

Information on Plagiarism

Source : Bartlett, A., Holzknrecht, S. and Thorne, A.C., 1999, Preparing Students for Graduate Study, Canberra, Asia

Definition : **Plagiarism means stealing words and ideas; that is, copying the ideas and opinions of other writers without acknowledgement.**

Forms of plagiarism:

- **Copy**
The most obvious way in which a student can plagiarise is to copy word for word what another person has written and then submit it without acknowledgement. This is unethical and unacceptable.
- **Submitting past papers/assignments**
There can be a temptation to copy and submit a previously done assignment. Lectures will usually, however, change exam and assignment questions each semester in order to avoid the possibility of students submitting previous assignment. Further, lectures are familiar with the readings, and vary the different assessment task.
- **Paraphrasing without acknowledgement**
Some students believe that by changing some of the words that an author has written, the student cannot be guilty of plagiarism. However, unless the student acknowledges (gives a reference to) the source of ideas/statistics/ words, the student can be accused of plagiarism. Paraphrasing is all right, provided that the original source is acknowledged.
- **Summarising without acknowledgement**
Some students believe that summarising is a way to avoid plagiarism. Again, the problem is that unless the original writer is acknowledged, the work can constitute plagiarism. The original ideas and argument have been formulated by another writer, and this needs to be acknowledged.
- **Cobbling : using 'chunks' of another person's work**
Sometimes students believe that by only borrowing 'bits' of work, they will be able to disguise what has been plagiarised. Students may copy work verbatim from various authors and then link together with their own words. This is known as cobbling and is relatively easy to detect: the style of writing and language used usually differ greatly between the bits that are borrowed and the language which links them together. In addition, the work may not 'flow' in terms of line argument.
- **Taking material off disk**
Other instances of plagiarism may be the result of the habit that some student have of saving material to the hard disk (C Drive) on computers, especially

when they are new to using computers. Unless a mechanism is installed on communal computers to automatically erase the hard disk at regular intervals, it can happen that work which is save to the hard disk is accessible to others. Students should learn to automatically save to the floppy disk. Unless this happens, the plagiariser and the student who originally produce the work both risk penalties.

- **Borrowing computer disk – effectively stealing**

Computer disk which contain assignments and material are personal property. When another student asks to borrow the disk ('I left mine at home'), the lender is at risk because material can be accessed and copied.

Strategies to avoid plagiarism:

It is important to stress to students that they can develop the resources, strategies and ability to avoid plagiarism.

- They can learn how to use reference and acknowledge sources appropriate (the next few sessions cover such issues as referencing acknowledging sources, citing and paraphrasing with acknowledgement, and producing new ideas and new configurations of ideas)
- If language/expression is a problem, they can seek assistance and consciously work to improve their skills.

Why might students plagiarise?

There are various reasons why students might plagiarise. It is important to open up the discussion to the students to let them express their views and concerns. What is important is to identify how experiences of learning may contribute to misconceptions: some students may come from backgrounds where the students are expected to gather and produce knowledge; others may have seen lectures present material without acknowledgment. There are various other reasons, including

- They may not know plagiarism is
- They may be under extreme pressure (assignment deadlines)
- They may not fully understand their subject
- They may not know how to use references
- They may perceive themselves to be inadequate to the academic task before them.

It is important to stress the view that the students should be able to read, research and synthesise their own view.