

Plagiarism

And how to avoid it

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual dishonesty or theft. When a person plagiarises s/he 'steals' someone else's words or ideas by passing them off as their own.

In the University of Melbourne's *Policy on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism*, plagiarism is defined as: 'the use of another person's work without acknowledgment' (University of Melbourne, 2002, para. 2). It is important to note that this definition extends beyond words printed in text and refers to all the elements in someone else's work including: ideas and arguments; images such as diagrams, charts and pictures; compositions; and the organisational structure of a text (Carroll, 2002).

Plagiarism comes in various forms. Some examples include:

- Direct duplication, by copying another's work. This includes copying from a book, article, web site or another student's assignment
- Paraphrasing (rewriting in your own words) another person's work with minor changes, but keeping the meaning, form and/or progression of ideas of the original
- Piecing together sections of the work of others into a new whole
- Submitting an assignment that has already been submitted for assessment in another subject
- Presenting an assignment as independent work when it has been produced in whole or part in collusion with other people, for example another student or a tutor (The University of Melbourne, 2002, para.3).

Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is avoided by accurately acknowledging the sources of ideas, written expressions and images. You need to acknowledge your sources whenever you make use of others' work.

Remember that your tutor will assume that any writing, information or ideas that are not referenced are the result of your own thinking and expression – that is, that they are solely your own work.

What do I have to acknowledge?

- Direct quotations
- Paraphrases (restatements in your own words) of another person's words and ideas
- Summaries of another person's ideas



- Tables, figures, graphs, diagrams or images obtained from any source
- Information obtained from personal communication and lectures

What does not have to be acknowledged?

- Your own ideas
- Common knowledge (information generally well known in the public domain), including facts available from various general reference books such as textbooks, dictionaries or encyclopedias. Statistics or direct quotes taken from these sources should still be cited, however.

Successfully acknowledging your sources

While some plagiarism is intentional, most cases are unintentional and result from incorrect or inappropriate use of sources. In order to avoid plagiarism, you must be able to recognise the difference between acceptable and unacceptable use of sources.

Look at the passage from Janet Yong's article below (source text for the information) and the five versions of writing that follow. Pay special attention to the comments explaining why the first four versions are unacceptable.

Original text:

'The Internet has changed the appearance of libraries and how librarians work today. The library is no longer confined to the four walls of a building. It has, instead, extended into cyberspace. Many librarians have gone into cyberspace to locate on line resources (p.294).'

From: Yong, Janet Y. (2001) Malay/Indonesian speakers. In M. Swan and B. Smith (Eds) *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*. (pp. 279 - 295) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Version 1:

Today, the Internet has changed the appearance of libraries and how librarians work and the library is no longer confined to the four walls of a building. Instead, the library has extended into cyberspace and so many librarians go into cyberspace to locate on-line resources.

x

Comments: This version is a clear example of plagiarised work. Much of it has been copied directly from the original without acknowledgement.

Version 2:

Today, the Internet has changed the appearance of libraries and how librarians work and the library is no longer confined to the four walls of a building. Instead, the library has extended into cyberspace and so many librarians go into cyberspace to locate online resources (Yong, 2001: 294).

x

Comments: This is still plagiarised work. Although this version has acknowledged the source of the information by providing an in-text reference, the writer has not put quotation marks around the words copied directly from the original text (direct quotations).

Version 3:

The library is no longer confined to the four walls of a building. It has, instead, extended into cyberspace and many librarians have gone into cyberspace to locate on-line resources. The Internet has thus changed the appearance of libraries and how librarians work (Yong, 2001: 294).

x

Comments: This paragraph also constitutes a plagiarised piece of work as the sentences have merely been re-arranged and most of the original wording has been copied without acknowledgement. Rearranging is not paraphrasing – paraphrasing requires the writer to reformulate the ideas in the original text in their own words.

Version 4:

Recent developments in Internet technologies have brought about a major transformation of libraries and the way that librarians conduct their work. Extending beyond the physical space of the library itself, many resources are now found on-line and are therefore easily accessed by library users and librarians alike.

x

Comments: In this version, the writer shows an understanding of the topic and has paraphrased effectively by using the information (rather than the words) of the original text to create a more original piece of work. However, the writer has failed to acknowledge the original source of information and therefore has plagiarised.

Version 5:

Recent developments in Internet technologies have brought about a major transformation of libraries and the way that librarians conduct their work. Extending beyond the physical space of the library itself, many resources are now found on-line and are therefore easily accessed by library users and librarians alike (Yong, 2001: 294).

✓

Comments: This writer uses the original text appropriately. The paragraph shows the writer's understanding of the topic and lets the reader know that the information has been obtained from another source.

Consequences of plagiarism

Plagiarism can have very serious consequences for you in your future studies. If found guilty of plagiarism, you may be:

- Required to undertake additional assessment in the subject
- Given a mark of zero for the piece of assessment
- Given a fail grade for the subject
- Referred to the Discipline Committee under Statute 13.1.3. for Academic Misconduct which may result in termination of enrolment and expulsion from the University.

For more information on the University's policy on plagiarism and the possible penalties see: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/plagiarism/policy.html>

And remember: *Ignorance is no excuse for plagiarism and you may face serious consequences for plagiarising, even if it is unintentional or 'accidental'.*

Further information

The Language and Learning Skills Unit has additional information on avoiding plagiarism and acknowledging sources. Refer to the LLSU website:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/resources/writing.html>

Additional resources on plagiarism

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/plagiarism/advice.html>

<http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html

<http://www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html>

Works cited

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

University of Melbourne (2002). University Policy on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism, [online] *University of Melbourne Student Services Website*. URL:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/plagiarism/policy.html> (14/10/2002) [Date accessed: 11/11/2003]

Yong, Janet Y. (2001). Malay/Indonesian speakers. In M. Swan and B. Smith (Eds) *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*. (pp. 279-295) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.