

# 14 Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is the practice of using or copying someone else's idea or work and pretending that you thought of it or created it. It's seen by professors/lecturers as one of the biggest problems they encounter in students' written work. It's not just a problem for international students. Some home students plagiarize other people's work too.

One of the biggest problems, from a student's point of view, is trying to understand what plagiarism is, exactly. Students will sometimes be accused of plagiarism when they weren't actually trying to plagiarize or cheat. This is because students need to reference other people's work properly when they write an essay. Here are the most common forms of plagiarism.

## Types of plagiarism

1. Turning in someone else's work and presenting it as your own—this usually happens when a student pays someone to write their essay for them, and hands it in. This is the worst and most serious form of plagiarism.
2. Patchworking—in this situation, a student takes other people's words and ideas from several different sources and presents them as their own. They will “patch” them together, like a patchwork quilt, with some of their own work in between to try to trick their professor/lecturer.
3. Incorrect, or not enough, citation or referencing of other people's work—this is the less serious form of plagiarism.

## Getting caught

Your professors/lecturers are usually very good at spotting plagiarism. When they read something, they can tell if it

doesn't sound like your own work. Professors/Lecturers will also probably use plagiarism software to check your essays for originality. So spotting plagiarism is not usually difficult.

Working out the student's intention is more difficult, and this is very important when trying to decide what form of punishment a student will receive for plagiarism. As we've said, though most plagiarism cases are definite examples of cheating, some plagiarism is unintentional, or not actually planned.

If you have committed plagiarism type 1, you were clearly planning to present someone else's work as your own. That is the most serious form of plagiarism because it's simply cheating by stealing someone else's work.

"Patchworking" is also presenting someone else's work as your own. Students who do this don't always realize that this is considered to be as bad as plagiarism type 1 in English-speaking countries. Sometimes students who are not confident about their ability to write good English do this because they're trying to use as much "good English" from other sources as they can in their work. This is not what your professor/lecturer wants you to do, and it'll be obvious when you need to link sections with your own English. You must learn to paraphrase the other sources you're using. Paraphrasing means taking the ideas and information you see in books and articles written by English-speaking experts and putting them in your own words. Don't worry that you can't write as "beautifully" as a native speaker: it's much better to submit work in imperfect English that shows you understand the topic and know how to use sources properly.

If you've done your own work, but fail to present your sources and citations correctly, that's a problem, but much less serious in most cases than types 1 or 2.

**intention (noun):** An intention is an idea or plan of what you are going to do.

## What happens if I get caught?

If you're caught plagiarizing, these are some of the possible consequences.

- You'll have to do your assignment or write your essay again.
- You'll fail your assignment or get zero marks for your essay.
- You'll fail the course.
- You'll be expelled from your college/university.
- You'll have a note on your permanent academic record to say that you plagiarized.

In most cases, you'll at least fail the assignment, and possibly fail the course. In some cases, being expelled is a possibility.

**expel (verb):** If someone is expelled from an organization, they are officially told to leave because they have behaved badly.

## The process

In many situations, your professor/lecturer or tutor will ask to speak to you privately about the plagiarism found in your work, and will quiz you about where your ideas came from. If your professor/lecturer isn't happy with your explanations, he or she will then explain the consequences. If you're lucky, you might be given a chance to write the paper again, but in your own words and showing your own work.

At many colleges/universities, where the consequences might include failing the course or being expelled from the program or college, you'll also be put through a hearing because being accused of plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct (bad behavior). This is usually a difficult process that involves a lot of preparation and possible public embarrassment if the professors/lecturers on the hearing committee agree with your professor/lecturer.

**hearing (noun):** A hearing is an official meeting which is held in order to collect facts about an incident or problem.

## How to avoid plagiarism

One of the big questions for a student is: how do I avoid being accused of plagiarism? To do this your written work must have correct citation and referencing, where all the words and ideas that are referred to in your papers are given credit.

Citation is not just about avoiding plagiarism. We also use it to:

- give credit to other people's ideas and words that you're using;
- show that you can support your ideas with useful statements from others' work (you can use someone else's ideas to support your ideas or you can present other people's ideas as ones that are wrong, in your opinion);
- help the reader find the sources of your citations to study those people's work;
- show that you have a deep understanding of your subject and how other people's work relates to your work within that subject.

The last point is especially important. In all fields, the work of others helps to support and leads to the ideas of the next person. Here's an example of a great idea that wasn't possible without the ideas and work that came before it:

Sir Isaac Newton could not have reached his Theory of Gravity without the work of Galileo and philosophers such as René Descartes, which influenced him greatly. Their ideas were necessary to reach Newton's new ideas on gravity.

### In-text citation

Here's an example of part of a modern research paper citing someone else's work:

As stated in *Human Learning*, “Instructional practices can have a significant impact on how students mentally process classroom material and thus also on how effectively students learn,” yet there is little instructional practice going on other than the ineffective suggestions mentioned previously (Ormrod, 2012).

You can see here how a statement by Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, a well-known educational psychologist, is cited. In this situation, there’s also a direct quotation of text used to illustrate a point the author of the paper is trying to make.

With this citation, the author is giving credit to another author, and using her words to support something new that the author is trying to discuss in the research paper. There’s no confusion as to who’s saying what, so there’s no plagiarism here.

### **When do I need to cite something in my paper?**

You must always cite, or give credit to the original author, whenever you:

- paraphrase: put someone’s idea into different words;
- quote: use someone’s direct words in speech or writing;
- summarize: explain someone’s statement in a shorter way, including the main ideas;
- refer: talk about or mention someone or their ideas.

### **Forms of citation**

As we mentioned briefly in Chapter 11, you’ll need to follow a style guide either produced by your college/university (as is common in the UK) or by a national organization, such as the Modern Languages Association (MLA), Vancouver style, or various others, as used throughout the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia.

The style guide that your professor/lecturer uses is usually used throughout that field of study. Your syllabus will tell you exactly which style you must follow.

## Reference list

After citing your references in the text itself, you must also prepare a reference list.

This comes at the end of your paper, in a list in alphabetical order. The purpose of the reference list is for the reader to be able to find the source that you've cited from. Your professors/lecturers also use it to check the references you've used for evidence in your paper.

The way you reference something will depend on:

- the style guide you're using;
- the thing you're referencing.

Possible sources to use for citation and then to list in your references:

- books
- textbooks
- journal articles
- websites
- lectures
- interviews

Basically, almost anything can be used as a source of evidence.

### **Do I only need to use citation in papers and essays?**

No, sometimes you will have to use in-text citation for other written work, including quizzes/tests, open book tests, and online discussion forums.

### **Attention to detail**

Many students complain that style guides are much too detailed and specific. Many, such as the American Psychology Association (APA), are incredibly detailed. All we can say about that is that you're going to have to get used to it. No one enjoys worrying about the level of detail required for citation and referencing, however, all college/

university students have to get used to it and accept it as just one of the many things you must learn to do well. Home and international students alike will often lose points in their essays or papers if they do not use citations and references correctly. So take time to learn to use citations and proofread them for common mistakes such as missing commas, spacing, or dates.

If you continue with your studies, for example by doing a PhD, you'll be likely to use referencing software, but you'll still need to understand the general principles to do this well.