



Understanding Plagiarism

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Aims of the tutorial

By the end of the guide, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of plagiarism and unfair means.
- Recognise the difference between collaboration and collusion.
- Identify ways of avoiding plagiarism through using appropriate note taking, reference management, and time management.

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Key terms and definitions

- **Plagiarism (either intentional or unintentional):** This is using the ideas or work of another person (including experts and fellow or former students) and submitting them as your own. It is considered dishonest and unprofessional. Plagiarism may take the form of intentionally cutting and pasting, taking or closely paraphrasing ideas, passages, sections, paragraphs, drawing, graphs and other graphical materials from books, articles, internet sites or any source and submitting them for assessment without appropriate acknowledgement.
- **Submitting bought or commissioned work:** This may take the form of buying or commissioning either whole pieces of work or part of it and implies clear intention to deceive the examiners. Submitting bought or commissioned work is an extremely serious form of plagiarism. The University also takes an extremely serious view of any students who sells, offers to sell or passes on their own assessed work to other students.
- **Double Submission:** Double submission or self-plagiarism is submitting previously submitted work on one or more occasions (without proper acknowledgement). This may take the form of copying either the whole piece of work or part of it. Normally credit will have already been given for this work.
- **Collusion:** This is where two or more students work together to produce a piece of work, all or part of which is then submitted by each of them as their own individual work. This includes passing on work in any format to another student. Collusion does not occur where students involved in group work are encouraged to work together to produce a single piece of work as part of the assessment process.
- **Fabrication:** This is submitting work (for example, practical or laboratory work) any part of which is untrue, made up, falsified or fabricated in any way. This is regarded as fraudulent and dishonest.
- **Facilitating the use of unfair means:** This is where a student assists a fellow student in using any of the forms of unfair means defined previously, for example in submitting bought or commissioned work.

If you would like to revisit these definitions, you can visit [Unfair means, cheating and plagiarism guidance](#).

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Group work versus collusion

Collusion is where two or more students work together to produce a piece of work, all or part of which is submitted by each of them as their own individual work.

Group work allows the sharing of ideas and information to complete a task, so it can be difficult to be sure that you are not colluding.

You will be required to work in groups for some assignments but should be selective in the references for your work and put any notes into your own words (Cottrell, 2013).

Acceptable Collaboration includes:

- Discussing both individual and group assessments with other students in the subject area and then writing up the assignment in your own words.
- When you are involved in group work and are encouraged to work together to produce a single piece of work as part of the assessment process.

Unacceptable collusion includes:

- Engaging in detailed discussion as to the written details of another student's assessment.
- Passing work in any format to another student.

For more information on the line between collaboration and collusion, visit the [301 Study Skills Online](#) pages.

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Quiz: Understanding different forms of unfair means

Each statement in the list below can be considered either **a) cheating**, **b) plagiarism** or **c) collusion**. Decide which one of these three categories the statement belongs to. The answers are given at the end of this document.

1. Copying from another student in an invigilated examination.
2. Doing someone else's coursework for them.
3. Deliberately hiding, mis-shelving, or cutting articles and chapters out of books, journals and other resources in the library to ensure no one else can find them.
4. Using the ideas or work of another person (including experts, former or fellow students) and submitting them for assessment without appropriate acknowledgement.
5. Getting someone else to take an exam for you or sitting their exams for them.
6. Falsifying extenuating circumstances in order to get special consideration for matters relating to examinations and assessments.

7. Paraphrasing material and submitting them for assessment without appropriate acknowledgement.
8. Taking unauthorised material (such as revision notes, books and data tables etc.) and electronic devices (such as electronic dictionaries, mobile or Smartphones etc.) into examinations.
9. Submitting a piece of coursework which was jointly written as your own piece of work.
10. Submitting bought or commissioned work from essay “banks” or “mills”. This can be a whole piece of work, or part of the work you submit.
11. Falsifying, altering, or inventing data, such as making up results of a survey or lab work to make it more favourable.
12. Fabricating references in your reference list or bibliography.
13. Not contributing a fair share to group work that is assessed for a group mark.
14. Allowing another student to copy your coursework.

Finished? [Check your answers.](#)

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When to paraphrase

Paraphrasing does not mean just changing an odd word, or changing a sentence if the phrasing of the original is still present in your work. When you paraphrase, you should restate the meaning of the original text **in your own words**.

