

Respecting authorship through good academic practice is one of the key values of higher education in the UK

Plagiarism is the term used to describe the misuse of authorship. It is a serious academic offence and is treated as such by the University of Essex. These pages have been designed to develop your understanding of authorship and plagiarism so that you can adopt good academic practice. Whether unintentional or intentional, plagiarism is your responsibility. Ignorance is no excuse. Therefore please read these webpages carefully or download the accompanying [booklet](#).

## **What authorship is**

In order to fully understand plagiarism, it is important to first understand the concept of 'authorship'.

Authorship refers to the production and ownership of ideas and intellectual material, such as books, articles, images, etc.

The higher education system in the UK places great importance on recognising the producer and owner of material. Whereas in some cultures knowledge is thought of as communal property, in the United Kingdom it is considered to be individual property. Therefore, improper or incomplete acknowledgement of a source of information is treated as 'intellectual theft'. The proper name for this is 'plagiarism'.

The issue of ownership is complicated by the fact that some knowledge is said to be 'common knowledge'. Do not be alarmed by this: 'common knowledge' is dealt with later in these pages, in the section called ['what needs referencing'](#), which will help you to identify what needs to be referenced from what does not.

The concept of authorship affects all of your academic work, not just the way you are expected to apply referencing conventions. At University, you will be encouraged to develop your own ideas and construct your own knowledge, using established knowledge as a foundation. You will also be encouraged to 'find your voice', which means developing your own unique academic writing style - your 'authorial voice'. Understanding the concept of authorship is therefore not only important for avoiding plagiarism

## **What plagiarism is**

The University applies the following definition of plagiarism:

'Using or copying the work of others (whether written, printed or in any other form) without proper acknowledgement'

In brief, if you use the work of others, you must either quote it or paraphrase it, but whichever method you choose, you must include a citation and reference. Note the phrase 'proper acknowledgement' in the University's definition. A piece of work that is partially referenced (for example, work in which a quote is put in quotation marks but not attributed to anyone) is still classed as plagiarism: merely acknowledging that an idea or phrase is not your own is insufficient. Failing to specify the exact source will be considered plagiarism.

The meaning of some of these terms ('quote', 'paraphrase', 'citation' and 'reference') may not be completely clear to you. They will be explained in due course, but if you feel that lack of meaning is hindering your understanding, go to the section called 'key terms' now, before you proceed any further.

There are several different ways of committing plagiarism. The next section will take you through them.

## **Types of plagiarism ii**

You will be plagiarising if you:

- Submit the same piece of work for two different assignments, even if they are to different departments

You cannot submit exactly the same piece of work for two different assignments. If you have been rewarded for a piece of work once then you cannot expect to be rewarded again for the same piece; this is also true for different years of study, even if you are repeating a year. You will be cheating if you try to get two sets of marks for one piece of work. However, it is perfectly acceptable to refer to, or to use, material from your earlier assignments, so long as you make sure that you acknowledge the original source, even if that source is yourself.

- Submit written work produced collaboratively, unless this is specifically allowed

This is known as 'collusion'. Alternatively, if you are required to work with another person, it is simply 'collaboration'. Whereas in most cases of plagiarism, the second party (the person being plagiarised) is not involved directly with the first party (the

plagiariser), in cases of collusion, the first and second party work together to deceive a third party (the marker).

- Copy the work of another student, even if they have consented

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## **Common excuses**

Reasons given for committing plagiarism vary from fairly innocent or accidental mistakes to a deliberate intention to deceive. Unfortunately, no allowance is made for whether the act was intended or unintended, as we saw from the University definition of plagiarism.

Some common excuses (which are not accepted) are:

- Being unclear about what exactly plagiarism is
- Having deficient time management skills or being lazy - i.e. being too disorganised with deadlines to undertake and submit original work
- Having an ineffective method of note-taking - i.e. not always recording the source of information
- Feeling under extreme pressure to pass or succeed - whether it be financial, parental, cultural, etc.
- Having different cultural values / practising different academic conventions
- Mistakenly believing that it will be easy to get away with (see the section [how it will be detected](#))
- Knowing that the syllabus has stayed the same each year - i.e. having access to work from previous students
- Having unclear instructions for an assessment task (if in doubt, always clarify with your tutor)
- Having a lack of academic confidence (again, speak to your tutor or a study skills advisor)
- Being conditioned from secondary schooling - i.e. not being used to acknowledging sources (sorry, no excuse)

