

Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism

What is Plagiarism?

According to the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA, 2003), plagiarism occurs when a writer “deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common knowledge) material without acknowledging its source” (p. 1). *Patchwriting*, which the Citation Project (Jamieson & Howard, 2011) defines as “restating a phrase, clause, or one or more sentences while staying close to the language or syntax of the source,” amounts to plagiarism. So does *double-dipping*, or self-plagiarism, which means turning in one’s own work that was previously submitted for credit. More broadly, plagiarism entails

“attempting to blur the line between one’s own ideas or words and those borrowed from another source” (WPA 1).

Plagiarism is a serious, intentional act (to be distinguished from carelessly or inadequately documenting sources). Academic consequences include a failing grade for the assignment or the course, expulsion from school, or even revocation of a degree.

How Can I Avoid Plagiarism?

Whatever the reason a writer feels the need to commit plagiarism—poor time management, less experience writing with sources, assignment ambiguities, or language or cultural differences—the lasting benefits of real learning far outweigh the short-term ease of *playing* school. The following choices facilitate real learning:

1. Understand research and writing assignments as learning processes and as opportunities for genuine inquiry and growth.
2. Learn to find and analyze relevant sources.
3. Make it clear when and how you use others’ words or ideas in your writing.
4. Learn how writers in your discipline use and cite sources and define common knowledge.
5. Ask your instructor when you are unsure whether or how to cite a source.
6. Choose a topic early, and one you connect with personally.
7. Start your research soon, take notes, and pay attention to the words you see authors using in the text around their sources. (Price 2002; WPA 2003)

It is especially important that you internalize your learning. Read your texts, assignment descriptions, and research sources. Ask questions so you understand your task, your role or purpose as author, your audience, and the genre you’re writing (Bean 2011). Take advantage of your instructor’s office hours. And, of course, visit the Writing Center.

References

- Bean, J.C. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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- Jamieson, S. & Howard, RM. (2011). What is plagiarism?. In *The citation project*. Retrieved from http://site.citationproject.net/?page_id=32
- Price, M. (2002). Beyond “gotcha!”: Situating plagiarism in policy and pedagogy. *College Composition and Communication*, 54, 88-115.

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