- When you paraphrase, it will show that you understand the original material and are able to restate the information in your own words.
- A paraphrase means that you avoid using too many direct quotations, which can distract from the coherence of the argument you are presenting.
- You can paraphrase to avoid using quotes that have a tenuous link to the argument you are presenting.

Examples of good and bad paraphrasing

The quote to paraphrase

“Achievement is talent plus preparation. The problem with this view is that the close psychologists look at the careers of the gifted the smaller the role innate talent seems to play and the bigger the role preparation seems to play” (Gladwell, 2008, p.38).

An example of a paraphrase that plagiarises:

Success seems to depend on a combination of talent and preparation. However, when psychologists closely examine the gifted careers, they discover that innate talent plays a much smaller role than preparation (Gladwell, 2008, p.38).

Why does this plagiarise? This example follows the sentence structure of the original too closely, as well as using the language that is too similar or the same as the original.

A good paraphrase:

As Gladwell (2008, p.38) observes, summarising studies on the highly successful, we tend to overestimate the role of talent and underestimate that of preparation.

Why is this a good paraphrase? This example summarises the original quotation succinctly without copying the sentence structure and the author uses their own writing style.

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When to quote

The use of quotations varies considerably from discipline to discipline:

- In some disciplines, particularly in the Arts & Humanities, it is standard practice to include quotations from texts and primary sources.
- In other disciplines, particularly in science, engineering and medicine, quotations are used much less frequently, if at all. Students are encouraged to paraphrase or summarise, always acknowledging the source.

Reading widely will help you to develop your experience of the style within a specific discipline. The primary focus of your writing should be your own words, with quotations used selectively and framed within your own argument.

Here are some examples of where it may be appropriate to include a quotation:

- Quoting the text of any formal definition or standard.
- Agreeing, disagreeing or engaging with a specific statement, idea or sentiment.
- Ensuring that the meaning of a specific phrase is not lost when paraphrased.

Different referencing styles integrate quotations into the text differently. The University Library offers separate guidance on referencing and quoting. Find the relevant guide for your department from the [University referencing page](#).

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Effective note taking

The more effective you are at note taking, the easier it will become to organise the structure of your essay and paraphrase the information for your assignment in your own words.

Make sure that you:

- Record the bibliographic details of the item including the page numbers of any direct quotations.
- Put quotation marks or highlight and direct quotes even if it is only three or four words.
- Paraphrase correctly using your own sentence structures and language rather than just changing one or two words.
- Separate your own opinions/ideas from the notes you have made on the text. Reflect in what you have read and why it relates to your topic or question.

[301 Academic Skills Centre](#) offers a range of services and activities to support your study skills development.

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Common knowledge

The referencing on common knowledge is one of the grey areas of referencing. In general, you do not need to provide a reference for anything that is common knowledge. But how do we determine what is common knowledge? Pacorari (2013) suggests that:

“...common knowledge comes from reflecting on the word ‘common’ which has a sense which means something like ‘found everywhere’ but also has the sense of ‘shared’. This suggests that common knowledge is shared knowledge and in the case of ideas which do or do not need references, it is presumably the writer and the (intended) reader who should share them” (Pacorari, 2013, p.149)

For example, you would not need to provide references for the following undisputed facts:

- Common facts, sayings and proverbs, e.g. the earth moves around the sun; “pride comes before the fall”
- Historical dates, places and events, e.g. Queen Victoria died in 1901; Paris is the capital of France

Common knowledge within a discipline is more difficult to determine. Each subject has its own rules and conventions, a set of commonly agreed assumptions, jargons, and symbols which do not have to be culturally explained or referenced. What is regarded common knowledge in one subject will not be in another. Similarly, what is considered common knowledge at PhD level will not be common knowledge in the first year of an undergraduate degree.

If you are in any doubt as to whether something is common knowledge, provide a reference.

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Quiz: Understanding plagiarism

Now take the quiz to test your knowledge of plagiarism and what is acceptable practice. The answers are given at the end of this document.

Q1. Collusion is...?

- a) Quoting from a book without citing the reference.
- b) When work produced by a group of people is submitted by an individual as their own effort.
- c) Using other people's ideas to inform your own thinking.

Q2. Plagiarism is defined as...?

- a) Using course material in your essay.
- b) Using too many quotations in your essay.
- c) Passing off someone else's work as your own.

Q3. Plagiarism would occur if you...

