

# Plagiarism: Supporting Student Academic Integrity

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## WHAT IS PLAGIARISM

### ACADEMIC CALENDAR

The U of C Academic Calendar (2013-2014) places plagiarism in its academic misconduct section and notes that plagiarism can occur in both written and oral work. In particular, it outlines the following situations:<sup>1</sup>

- (a) The work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test),
- (b) Parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author,
- (c) The whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or,
- (d) A student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.

A more student-friendly way to explain plagiarism would be to state that the writer has reused material, whether it be the student's or another's, without letting the reader know. This can include words, sentence structure, or ideas.

### POLICY AND PROCEDURES

While the instructor is likely the first to identify plagiarism, he or she is not permitted to make a decision as to what will happen to the student. This policy is similar across all faculties. Section K.2.4 requires that the instructor report the suspected plagiarism to the dean or head of the department. While this may be frustrating, the goal is to ensure that students are treated equally, reducing variations in approach across instructors. It also ensures that students are not repeatedly committing plagiarism in more than one course, without the knowledge of individual instructors. Unfortunately, this process can be nerve-racking for the student, who then must wait to hear from the dean, sometimes for several weeks.

### DOES THAT MEAN THAT ALL PLAGIARISM RECEIVES THE SAME PUNISHMENT?

No! Students often think that they will be expelled from school for forgetting to cite a source or not properly citing a source. Penalties tend to respond to the level of misconduct. An improperly formatted in-text citation is not likely to lead to expulsion from the University. Some of the more common penalties include the following: failing grade on the assignment; failing grade in the course; attending a workshop on academic integrity; and completing a defined number of hours at Writing Support Services.

## FINDING PLAGIARISM IN STUDENT PAPERS

Instructors are often correct in their instincts when they suspect plagiarism. A marked change in style or vocabulary, oddities in formatting, inconsistencies in style or content, terminology or background knowledge far beyond the student's level of education or ability, or suspicious citations can all point to plagiarized material. While UCalgary discourages the use of specific plagiarism detection software, often the instructor can find sources in the library, in electronic copies of books and articles, and on the

<sup>1</sup> Taken from: University of Calgary, (2013-2014). *Calendar*. Section K.2.1. Retrieved from: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2.html>

Internet. Papers purchased or exchanged through papermills are often themselves plagiarized and sources can still be accessed, at least in part. Instructors who suspect plagiarism often become more certain that it exists through a discussion of research findings with the student, although such conversations must be approached with tact and caution.<sup>2</sup>

## POTENTIAL CAUSES OF PLAGIARISM

### CONFUSION BETWEEN QUOTATION AND CITATION

Many students seem to equate quotations with citations. Therefore, they fail to include quotation marks when needed. It is important for students to understand that citation lets the reader know that they used someone else's ideas, but that without quotation marks or block formatting and page number the reader will assume that the expression is in the student's own words. A citation at the end of an unacknowledged quote is still plagiarism. Students should be aware of this distinction early in their university career.

### POOR READING AND NOTE-TAKING SKILLS

Often students will plagiarize without realizing it. In these cases of inadvertent plagiarism, the cause is often a combination of student fatigue and poor note-taking skills. For example, they have made notes that are almost direct quotations of the original material but have left these unmarked. When students go back to write their papers, they end up cutting and pasting from their notes, forgetting that their notes are not their own work. Students can be taught note-taking and paraphrasing skills that will help them avoid this kind of plagiarism.

### TIME MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Often students have great aspirations for their papers, but do not have the time necessary to achieve them. As the deadline approaches, they can struggle to finish. If citations are left to the end of the process, mistakes and shortcuts are likely. A student rushing through his or her paper may cut and paste research notes, and it is more likely that he or she will forget where material was taken from other sources. While getting students to start assignments earlier is ideal, it may not be feasible. Assignment tracker ([www.ucalgary.ca/tracker](http://www.ucalgary.ca/tracker)) breaks down most assignments into steps and students are e-mailed reminders when each step should be completed. Encouraging them to cite while they write could also help prevent plagiarism. Refworks, offered free through the university, has a Word attachment to help students cite as they write.

