



Get Smart!

Use your own words and ideas

What is plagiarism?

MLA (Modern Language Association) defines plagiarism in this way:

"To use another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source is to plagiarize. Plagiarism, then, constitutes intellectual theft and often carries severe penalties, ranging from failure in a course to expulsion from school." [taken from the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4th ed.]

How can I avoid plagiarism?

Many of us know the blatant examples of plagiarism, such as duplicating exactly another author's words and labeling them as our own. There are also cases when we may inadvertently plagiarize and not realize that we are doing so. Ignorance will not help if you are accused of plagiarizing. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

A checklist on how to avoid plagiarism:

- Learn how to cite your sources using the appropriate style manual.
- Using a sequence of sentences or word language of another author's work is considered an act of plagiarism.
- Keep careful notes and documentation as you do your research.
- It is advisable not to "overquote" in your paper. Remember the paper should be made up of your own ideas and arguments.
- Downloading information from the Internet or any other electronic database product to include in your paper, without citing its source, is considered an act of plagiarism.
- Cite ideas from other sources when they add weight to your own argument or ideas.
- Learn how to paraphrase wisely using your own words and citing the source appropriately.
- Use quotation marks even if a footnote is provided.
- Know the difference between a bibliography and a reference list. Your reference list is where your source material cited in your paper is listed. The bibliography includes general background material which you read but did not cite in your paper.
- Paraphrasing does not mean you do not need cite the source.
- Always quote the exact words of an author and surround them in quotation marks, citing the source within the body of the text and in the reference list.
- If you are not sure whether to cite a source, cite it.
- Changing a few words of another author's work it still considered an act of plagiarism.
- Do not start your paper the night before your paper is due. This may cause you to stress out enough to "cut corners."

This help sheet on plagiarism is adapted from the StarQuest tutorial, ethics module, by Elizabeth Hogue, <http://www.lib.odu.edu/research/tutorials/starquest/ethicsmodule/>.