

Plagiarism #1

Plagiarism Definition

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the act of plagiarism as; "to steal and pass off ideas or words of another as one's own". Simply put, plagiarism is the process of taking other people's words and/or ideas and pretending that they are your own. An alternative definition of plagiarism is forwarded by the Collins Dictionary which explains that plagiarism is the practice of using someone else's work and pretending that it is your own. Plagiarism can also be defined as the act of deliberately trying to deceive your academic tutor by submitting content which is not your own work.

Has Plagiarism Been Getting Worse in Recent Years?

In recent years, chiefly due to the popularity of over the internet assignment purchases, plagiarism has gotten worse. There has been a spike in plagiarism across much of the academic institutions based in the UK. Indeed in the last 3 years alone, 50,000 students have been caught plagiarising. This figure does not allow for those students who have plagiarised and not been caught, thus illustrating the scale of the problem.

Why does it matter?

Plagiarism is a serious problem. If you as a student are caught plagiarising it can have **serious consequences** for your future academic and work career. Aside from the disciplinary perspective, plagiarism also harms the extent to which you as a student can learn whilst in years of academic study. When you cheat through plagiarism you are ultimately cheating yourself as you have spoiled the chance to learn and develop your knowledge on a specific subject. This learning and development skillset could stand you in good stead for later life so from all perspectives, plagiarism is something which should be avoided at all costs.

Common Ways that Students Plagiarise

Handing in an Essay That You Didn't Write

Typically, the most common trap students fall into is finding an essay online which concerns a similar research topic to which they have been working on and submitting it. Offline, some students have also relied on individuals from their peer groups to write their academic essay for them. In either case, these are examples of plagiarism. Chiefly because the words, ideas and critical arguments contained in those essays are not the work of the individual submitting it. Furthermore, it is important to note that with the ever-increasing number of essay answer websites, the issue of handing in an essay that was written by somebody else has proliferated hugely in recent years. Doing this is easily detectable by academic tutors as they are used to receiving your work written in your own individual style, so it is immediately noticeable when a new writing style appears.

Copy Words or Ideas from Someone Else's Work, Without Giving Credit

Often in the process of completing academic work, a student will come across an idea or line of work within the existing literature which answers their essay or research question almost exactly. Students often use such sources verbatim without giving due credit to the original author of the ideas and work. To avoid falling into this particular trap, students should consider revising how to reference academic content effectively, which is another service the Viper software provides.

Failing to Put a Quote in Quotation Marks

Some academic students also fall foul of not putting quotes in quotation marks therefore it appears that they have simply copied the work without giving credit to the original author. When a student takes material from books and academic journals and use it word for word, verbatim, they must ensure that they implement quotation marks. It is not enough to copy a large section of text and give a reference – you also need to use quotation marks to illustrate that it is a direct quote. This form of plagiarism although seemingly easy to counteract occurs highly frequently in the world of academia as it is much easier and quicker to insert quotes without referencing them appropriately. Unfortunately, by doing this, it detracts massively from the students work and also results in them being viewed as untrustworthy and inauthentic by the academic institution which they are studying in.

Giving Incorrect Information About the Source of a Quotation

When researching a book or academic journal, it can often be tempting for students to utilise the source list cited by these works to overstate the level of reading which they have carried out. Unless the student has actually read some of the pieces cited in the source lists of these original texts, this can also be considered as an element of plagiarism. This is because the student has misrepresented the true extent of their readership outside the classroom and as in-depth reading is an area where a student can attain higher marks, this constitutes a clear act of plagiarism.

Copying Sentence Structure, But Changing Words Around, Without Giving Credit

It is also not enough to simply reword what another academic author has said without reworking the structure of their critical arguments. This is still considered plagiarism in the world of academia because the student is still guilty of copying the structure of the authors arguments which is a key element of their delivery of ideas. Moreover, how a sentence is structured is vital to the point the author is trying to put across or the analytical comment in which they are trying to advance. It is therefore important for the student to showcase that they can restructure the sentence accordingly to put forward their own original idea or interpretation.