### DIFFERENT CULTURAL VALUES

Western education requires that students identify and attribute information to the author or originator of the idea. Currie (1998) notes that this concept is rooted in the western notions of intellectual property and individualism developed during the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Sutherland-Smith (2005) notes that other cultures may have a collective sense of information ownership, and thus consider it common knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Students' understanding of appropriate academic writing will be shaped by their past educational experiences, where students may have been encouraged to incorporate sources differently. Understanding why we value this form of attribution can help students to understand why we incorporate material in this way.

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2 University of Alberta Library Guides (2012) "Guide to Plagiarism" URL: <http://guides.library.ualberta.ca/plagiarism>

3 Currie, P. (1998). Staying out of trouble: Apparent plagiarism and academic survival. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(1), 1-118.

4 Sutherland-Smith, W. (2005). Pandora's box: Academic perceptions of student plagiarism in writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(1), 83-95.

### PERCEIVED LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Paraphrasing requires students to analyse and synthesize information. Some students feel that they are unable to appropriately convey the meaning of the source. Other students, in an effort to sound like the source, may imitate or closely copy the original source. In periods of high stress or importance, students may return to past writing strategies. Patch-writing from the lines of other texts may be one of these past strategies, and students may not be aware that this is no longer acceptable.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, students may feel that using their own words would over-simplify a complex idea. Students are likely to quote rather than paraphrase when they feel that they can't say it any better than the author or lack the vocabulary to attempt it.

### GRADE ANXIETY

Sometimes students facing personal or academic stress and panic when it seems that they will not receive the grade they hope for or require in a particular course. They may attempt to protect their grade through deliberate plagiarism because they are afraid that their own words and ideas will not be sufficient.

## PREVENTING PLAGIARISM

### THROUGH INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Original assignments and those that rely on student participation, such as case studies, class presentations, and research projects all minimize instances of plagiarism. The instructor can control permitted sources and insist on uniform style and format. Instructors can discourage or avert plagiarism by first scaffolding the skills needed to successfully complete all components of the assignment. They can ensure that students have the opportunity in class to learn and practice skills such as citing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and constructing thoughtful research questions. Requiring students to construct a portfolio containing possible proposals or thesis statements, article abstracts, annotated bibliographies, notes, and early drafts, as well as meta-learning exercises such as inquiry journals, research logs, and postscripts for writing projects documents and influences the students' progress and engagement.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see: Pecorari, D. (2003). Good and original: Plagiarism and patchwriting in academic second-language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(4), 317-345.

## TEACHING PARAPHRASING

Students often require some direction in their use of sources and paraphrasing skills. The following steps may help.

Rather than looking at the material that you want to quote,  
try following these steps.

1. Read the excerpt for its abstraction or gist. The gist captures the point or basis of the article, or a section of it. The gist draws out the ideas of the article in a way that they can be used in your own work. The gist of the article is based on the article's contribution to knowledge in the field.
2. Look for keywords or phrases. These may be "prestige abstractions," meaning that they are certain terms used by the larger scholarly community. Including "prestige abstractions" can create a stronger connection between your paraphrase and the original work. Make sure you understand any term or phrase that you use. If the terminology is commonly used, you may include it. If the term was unfamiliar to you before your research, you probably should provide a brief definition. If you are unsure, always quote it.
3. Do NOT look at the article when paraphrasing. It's too tempting to repeat words. Open a new window, or flip over the paper and write what you remember. If you do this throughout reading any article, you'll have a set of paraphrases before you sit down to write the assignment.
4. Frame it with the author's name and a verb ("Smith argues"). By referencing people in your sentence, you can avoid sounding like an omnipotent narrator. This strategy also is more likely to focus you on the big picture rather than mere restatement of percentages and details.
5. Imagine it as part of a larger work. Your paraphrases should serve your purpose. Why are you including this information in your paper? Make sure your reason is explicit to your readers. Don't expect that they will figure it out because you put it in a particular spot.
6. Don't forget to include the appropriate citation

Feel free to use this for your classes.