

Leaving work until the last minute doesn't give you enough time to read, digest, form your own ideas and write information in your own words. When students rush to meet a tight deadline, they are more likely to plagiarise unintentionally or succumb to the temptation to 'cut and paste' information directly from electronic resources.

Plagiarism & the Internet

The internet can be a great source of information and an effective research tool. However, just because electronic information is easily available does not mean it is 'free'. Remember that the information you find online should be referenced, just like any other source. Online sources should be used with care, fully acknowledged and evaluated in the same way you would any print-based source of information.

Warning!

There are an increasing number of websites that feature university assignments that students can access and download. Downloading an assignment from one of these sites and submitting it as your own is plagiarism and carries heavy penalties, including exclusion from the university. If you are tempted to do this, please remember that academics are experts and are extremely well versed in the knowledge, words and ideas of their discipline area! They are also aware of these sites and have developed strategies to identify internet plagiarists. Remember, if you found the paper, so can your lecturer or tutor!

Resist the temptation to 'cut and paste' text directly from an electronic resource into your assignment. You should rewrite any information in your own words. When using the internet, cite the source of anything that you borrow, including material from web pages, email, and newsgroups. These materials are the words and ideas of people who deserve to be given credit. For referencing purposes, always make a note of the 'address' or URL of web pages and the date you accessed the material. If possible, print out the web pages.

Learn to How to Acknowledge Your Sources of Information

The Golden Rule: Make sure your assignments are referenced correctly

Referencing allows you to acknowledge the contribution of other writers in your work. Whenever you use words, ideas or information from other sources in your assignments, you must cite and reference those sources.

Why Reference?

Inaccurate references or—worse still—no references at all can be regarded as plagiarism. All university assignments must contain references; an unreferenced assignment implies every word, idea and fact is your own work.

Referencing is a way to provide evidence to support the assertions and claims in your own assignments. By citing experts in your field, you are demonstrating the extent of your reading and research. Referencing is also a way to give credit to the writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas. References should always be accurate, allowing your readers to trace the sources of information you have used. The best way to make sure you reference accurately is to keep a record of all the sources you used when reading and researching for an assignment.

Referencing Methods

There are several different referencing methods. Follow the referencing style recommended by your school. Check with your lecturer or tutor about the method they prefer you to use.

* Short referencing guides for commonly used styles are available from *The Learning Centre*.

Acknowledge ALL Your Sources

Academic books are not the only sources that require acknowledgement. ANY words, ideas or information taken from ANY source requires a reference.

What kind of information should I reference?

Reference when you are using words or ideas from:

- books and journal articles
- newspapers and magazines
- pamphlets or brochures
- films, documentaries, television programs or advertisements
- web pages or computer-based resources
- letters or emails
- personal interviews
- lecturers or tutors (This isn't always necessary, but check with your lecturer or tutor about their preferences before you draw on their ideas).

Reference when you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts or pictures.

No need to reference:

when you are writing your own observations (for example, a report on a field trip) or experiment results

when you are writing about your own experiences (for example, a reflective journal)

when you are writing your own thoughts, comments or conclusions in an assignment.

when you are evaluating or offering your own analysis (for example, parts of a critical review)

when you are using 'common knowledge' (facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people) or folklore.

when you are using generally accepted facts or information (this will vary in different disciplines of study. If in doubt, ask your tutor).

Learn How to Incorporate the Work of Others into Your Own Work

In addition to knowing the rules for referencing your sources, and knowing what to reference, you also need to understand how to effectively integrate material in your writing. Knowing how to quote correctly from a source, and how to paraphrase and summarise the words and ideas of others can help you avoid plagiarism.

Writing in your own words: Summarising & Paraphrasing

You can integrate evidence/ source material into your assignments by summarising and paraphrasing. Summaries and paraphrases offer alternatives to using direct quotations.

- A summary is an overview of a source, condensing it to its most important ideas.
- A paraphrase is usually a short sections of text. It retains the meaning but uses different words.

Summarise or paraphrase in your own words and sentence patterns. Follow with a reference. However, just changing one or two words does not make a paraphrase; you must digest the ideas, understand them, and write them in your own words and phrasing.

Why writing in 'your own words' is important

Expressing information or ideas in your own words (by paraphrasing or summarising) demonstrates that you have understood, absorbed, and interpreted information. It also helps you to develop your writing style. If your work is only made up from copied material you are likely to be penalised by your lecturers.

Use Quotations

A quotation is an exact reproduction of spoken or written words. When you want to reproduce someone's exact words in your work:

1. present them between quotation marks and follow them with a citation.
2. use quotation marks even when you borrow a phrase or a single, special word from another source.
3. always include page numbers in your reference.

It can be helpful to lead into a quotation or paraphrase by using the author's name. This is known as *Strong Author Referencing*. For example, you can write, "According to Ward," followed by a quotation from Ward or your paraphrase or summary of Ward's ideas.

* See *The Learning Centre's guide to Summarising Paraphrasing & Quoting*

Learn to Make Effective Notes from Sources

Students often plagiarise unintentionally when they take 'word-for-word' notes from sources and then simply reproduce these in their assignments. To make sure that you don't accidentally plagiarise, take notes carefully. Develop a system to distinguish between what you have copied directly from a source, what you have noted in your own words, and your own comments about the material.

When you take notes from a source of information, use the split-page method:

Divide your page into 3 columns.

- Write the notes from a source in the first column
- Record the page number(s) in the second column
- The third column is where you write your comments, questions or ideas about the information. This allows you to distinguish between your ideas and the author's.

Before you begin to take notes, record the bibliographic information for the source at the top of the page. Carefully note which source the material comes from and all the information needed for referencing that source. You won't want to try to retrace your path to an Internet site or run back to the library the night before your paper is due just because you forgot to write down the necessary information the first time!

When taking notes from a source, try to write in your own words. Cover the original source, then relying on your memory, write a summary or paraphrase. Check your version with the original for accuracy and any phrases you may have accidentally reproduced. Put any unique words or phrases that you can't change into quotation marks.

If you copy down the exact words from a source, make sure they are between quotation marks.

Use 'In-text' referencing in your notes. During note-taking, develop the habit of concluding each paragraph with the author's name and the page number between brackets. This will help you reference the information when you use it in an assignment.

* See *The Learning Centre's guide to Effective Note-making from Written Text*

If you are in any doubt about whether something constitutes plagiarism, always ask your tutor before handing in your assignment.

References

Carroll, J., *A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education*, 2002, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford.

Davis, U. C., University of Southern California, *Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship* <<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm>> October 25, 2001

Northedge, A., *The Good Study Guide*, 1988, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab, *Avoiding Plagiarism* <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html>

Westphal, D., *Plagiarism*, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud <<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/research/plagiarism.html>>

Example: Page Layout for Notetaking

Bibliographic Details of the source		
Your notes from the source	Page no.	Your comments, questions or ideas about the information