Copying so Many Words or Ideas From a Source That it Makes up the Majority of Your Work, Whether You Give Credit or Not

Some students stream large parts of their essay from the work of existing authors in the field. Despite giving proper credit through referencing, most of their work is still composite of other people's ideas and critical arguments and the students own critical insights regarding the subject matter never emerge. It is important for the student to demonstrate that they have the capacity to interpret the complex research topic and rely on their own analytical skills to advance critical comment. This is where the student can receive high marks because in the world of academia, the disproportionate number of marks are earned through the researcher being able to critically analyse the theory in which they are studying. If the researcher copies too many ideas or words from other authors it conversely demonstrates that they have limited capacity in being able to advance their own critical viewpoints and judgements.

Self-Plagiarising

Although it sounds unlikely, a student can also be accused of plagiarising their own work and they often are, by using substantial sections of work streamed from previously submitted content. The key reason why this act is considered plagiarism is because a student cannot be awarded two grades/degrees for the same piece of work. Self-plagiarism is a key issue in the modern world of schools, colleges and universities as curriculums are becoming larger and larger thus increasing the risk of crossover with respect to certain subjects. Therefore, there is a high level of temptation for students to simply rely on the work which they have previously completed on the same subject or topic. In many cases students are not aware that this constitutes an act of plagiarism because they are the original author of the piece of work. However it is, and the penalty is just as severe as would be the case with any of the other methods of plagiarism listed in this section.

Who Cares if I Plagiarise?

You Should. There are also a variety of other stakeholders to consider when you cheat as a student such as your academic institution and future employers.

There are two core, fundamental reasons why students should not plagiarise academic content:

1. Plagiarism is stealing: Stealing other people's work ideas, critical arguments and sentence structure. Morally, it is a similar act to stealing a car or anything else. The concept remains the same. As a student, if somebody else stole your ideas, how would you feel?
2. Plagiarism represents information illiteracy: If you plagiarise somebody else's work, you are implying that you are incapable of expressing your own thoughts and ideas in an eloquent enough manner to attain a high-grade classification. In essence, being caught plagiarising is an admission of illiteracy in handling information which is not an impression that you want to create as a student. It can also have several adverse effects with respect to the students ability to enter gainful employment in the future.

The after effects of being caught plagiarising are really quite profound. If caught plagiarising, the immediate outcome is that the student has proven themselves to be lazy and untrustworthy. These attributes are not only immediately detrimental to the success of their academic pursuits but could also cross over into their capacity to attain a high paying career in the future. From the perspective of a potential employer, there is little value in recruiting an employee who has already proven themselves to be lazy and dishonest before they have even completed a shift for the company. It is in no way an act of overstatement to suggest that this happens, and it very often does as academic referees are vital in obtaining gainful employment later in life.

Instead, the main aim for modern students should be to attain information literacy. Information literacy is essential in ensuring that students do not plagiarise academic content. This concept is defined as; "knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) (CLIP, 2018, p.1). An alternative definition of information literacy is the capacity for students to use source texts as a basis for developing their own ability to think critically about a subject matter. The key benefit to a student developing their capabilities in the field of information literacy is that they increase their likelihood of attaining a higher-grade classification at the end of the academic year.

Plagiarism #2

What is plagiarism in professional practice and how can it be managed and ideally prevented?

Plagiarism is the concept of presenting other people's content, words, or ideas as if they're your own. Often found occurring in educational settings, the practice can have a significant impact if discovered, ranging from severe academic penalties to fines or even expulsion. In schools, colleges, and universities, considerable effort is made to ensure it isn't taking place, using online tools and systems to check and cross-reference content for originality and correct citation of sources.

The ever-increasing accessibility of online resources enables students and professional learners to usefully obtain endless amounts of material to support them in understanding the context of their qualification and prepare for assessments and coursework. However, this also means there are a plethora of opportunities for content to be plagiarised, without giving suitable acknowledgment of authorship, or reference to other's work.

In professional learning environments, the landscape is slightly different, but the problem persists. For vocational training, there is an additional cost for the employer if a professional learner is found to have broken the plagiarism rules.

Recently, the rising impact of balancing work and professional studying has significantly contributed to malpractice, as work, lives, development, and health all come under intense pressure. An increasing concern is how this malpractice may relate to the professionalism of an individual in their role, and whether they have the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to do their jobs effectively, following completion of their qualification.

