



Avoiding plagiarism

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What is plagiarism?

At university you are expected to provide evidence to support points you are making. This evidence will come from a range of sources that you must acknowledge by using an accepted referencing system. Failing to acknowledge your sources results in the most common form of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is to take someone's words or ideas and present them as your own (Marshall & Rowland, 1998). This means that when a person presents ideas or words as if they are their own, they have plagiarised. This inappropriate use of ideas from books, articles, the internet, or other student's work is regarded as plagiarism.

Plagiarism is academic dishonesty and is regarded very seriously. See the University of South Australia's [policy on plagiarism](#).

This policy recognises that plagiarism can be deliberate or it can be inadvertent (unintentional) but it is always considered as a serious misdemeanour. As a graduate, learning to avoid plagiarism will be an important factor in your professional life where you will be expected to respect other people's ideas in much the same way as you do in your university studies.

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Forms of plagiarism

You may be accused of plagiarism if you:

- write about someone's ideas without giving a reference. This includes ideas which are quoted directly or expressed in your own words.
- use an author's exact words without indicating you are making a direct quote and/or without giving a reference.
- present your own version of other people's ideas which you have collected from a number of sources you have no record of.
- try to put ideas in your own words but change only a few words of the original source. A lecturer may decide that as the words are almost the same as the original that this is plagiarism, even if a reference is given.
- copy another student's work and submit it as your own. If a student lends an assignment to another student and their assignment is copied and handed in by that student, both students can be penalised as the lecturer may not be able to find out who originally wrote the assignment.
- submit work written for you by someone else.

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How can plagiarism be avoided?

Keeping track of your sources can help you avoid plagiarism. Here are some strategies to do this.

- **Check the referencing system you are expected to use.** A Learning Guide on [how to use the Harvard Author-Date referencing system is available here](#).
- **Record the sources you use.** Before beginning to take notes from any source, record all the bibliographic

information. For a book you need to record the author's names, year of publication, title of book, publisher and place of publication. For a journal article you need to record the author's name, year of publication, title of the article, title of the journal, volume and/or issue number and page numbers of the article. For a document on the World Wide Web you need to record the author's name, year of publication, title of the item, the date you accessed it and the URL.

- **Take careful notes.** To ensure that your essay or report does not inadvertently plagiarise another researcher's work it is important to take careful, clearly written notes. Develop a system to distinguish between what you have copied directly from the source, what you have put in your own words and your comments about the source. Please refer to the Learning Guide [Getting the most out of your academic reading](#), the Learning Guide [Notemaking from reading](#) and the online workshop [Notemaking from reading](#).
- **Compile your reference list as you go .** Recording the bibliographic details of each source as you read and note them is an easy way to build up your reference list. If you follow the method of notemaking suggested in the Learning Guide [Notemaking from reading](#), writing the reference list will simply be a matter of transferring your bibliographic details for each source as your reference list.
- **Include in-text referencing with every draft.** Get into the habit of including the in-text (author, date) references as you write.
- **Keep your work secure.** Avoid sharing paper or electronic drafts of your work with other students so that you cannot be accused of academic misconduct.
- **Paraphrase appropriately.** Paraphrasing is the process of putting another person's ideas in your own words. Sometimes students express other people's ideas in their own words but change only a few words so that what they write is very similar to the original. Even if they use an in text reference to show where the idea came from, a lecturer may decide that this is plagiarism because their wording is too close to the original source.

For example, if the original source read:

'The dissatisfying nature of industrial or clerical work is no longer disputed. Many of to-day's employees prefer a greater level of involvement in their jobs than was previously assumed. Many desire more self-control and a chance to make a greater contribution to the organisation' (Schuler, Dowling and Smart, 1988, p 17.)

and a student paraphrased this as:

It is no longer disputed that the nature of industrial/clerical work is dissatisfying. Employees prefer more involvement, desire more self control and a chance to make a greater contribution to their organisation (Schuler, Dowling and Smart, 1988, p 17)

it is likely to be considered by their marker as "too close"

One way to avoid this "too close" situation is to paraphrase a whole paragraph rather than sentence by sentence. To do this you read a paragraph, then put it aside and try to write the main idea in your own words without looking at the original. Check that you have kept to the essential meaning of the original source.

- **Submit your work to Turnitin** to check for originality. **Turnitin** is an electronic tool used to promote [academic integrity](#) at the University of South Australia. The tool enables a student or lecturer to submit work to check for originality.

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When is referencing not necessary?

Some students are nervous that they will be accused of plagiarism if they do not reference every idea. At university there are some occasions where referencing is not used but this is not considered plagiarism. For example, lecturers often do not reference the ideas that they present in lectures; some text books do not give in-text references, just a list of references at the end of chapters. Also in some disciplines certain ideas are not referenced because they are regarded as common knowledge. For example if a student writes the equation $E = MC^2$ they usually do not reference this to Einstein because it is regarded as common knowledge in some disciplines.

There are two strategies that students can use in these situations. In relation to what constitutes 'common knowledge'

in a particular discipline it is useful to take note of the practices adopted by academic writers in the discipline. When reading academic articles and books take note of the ideas which they reference, and those which they do not reference. In relation to presenting assignments at university it is safest to assume that some level of referencing is expected with student assignments and assessments. The most notable exception to this is exams where referencing is not usually required. However, for oral presentations it is advisable to reference the ideas being presented and indicate when someone else's exact words are being used and to draw up a reference list.

As you read more widely from the range of sources you will find at university, you will become aware of the ways in which experienced writers use referencing to avoid plagiarism and you will adopt and use these ways in your own writing.

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Sources

Marshall, L & Rowland, F 1998, *A Guide to Learning Independently*, 3 rd Edition, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne.

Schuler, R, Dowling, P & Smart, J 1988, *Personnel/Human Resource Management in Australia*, Harper and Row, Sydney.

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