

Language & Learning Skills Unit

Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Most students understand they need to include reference details when they directly quote someone, but many don't realise that ideas, as well as words, need their sources acknowledged. As you are writing, you need to ask yourself, '**how do I know this?**' If the answer is that the information or ideas came from another person or authority then you need to **acknowledge the source**.

What do you reference?

You need to acknowledge **all the ideas you have sourced**. This includes graphs, diagrams, images, visual or audio information and resources available on the internet, as well as books and journals. Keep in mind that someone has done this work and it is politeness, as well as a legal requirement, that you acknowledge their contribution to your thinking. Even if this source is a friend, you need to acknowledge his or her input – or go and find a more official source that says the same thing and acknowledge this instead.

What don't you reference?

Information, such as Picasso was a painter, is **commonly known** and would not need referencing. But any personal point of view or writer's theory about Picasso's involvement with Cubism would need to be acknowledged.

What is the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarism?

Paraphrasing occurs when you express another person's ideas in your own words. Of course these ideas must still be acknowledged. However, some students only change a few key words in the original sentence from the source. **Avoid this habit**. Paraphrasing can also be a form of plagiarism because while a general reference may acknowledge the source of the idea, it does not acknowledge that most of the words are those of the original writer. In fact, most of them are from the original text.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Note-taking

Most plagiarism occurs when a student is taking notes but loses track of the source of the information. **Author, year of publication, page number(s) and publication details should always be included as notes are taken, and quotations taken with 'quotation marks'**. DO NOT LEAVE THIS UNTIL LATER!

You might want to look at adopting a 'double-entry' note-taking system, where the left-hand side of an exercise book is dedicated to notes and quotes and referencing details. The right-hand side of the page includes your thinking about the notes and quotes – what they mean to you, how they are relevant etc.

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Writing

Lecturers are not looking for lots of quotes, nor extensive paraphrasing. Lecturers are looking for evidence of research (references), what the student understands by the research (explanations of the material), and why this research was chosen (relevance to the topic).

A 'quote' should always be relevant to your argument and ideas. Remember lecturers do not read assignments to learn from the student, but instead want to find out what their students have learnt.

A lot of students find it difficult to write without using a lot quotations. If you can't put an idea into your own words, it often means you do not understand it thoroughly. When taking notes, it is helpful to look up new words and/or replace them with ones you know, or use diagrams to help you understand new ideas. [This will help you when you come to write about the idea in your essay or assignment.

Comment [d1]:

Being original

Some students are reluctant to acknowledge the full extent of their research because they worry that if they include all of their references it will look like they haven't been very original. As an undergraduate, you are expected to read widely and access a whole range of materials, so that you can find out what has already been done and thought about in the world. It is assumed that undergraduates need this knowledge – why else would they be doing a degree? Including references to all of the relevant research you have read and understood (though not necessarily understood perfectly) shows you are doing the work expected of an undergraduate student.

This does not mean that you must not have original thoughts. Original thinking includes responses, opinions and /or understandings that are discovered through research, and the form of your argument or the position you take. If you have an original idea or concept then include it in your assignment. You can clearly indicate it is your original idea or concept by writing 'I think...'.

What happens to a plagiarist?

Universities and colleges are places where original ideas are generated and they take plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism means stealing someone else's work and claiming it as your own. Plagiarism is theft. Thieves are punished.

Most students plagiarise without meaning to. Unfortunately, even if plagiarism occurs by accident, the theft has still occurred.

A small number of students plagiarise on purpose. There might be a reason for doing this, but it does not stop their actions from being wrong. Fortunately, it is really very easy to tell when a work has been plagiarised.