



# Avoiding Plagiarism

*As a new student you have probably already heard the terms plagiarism or academic dishonesty in your lectures or course materials. In your previous studies you may not have had experience with these concepts. However, when studying at tertiary level these are very important issues that you must become familiar with as the University 'regards all plagiarism as unacceptable' (The University of Adelaide 2004, p3). This guide will explain what plagiarism and academic dishonesty are and how to avoid them.*

## What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a concept that is important in referencing within academic writing. At the University of Adelaide it has been defined as 'using another person's ideas, designs, words or works, without appropriate acknowledgement' (The University of Adelaide 2004, p2). Sometimes this is done deliberately where the student intentionally copies another's work without acknowledgement. This is called 'academic dishonesty'. Many times, however, particularly with new students, plagiarism 'can occur as a result of inadequate understanding of the procedures of appropriate referencing or because of a lack of skills in academic writing' (The University of Adelaide 2004, p3). This is called unintentional or inadvertent plagiarism.

Lecturers realise that learning how to reference appropriately is a developmental process where you will improve through experience and feedback. However, they do expect you to begin from the first assignment to use referencing and to consciously work on avoiding plagiarism in your writing.

## Types of plagiarism

The University takes plagiarism very seriously and penalties may be given which could include preclusion or expulsion from a course in some cases. Five main forms of plagiarism have been identified as academic dishonesty in the policy document of the University of Adelaide:

- I. Presenting work in any format, without appropriate attribution to the original source.
- II. Paraphrasing sentences or whole paragraphs without due acknowledgement by reference to the original work.
- III. Submitting assessment work with the intention to deceive the assessor as to the contribution made by the student submitting the work.
- IV. Students separately submitting the same piece of work with the intention to deceive the assessor as to the contribution they have made to the assessment work.
- V. A student submitting the same piece of his or her own work for two (or more) different courses, without the assessor's permission

(The University of Adelaide 2004, p5).

To read the University's policy on plagiarism in more detail please refer to:

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/policies/?230>

The rest of this guide will suggest ways of dealing with the first two points above as inadvertent plagiarism is often a problem for new students.

## Avoiding plagiarism

The first step to avoiding plagiarism is to understand the essential characteristics of tertiary study and academic writing. When you are writing at tertiary level, you place yourself into a research tradition. This means you acknowledge that at least some aspects of what you are writing about have been dealt with before (McGowan 2005).

In the case of essays you must analyse the question or topic that has been set, and respond to it. Your response is usually expected to be an 'argument' or personal point of view, using information from the literature (sources) to support that point of view; or you may want to contradict certain points of view found in the literature (again, supporting your critique by reference to authors whose views are similar to your own).

You can achieve this by using your *reading* to support your *writing*: finding those language items (words, phrases, sentence structures) that are commonly used in your readings. These are 'right' (or appropriate) for your specific discipline and can therefore be *re-used* in your essay without plagiarising (McGowan 2003).

As an academic writer you must pay close attention (analyse) not just *what* is said in the literature, but *how* it is said. If you find certain phrases and sentence structures that are used over again by different authors, you can assume that you can use them too, but make sure you use them to express your own point of view. You can build up a stock of language 'chunks' that are generally used in the articles you are reading.

Another way to avoid plagiarism is by consistently and accurately using some form of referencing system. There are many types of referencing systems including the author-date or Harvard system; APA (Australian Psychology Association); the number system (as used in Engineering); and the footnoting system. Different schools and disciplines have different preferred options regarding which system to use. It is best to ask your school for specific guidelines.

Regardless of which referencing system you use, you will need to acknowledge the source of all your material in assignments including direct quotes, paraphrased and summarised material. Various tools are available to university lecturers to detect plagiarism by electronic means. One available at the University of Adelaide is *Turnitin.com* which can identify any text that has been taken from the internet and makes it possible to detect many attempts at cheating. However, students can also use this tool (available on the University web page at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/plagiarism/staff/turnitin.html>) to upload their own work. This can be a valuable learning tool to make sure you have not accidentally plagiarised. Student access to *Turnitin.com* to check work before it is submitted for assessment will depend on the lecturer for the course. You will need to check with your lecturer whether this feature is available to students in your course.

## Paraphrasing and summarising

Paraphrasing is when you take the essence of what another writer has said and write this by using some of the commonly used language 'chunks' that make it clear you are re-telling someone else's ideas. You must, of course, still acknowledge where the original ideas came from by adding a reference. It is not sufficient to simply change one or two words and present the ideas as if they were your own. Lecturers are very familiar with their subject area and will easily recognise material that has been taken from another source or they may detect them by using electronic search engines or a service such as *Turnitin.com*.

When summarising, you pick out the main points of a passage, section or chapter. Again you should aim to write these by using the language of the discipline in which you are studying, clearly indicating, by the use of inverted commas (quotation marks), where there is a direct quote. Make sure that every quotation is copied exactly from the original. Having a clear and careful note making system will also help you to avoid plagiarism. For more information on note making skills please refer to the Note Making Guide in this series.

