

Avoiding Plagiarism

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is incorporating someone else's work into your work without giving proper credit to the original source. Citations let your audience know what work is yours and what is the work of others. Failure to cite sources properly is a serious breach of ethics, inside and outside the academic world.

Why care about Plagiarism?

In a university setting, intellectual development requires both individual learning and honest exchange of ideas among knowledgeable people of various cultures and talents. Plagiarism undermines both of these basic goals of education.

Undermines individual learning: Individual learning takes place when a student really "tackles" and masters their material. If a student merely takes other people's work and presents it as their own, they bypass the education-process, which may be difficult, but worthwhile.

Undermines honest exchange of ideas: As a university community, we rely on trustworthy information, and honesty in presentation of ideas. Students and faculty learn from each other in a research community when each member respects the hard work that others have done, and everyone works to advance our knowledge together. Plagiarism is fundamentally dishonest: it fails to acknowledge the value of the work being plagiarized, it disrespects both teachers and fellow students, it fails to "contribute" new ideas, and it provides an unfair "advantage" to the plagiarist – if only in the short-run.

University Policy/Student Handbook:

Because the university promotes education and values trustworthy research, your professors expect that you will use information ethically in your work. Penalties for plagiarism (whether intentional or unintentional) can range from loss of credit for an assignment/course, to being suspended/expelled from the university. Citing sources correctly is a serious responsibility, so if you need help, be sure to ask.

Where does your work begin & end?

Incorporating "someone else's work" means directly or indirectly including another person's words, ideas, data, music, methodology, etc, as if it were your own work. When reviewing your work, consider how what you are saying is related-to or inspired-by what you heard, saw or read elsewhere. Those sources could have been published or unpublished, examples include:

Printable sources like a book, an article, an email, information from a website, an essay by a friend, a letter from your grandmother, a photo chart or graphic, etc.

Non-print sources like a conversation with a co-worker or classmate, a radio program, song, etc.

How do I give "proper credit"?

Direct quotes require the use of quotation marks to set off the exact wording, and a citation note to let the audience know who said those words. If you **paraphrase** another person's words or put their **ideas** into your own words, you need to cite that within the paper or presentation. If you were inspired by an **image** or added background **music** to a presentation, you should credit the artist/s, and include the title of the work. For more details on proper citation, see the **Citing Sources/RefWorks** section of the library website.

What about "common knowledge"?

Common-knowledge is information that many people are likely to know, so it does not need to be cited. For example, it is common knowledge that "New York City is a multicultural city", but it is not common knowledge that "there are about 64,000 Koreans residing in Queens". The first statement doesn't need a citation, the latter does (2000, U.S. Census data, InfoShare).

Note: while information on the web is "freely available," that does not make it "common knowledge." Be very careful of unintentional plagiarism when using websites as a source.

Where can I get more help?

Make an appointment with your professor, consult with a Reference librarian; attend a library workshop, or make an appointment with a tutor at the Institute for Writing Studies.