While in key sectors such as police, fire & rescue, and health and social care, students risk tarnishing the profession and harming the reputation of vocational learning for their sector. Consequently, it's vital that employers delivering vocational training demonstrate and encourage a culture of honesty and fairness and provide adequate opportunities for learners to raise the alarm when they are struggling under increased pressure.

Why is plagiarism so common as a form of malpractice in vocational training?

There are a variety of reasons why a professional learner may consider plagiarism to help them pass assessments or exams. The obvious and conscious choice is to improve your chances of performance, possibly due to the lack of time to conduct research or a lack of consideration for the consequences.

Learners under intense pressure, who may fear failure, are more likely to commit plagiarism as they feel there is no alternative to pass their qualification or assessment.

In some circumstances, a professional learner may commit plagiarism less intentionally, by using excerpts from research or other sources, unwittingly copying content, without referencing it. This 'accidental plagiarism' occurs when a person does not cite or might misquote their sources, or inadvertently paraphrases another person by using similar words, phrases, or sentence structure without referencing the original author or source.

Why is it important to support learners who may commit plagiarism?

Delivering vocational training takes a considerable amount of resources, time, and effort, from both the learner and the employer. In the public sector, these demands are intensified with limited budgets, and the strain on services such as the Police, Fire & Rescue Services, and Emergency Services ever increasing.

It's critical that employers have a pipeline of skilled learners undergoing training to become the workforce of tomorrow. Meeting Government recruitment, training, and apprenticeship targets further add to the weight of needing to have as many trained professionals working to support the public, as possible. Recruitment is already a huge challenge, as seen in the recent Police Uplift Programme, as Police Services battle to meet the Governments' "20,000" target, whilst continuing to support ongoing learning and development of the existing workforce.

With these added pressures, it's vital that learners' progression through training is effective and efficient and enables them to go on to become trusted and highly skilled professionals for the service, for many years. The impact of malpractice on these ongoing demands to recruit, train and deliver means that it's critical employers and training providers put in the necessary steps to reduce the risk of malpractice and plagiarism throughout a learners' professional qualification, and any future training.

What can employers do to support those at-risk of committing plagiarism?

There is clearly a range of reasons someone may fall into a position where they are considering committing plagiarism. Once the act is done and has been discovered, there are of course regulations and processes to follow to judge the appropriate penalty for the professional learner

More importantly, how can employers prevent plagiarism before it's happened?

A learner who is also in employment may be under increased pressure whilst doing their role and juggling professional learning alongside. It's vital to ensure there is appropriate support and time allocation for learners to conduct their qualification, not just for assessment, but throughout.

A professional learner may show signs of distress, and therefore appropriate mentoring and support for mental health and wellbeing, as with all staff, should be readily available and ongoing during employment and studying.

A good way of preventing plagiarism from occurring is by providing a network of support to learners. While there is no excuse for plagiarism and it is always wrong, if employers can better appreciate and recognise the demands a professional learner is facing to balance work, life, and study, providing encouragement, then a learner may feel less 'isolated' and less tempted to offend.

Practice exams can also be incredibly useful for tutors to carefully assess the level of understanding learners' have on a given subject, identify areas for improvement and prepare for the real thing.

Ultimately, the more supported and adjusted a learner is, and with adequate dispensations, for circumstances that could lead to them being in a position they feel they need to plagiarise to pass, should prevent and reduce the risk of malpractice.

These good practices throughout vocational training will set the tone for employees as they progress in their careers and, we hope, embrace life-long learning to enhance skills, flexibility, and jobs.

Intellectual Property & Software Laws

Intellectual Property Rights in Software – What They Are and How to Protect Them

People talk a lot in the information technology business about “intellectual property rights.” But what are they? How do they apply to software technology? Why should you protect them? How do you protect them?

Intellectual property rights are at the foundation of the software industry. The term refers to a range of intangible rights of ownership in an asset such as a software program. Each intellectual property “right” is itself an asset, a slice of the overall ownership pie. The law provides different methods for protecting these rights of ownership based on their type.