## **Common mistakes**

There are many reasons why acts of plagiarism occur, some of which are due to genuine mistakes that relate to referencing and note-taking practices. Some students make the mistake of thinking that plagiarism does not apply to every type of source material or to every type of assignment, but it does. Unfortunately, no allowance is made for whether the act was intended or unintended, as we saw from the University definition of plagiarism

Examples of some common mistakes include:

- "I thought it would be OK if I only included the source in my bibliography."
- "I made lots of notes for my essay and couldn't remember where I found the information."
- "I am familiar with other academic conventions"
- "I thought it would be OK to use material that I had purchased online."
- "I thought it would be OK to copy the text if I changed some of the words into my own."
- "I thought that plagiarism only applied to essays, I didn't know that it also applies to oral presentations/group projects, etc."
- "I didn't think I had to reference my tutor's notes."
- "I didn't think that you needed to reference material found on the web."
- "I left it too late and just didn't have time to reference my sources."

Please make sure that you do not make these mistakes. If you require any further guidance, you should contact your department.

## **Benefits of referencing**

Avoiding plagiarism is not the only reason for referencing. There are many others.

Benefits of referencing include:

- Receiving credit for your own hard work and research
- Demonstrating your intellectual integrity by conforming to agreed academic standards of good practice
- Receiving meaningful feedback from your tutor that is targeted to the level you are really at (not pretending to be)
- Contextualising your work to show how it relates to current research and debates
- Directing your reader to sources of information and enabling them to 'pick up the thread'

## **How to avoid plagiarism**

As well as having an understanding of what plagiarism is, you will also need to develop certain skills to fully protect yourself.

Some of the key academic skills you will need to develop are:

- Learning how to note-take effectively

Many instances of plagiarism can be traced back to the note-taking stage. Make sure you always record the reference details of your sources for ideas, quotations, and general information.

- Learning how to reference correctly

Most departments provide their own guidance on referencing; there is more than one system used around the University, so it is important that you follow your department's guidelines, where available. Usually, this information features in the

departmental Undergraduate Handbook. If there is no guidance available from your department, our [Talent Development Centre](#) can help.

- Learning how to paraphrase correctly

Paraphrasing is the practice of putting someone else's ideas into your own words. It is an alternative practice to quoting, but still requires a citation and reference, though not quotation marks. Only changing one or two words is NOT paraphrasing: you must rephrase the idea entirely, whilst still capturing its essence and meaning. And remember, paraphrasing is an extremely helpful exercise in clarifying your own understanding - it is not just a means of avoiding plagiarism.

## **Cheat-sites i**

There are a number of websites that sell essays. Some of the essays have been written by students, others claim that the essays have been written by experts. These websites are relatively easy to find, and vary enormously in both style and cost. You are strongly advised not to purchase or copy essays from these websites, as you will risk failing your assignment, receiving a mark of zero for the module, or even being required to withdraw.

Why would you download an essay from the web?

When you are preparing to write an essay or any other type of coursework, it might seem like a good idea to buy a complete essay on the topic. It might seem like another way you can research your topic.

For example:

- It would be helpful to read how somebody else has structured their essay on a particular topic .
- It would be helpful to compare your references and bibliographies with this essay.
- You might fully intend to reference the source in your own essay.

But you should not rely on essay websites to provide this information. If you would like any advice on appropriate source material you should speak to your tutor, who will be able to direct you to relevant material. Please remember that if you are having any difficulties with your assignment you should always contact your department for further support

## **Cheat-sites ii**

Anyone who is prepared to risk failing their assignment by using one of these cheat-sites should stop and ask themselves:

- How do I know that these essays are a reliable source of information on my topic?
- If I am aware of this cheat-site, are the other students also using it and submitting the same essay?
- If I am aware of this cheat-site, is my tutor also going to have seen it?
- What will happen if I submit the essay as my own work and get caught?
- Do I realise that I'm cheating?

Whatever your reasons, you are strongly advised not to [purchase essays](#) from websites. If you submit an essay, or part of an essay, which you have bought or copied from a website as your own work, then you will be plagiarising and risk failing your assignment.