## When do I not have to acknowledge my sources?

Students often worry that they will be expected to reference or acknowledge absolutely everything they write in their assignments. They are concerned that this indicates they have no original thoughts or views on the material. As mentioned above, academic writing at a tertiary level involves constantly working with material written by experts in the field, synthesising their ideas and analysing the arguments being presented. These all require careful referencing. Your originality lies in the choices you make and the way you analyse and present them.

In each discipline area, however, there are examples of common knowledge material that does not need to be referenced. Examples include various mathematical and scientific formulae, medical terms and general concepts in law that are used regularly without reference to the original author. As you become more familiar with your discipline area and read more widely you will begin to notice what is considered common knowledge in your discipline and what needs to be referenced.

## Examples of writing to avoid plagiarism

### Original text

The box below contains a passage with information that a student wants to incorporate into his or her own writing:

The chunk of text known as the *paragraph* is a series of sentences, all of which relate to a particular point you want to make. This means that some paragraphs are very long and others are very short. Paragraphs are usually more than one sentence although a one-sentence paragraph can be electrifying. It's more common to have four or five sentences bunched together around one idea, and it's considered courteous for the writer to try and vary the length of those five sentences to assist understanding and prevent reader fatigue (Fox & Wilkinson 1993, p8).

(Note: this passage has been referenced using the Harvard referencing system.)

### Paraphrasing example 1

This box contains one example of the student attempting to incorporate the above ideas.

A paragraph is a series of sentences that relate to a certain point you wish to make. Some paragraphs will be long and others are short. They are usually more than one sentence long and more commonly have four or five sentences in them. To be a courteous writer it is important to vary the length of the sentence to assist the reader to understand and to prevent reader fatigue.

This writing is an example of plagiarism because there is no indication where the material has come from. The wording is also very similar to the original with only a few words changed. A lot of phrases and words have been directly copied from the original with no acknowledgement. The student would be considered to have plagiarised.

### Paraphrasing example 2

This box contains another attempt to incorporate information from the original passage:

According to Fox and Wilkinson (1993) a paragraph is a series of sentences that relate to a certain point you wish to make. Some paragraphs will be long and others are short. They are usually more than one sentence long and more commonly have four or five sentences in them. To be a courteous writer it is important to vary the length of the sentence to assist the reader to understand and to prevent reader fatigue (Fox & Wilkinson, 1993).

Although the writer has attempted to reference here, there is still a considerable amount of plagiarism. The words used are very similar to the original. It is not sufficient to simply change a word here or there. When paraphrasing or summarising a passage you must ensure that you are writing the material in your own combination of words and indicate clearly any sentences or parts of sentences you are copying directly from the original.

### Paraphrasing example 3

This box contains a more successful attempt to incorporate the ideas without plagiarizing:

According to Fox and Wilkinson (1993) paragraphs are developed around a central concept, incorporating a number of linked sentences. They suggest that the number of sentences in each paragraph can vary from one to many, and that sentences should be of varying lengths 'to assist understanding and prevent reader fatigue' (Fox & Wilkinson 1993, p8).

This writing acknowledges where the ideas came from and the student has used their own word combinations. The student has clearly indicated where there is a direct quote from the original text by using inverted commas and including the page number of the original text. This is an example of correct use of referencing to avoid plagiarism.

## Reference list or bibliography

The final step for avoiding plagiarism is to include a reference list or bibliography at the end of each piece of assessment listing all of the sources you have referred to in your assignment. In order to do this you will need to have all of the bibliographic details (author, date, name of book/article/journal/website, publisher etc) of each source you have used. The exact format for this list will vary from school to school so you will need to check what is expected for each course you do.

An excellent general overview of referencing which refers in some detail to the Harvard author-date system can be found at: <http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/students/Lguides/Harvard%202002.pdf>

## References

Fox, M & Wilkinson, L 1993, *English Essentials*, Macmillan Education Australia, Melbourne.

McGowan, U 2003, 'Plagiarism detection and prevention. Pedagogical implications for lectures of first year students'. In D. Nulty & N. Meyers (Eds) *7th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference Proceedings*. (CD-ROM pp1-7) Brisbane, Australia: QUT. Url: <http://www.qut.edu.au/talss/fye/papers-accepted.htm> (accessed 01/05/05).

McGowan, U 2005 (in press) 'Plagiarism detection and prevention: Are we putting the cart before the horse?' In A. Brew & C. Asmar (Eds) *Higher Education for a Changing World. Proceedings of the 2005 HERDSA Conference*, Sydney, July 3-6.

The University of Adelaide 2004, *Policy Statement & Guidelines on Plagiarism, Collusion and related Forms of Cheating*, Adelaide, viewed 15 April 2005, <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/policies/?230>>.

## Other useful sites

Turnitin research resources - [http://www.turnitin.com/research\\_site/e\\_home.html](http://www.turnitin.com/research_site/e_home.html)

If you require more assistance with avoiding plagiarism please contact the Language and Learning Service on 8303 5771.

Visit the LLS website for additional resources: [www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/lls/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/lls/)

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