There are essentially four types of intellectual property rights relevant to software: patents, copyrights, trade secrets and trademarks. Each affords a different type of legal protection. Patents, copyrights and trade secrets can be used to protect the technology itself. Trademarks do not protect technology, but the names or symbols used to distinguish a product in the marketplace. We’ll save a discussion of trademarks for a later issue.

Patents

A patent is a twenty year exclusive monopoly on the right to make, use and sell a qualifying invention. This legal monopoly is considered a reward for the time and effort expended in creating the invention. In return, the invention must be described in detail to the Patent Office, which publishes the information, thus increasing the amount of technological knowledge available to the public.

To obtain a U.S. patent, an inventor must apply to the Patent Office and demonstrate that the invention is new (as compared to prior technology), useful, and “nonobvious.” An invention is nonobvious if it is more than a trivial, obvious next step in the advance of the technology.

Software patents can be extremely powerful economic tools. They can protect features of a program that cannot be protected under copyright or trade secret law. For example, patents can be obtained for ideas, systems, methods, algorithms, and functions embodied in a software product: editing functions, user-interface features, compiling techniques, operating system techniques, program algorithms, menu arrangements, display presentations or arrangements, and program language translation methods.

Since patent rights are exclusive, anyone making, using or selling the patented invention without the patent owner's authorization is guilty of infringement. Penalties are stiff and include triple damages. Once a patent for an invention is granted, subsequent "independent" (i.e., without access to the patented technology) development of the invention by another inventor is still considered infringement.

Copyrights

While a patent can protect the novel ideas embodied in a software program, a copyright cannot. Copyright protection extends to the particular form in which an idea is expressed. In the case of software, copyright law would protect the source and object code, as well as certain unique original elements of the user interface.

As discussed in last month's issue, the owner of a copyrighted software program has certain exclusive rights (with some exceptions): the right to copy the software, create derivative or modified versions of it, and distribute copies to the public by license, sale or otherwise. Anyone exercising any of these exclusive rights without permission of the copyright owner is an infringer and subject to liability for damages or statutory fines.

As with patents, the exclusive rights afforded under copyright law are intended to reward the creative and inventive efforts of the "author" of the copyrighted work. The exclusive right to control duplication protects the owner of copyrighted software against the competition that would result from verbatim copying of the program's code. Copyright law also protects against indirect copying, such as unauthorized translation of the code into a different programming language.

Copyright protection arises automatically upon the creation of an original work of authorship. There is no need to "apply" for a copyright or register the copyrighted work in order for protection to exist. Generally, the duration of a copyright is the author's life plus fifty years. In the case of software created by an employee in the course of his or her employment, the resulting "work made for hire" would be protected by copyright law for seventy-five years from publication.

In contrast with patents, independent development of a copyrighted work is a defense to an allegation of copyright infringement. Imagine, though, how unlikely it would be for the same thousands of lines of code to be created independently by one not engaged in unauthorized copying. Unlike patents, copyright law affords no protection to the ideas underlying the program. Ideas and concepts are fair game for competitors to the extent they are not protected by patents or trade secrets.

Trade Secrets

A trade secret is any formula, pattern, compound, device, process, tool, or mechanism that is not generally known or discoverable by others, is maintained in secrecy by its owner, and gives its owner a competitive advantage because it is kept secret. The classic example of a trade secret is the formula to Coca-Cola.

A trade secret can theoretically last forever — for as long as its owner uses reasonable efforts to keep it secret and someone else doesn't independently create or “discover” it.

Many features of software, such as code and the ideas and concepts reflected in it, can be protected as trade secrets. This protection lasts as long as the protected element retains its trade secret status. Unlike patents, trade secret protection will not extend to elements of software that are readily ascertainable by lawful means, such as reverse engineering or independent development.

Trade secrets are not subject to being “infringed,” as with patents and copyrights, but are subject to theft. Their legal status as a protectable intellectual property right will be upheld if the owner can prove the trade secret was not generally known and reasonable steps were taken to preserve its secrecy.

Maximizing the economic value of a software asset critically depends on understanding the nature of the intellectual property rights involved and how best to use the available forms of legal protection to protect those rights.