

# Avoiding plagiarism

## Definitions

*The concise Oxford dictionary* (6th edition) (1976)

Plagiarise - Take and use another person's (thoughts, writings, inventions) as one's own.

*The Cambridge international dictionary of English* (1995)

Plagiarise - To use (another person's idea or part of their work) and pretend that it is your own.

*The Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (5th edition) (1995)

Plagiarise - To take somebody else's ideas or words, and use them as if they were one's own.

*The Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (6th edition) (2000)

Plagiarise - To copy another person's words or work and pretend that they are your own.

*Collins COBUILD English language dictionary* (1987)

If you plagiarise someone else's ideas, or part of a piece of writing or music by someone else, you use it in your own work and pretend that you thought of it or created it.

*Funk and Wagnalls' new standard dictionary* (1921)

Plagiarism is the act of appropriating the ideas, writings, or inventions of another without due acknowledgement; specifically, the stealing of passages either for word or in substance, from the writings of another and publishing them as one's own.

*Collin's pocket English dictionary* (1987)

Plagiarism is the taking of ideas, writings, etc. from another and passing them off as one's own

*University of Hertfordshire Policies and Regulations*, 17.7, 5.2.

Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work as the student's own, either by extensive unacknowledged quotation, paraphrasing or direct copying.

*MLA handbook for writers of research papers* (1995)

To use another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source is to plagiarise.

**Plagiarism is taking another person's words or ideas and using them as if they were your own. It can be either deliberate or accidental. Plagiarism is taken very seriously in UK Higher Education. If even a small section of your work is found to have been plagiarised, it is likely that you will be assigned a mark of '0' for that assignment. In more serious cases, it may be necessary for you to repeat the course completely. In some cases, plagiarism may even lead to your being expelled from the university.**



## Reasons for plagiarism

Plagiarism can happen for many reasons.

### 1. Deliberate plagiarism.

This is when you make the decision to steal someone else's work. For example, this could be either:

- a. because you do not have the time to do the work yourself;
- b. because you do not have the energy to do the work yourself;
- c. because you think your lecturer will not notice;
- d. because you think your lecturer will not care;
- e. or, perhaps, because you are not able to do the work yourself.

It can involve:

- a. copying another student's work;
- b. copying another person's work from a book or a journal;
- c. copying another person's work from a web-site;
- d. asking another person to do the work for you;
- e. downloading the complete text from the Internet;
- f. buying the text from the Internet;
- g. or even paying for someone to do the work for you.

In all cases, if you do not do the work yourself, you are unlikely to learn from it. It is therefore not useful and a waste of your time. Do not do this. There are many ways your lecturer can check whether or not you have plagiarised. It is not worth the risk.

### 2. Accidental plagiarism.

This is when you accidentally, through carelessness or lack of skill, use another person's words without acknowledging it. This can happen for several reasons:

- a. you do not know that you must not copy a person's words directly;
- b. you do not have the skill for expressing another person's ideas in your own words;
- c. you do not know the correct systems for indicating that you are using another person's words or ideas;
- d. when you take notes from a book or journal, you copy out some sections and do not make this clear in your notes. Later when you re-read the notes, you forget that they are not your words or ideas;
- e. you forget to acknowledge another person's words or ideas;
- f. you do not have time to include the acknowledgments and list of references;
- g. you feel your written work is not good enough;

- h. you borrow your friend's notes, not realising that some of the words are plagiarised.

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## Types of Plagiarism

Hamp-Lyons & Courter (1984, pp. 161-166) distinguish between four types of plagiarism:

- outright copying
- paraphrase plagiarism
- patchwork plagiarism
- stealing an apt term

Examples:

Original Text	<p>While the Education Act of 1870 laid the groundwork for the provision of elementary or primary education for all children in England and Wales, it was not until the implementation of the 1944 Education Act that all girls and boys were entitled to a secondary education. Indeed, the decades immediately following the Second World War saw such a rapid increase in educational provision - in the USA, and many countries of Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in Britain - that some writers refer to the 'educational explosion' of the 1950s and 1960s. The minimum school-leaving age was extended from 14 to 15 years (in 1947) and raised to 16 (in 1971-2), but the proportion of people choosing to pursue their studies beyond this age hurtled upward; by 1971, 30 per cent of 17- year-olds were in full-time education in schools or colleges, compared with 2 per cent in 1902, 4 per cent in 1938, 18 per cent in 1961 and 22 per cent in 1966. The Robbins Report (1963) undermined the view that there was a finite pool of ability - a limited number of people who could benefit from advanced education - and provided ammunition for the expansion of higher education. This expansion took place through the establishment of new universities and growth of existing ones, as well as through the conversion of colleges into polytechnics which could offer degree courses, and the founding of the Open University. In 1970, 17.5 per cent of 18- year-olds entered further or higher education on a full-time basis (compared with 1.2 per cent in 1900, 2.7 per cent in 1938, 5.8 per cent in 1954, and 8.3 per cent in 1960); another three million people enrolled for part-time day classes, evening classes or sandwich courses.</p> <p>Bilton, Bonnett, Jones, Stanworth, Sheard &amp; Webster (1981, p. 381)</p>
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Outright copying is when a student uses exactly the same words as the original author without using quotation marks or saying where the words are from. For example:

Student's text	While the Education Act of 1870 laid the groundwork for the provision of elementary or primary education for all children in England and Wales, it was not until the implementation of the 1944 Education Act that all girls and boys were entitled to a secondary education. Indeed, the decades immediately following the Second World War saw such a rapid increase in educational provision - in the USA, and many countries of Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in Britain - that some writers refer to the 'educational explosion' of the 1950s and 1960s.
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Paraphrase plagiarism is changing some of the words and grammar but leaving most of the original text the same. For example:

Student's text	The Education Act of 1870 put down the basis for providing primary education for every child in the United Kingdom. It was not, however, until the establishment of the 1944 Education Act that all male and female children were given the right to education at secondary school.
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Patchwork plagiarism is when parts of the original author's words are used and connected together in a different way. For instance:

Student's text	The right to elementary education for every child in England and Wales was established in the 1870 Education Act. However, the right to secondary education had to wait until the implementation of the 1944 Education Act. Following that act, in many countries of the world, there was such a rapid increase in educational provision that it was called the 'educational explosion' of the 1950s and 1960s.
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Stealing an apt term is when a short phrase from the original text has been used in the students work, possibly because it is so good. For example:

Student's text	In England and Wales, all 5 year all children have had the right to an education since 1870. This has not, however, been the case for 11 year olds, who had to wait until 1944 for a national system of secondary education. Once this system was established, though, secondary education expanded rapidly in the decades immediately following the Second World War.
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See also Modern Language Association (2009, pp. 56-58).

## Advice

Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work as your own.

There are three main reasons why you should not do this:

1. It is not helpful.  
If you plagiarise, you are saying that something is your work when it is not. This is not good, you will not learn much from it and it will not get you good marks. In order to do well in higher education, you need to be responsible for the ideas and facts that you use. You need to provide evidence for these ideas and facts. You need to show where they have come from and what they are based on. You do this by acknowledging the sources, by citing. This will support your arguments and help you succeed in your academic writing. It will also show your lecturers that you have read and understood the required texts.
2. You need to come to your own conclusions.  
You need to show that you have understood the material and come to your own conclusions on the basis of what you have read and heard. Therefore copying from textbooks, or pasting text from the Internet into your own writing, is not good enough. Most of what you write will come from the ideas of other people (from the text books you read, the lectures and the seminars you attend, and your discussions with other students, etc.). This is what academic study is all about. However, you need to come to your own conclusions on the basis of what you have read, listened to, and discussed. The purpose of an essay is for you to say something for yourself using the ideas that you have studied, for you to present ideas you have learned in your own way. The emphasis should be on working with other people's ideas, rather than reproducing their words.
3. It is against the regulations.  
You must not use another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. This is against university regulations and is regarded as a very serious offence. It is also not helpful for you. If you plagiarise, your lecturer cannot understand how well you understand the course and cannot therefore give you useful advice and support. In addition, if you plagiarise, you are not learning. This will become obvious in any written examination you are required to take.

However, there is a difficult area here because, as a student, when you are doing assignments, you need to use what you have read or been taught in your lectures. In fact, this is an essential skill for every student. Spack (1988, p. 42) has pointed out that the most important skill a student can engage in is "the complex activity to write from other texts", which is "a major part of their academic experience." It is also difficult as Andrew Northedge points out in *The good study guide* (Northedge, 1990, p. 190)

You have to tread quite a fine line between being accused, on the one hand, of *not making enough* use of the writers you have been reading on the course, and, on the other, of *having*

*followed them too slavishly*, to the point of plagiarising them. One of your early tasks as a student is to get a feel for how to strike the right balance.

Much of what you write will come from the ideas of other people (from the text books you read, the lectures and the seminars you attend, and your discussions with other students, etc.). This is what academic study is all about. However, the ideas and people that you refer to need to be made explicit by a system of referencing - if you use another person's ideas or words, you must say where they are from. This will prevent you being accused of plagiarism and, furthermore, it will add support to your ideas and points of view.

You need to acknowledge the source of an idea unless it is common knowledge. It may be difficult to decide exactly what is common knowledge within your subject, but if your lecturer, in lectures or handouts, or your textbooks, do not acknowledge the source you can assume that it is common knowledge within your subject. For concepts and ideas which are generally accepted as valid within your specialism, there is no need to provide a reference. If in doubt, cite.

- Take notes in your own words. A good strategy is: read, put away your books and think, and then write your notes.
- Acknowledge quotations, even in your own notes. This will help you avoid accidental plagiarism when you copy from your own notes, not realising the words were copied from a textbook.
- If you use ideas of other people, be explicit about it. That is to say, cite the relevant author at the relevant point in your writing. It is then not possible for anyone to accuse you of cheating or stealing someone else's work. It will also help you by showing that you know the background