- a) Mentioned that Queen Victoria died in 1901.
- b) Discussed your essay outline with your tutor before writing the essay.
- c) Used materials from web pages without quoting your source.

Q4. Which one of the following statements is true?

- a) It is ok to put in a couple of quotes without referencing my source as no one will notice – the lecturer can't have read all the books and articles I used.
- b) If I cite every source I have used it will look like the ideas are not my own, so it's better not to reference everything.
- c) It is good practice to use the ideas of others to build my own ideas in my work.

Q5. In the examples below, number 1 is a form of plagiarism and number 6 is not. Where do you draw the line between unacceptable and acceptable practice? Select the first statement that you consider acceptable practice.

- 1) Copying a paragraph verbatim (word-for-word) from a source without any acknowledgement.
- 2) Copying a paragraph by making small changes (e.g. replacing a few verbs, replacing an adjective with a synonym). The source is given in the references.
- 3) Cutting and pasting a paragraph by using sentences of the original but omitting one or two, and putting one or two in a different order, no quotation marks; in-text citation e.g. (Jones, 1999), plus in the reference list.

- 4) Composing a paragraph by taking short phrases of 10 to 15 words from a number of sources and putting them together, adding words of your own to make a coherent whole; all sources included in the reference list
- 5) Paraphrasing a paragraph with substantial changes in the language and organisation; the new version will also have changes in the amount of detail used and the examples cited; in-text citation e.g. (Jones, 1999) and inclusion in the reference list.
- 6) Quoting a paragraph by placing it within quotation marks, with the sources cited in the text and the list of references.

Finished? [Check your answers.](#)

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Tips for avoiding plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism, follow a few simple strategies:

- Keep a record of sources making note of full bibliographic detail as you use them. You can do this by using a reference management system e.g. EndNote, Mendeley, Zotero, etc.
- Keep accurate notes when researching your assignment.
- Avoid cutting and pasting sections of text when reading online.
- Learn to paraphrase/summarise in your own words without copying the language or structure of the original.
- Be aware of the University Policy on plagiarism and collusion.
- Reference correctly using your departmental style.

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Quiz answers

Understanding different forms of unfair means

- a) The following statements are considered **cheating**: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13.
- b) The following statements are considered **plagiarism**: 4, 7, 10, 12.
- c) The following statements are considered **collusion**: 2, 9, 14.

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Understanding plagiarism

- 1. The correct answer is **B**. You must ensure that any work you submit is your own individual work and has not been produced jointly with others, or you would be passing off another's work as your own, which is a form of plagiarism.
- 2. The correct answer is **C**. You must ensure that any work you submit is your own individual work and has not been produced jointly with others, or you would be passing off another's work as your own which is a form of plagiarism.
- 3. The correct answer is **C**. You have taken ideas or information from another source and so need to cite the source to avoid plagiarism.
- 4. The correct answer is **C**. Demonstrating an awareness of similar lines of reasoning and argument in relevant literature helps the author to both appropriately qualify and justify the point being made. However, you must ensure you reference all of your sources.
- 5. The correct answer is **5**. The original work should be paraphrased (i.e. rewritten in your own words), and direct quotes (word-for-word sections of the text) should be indicated with quotation marks.

If you correctly answered 4 out of 5 or more questions in this quiz, congratulations – you seem to understand plagiarism! Make sure you are also referencing correctly by attending the [Research Skills and Critical Thinking workshops](#), or by looking at our online [referencing guides](#).

If you scored less than 4, you do not seem to have a good understanding of plagiarism. Try attending the [Research Skills and Critical Thinking workshops](#) on plagiarism and referencing, or by rereading this tutorial.

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Summary

You have reached the end of this resource. This information has been adapted from the [Understanding Plagiarism tutorial](#).

Why not look at some of our other Research Skills and Critical Thinking resources? [Book onto a Workshop or take an Online Tutorial](#).

Remember to reflect on and record your skills development using [mySkills](#).

University guidance on the use of [unfair means](#).

[Turnitin](#) guidance for students.

For more information on the line between collaboration and collusion, visit the [301 Study Skills Online](#) pages.

Visit our FAQs: [Library FAQs](#)

Get in touch: library@sheffield.ac.uk

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References

Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., Williams, J.M., Bizup, J., & Fitzgerald, W.T. (2016). *The craft of research* (4th ed.). Chicago, University of Chicago Press. pp.208-209.

Cottrell, S. (2013). *The study Skills Handbook* (4th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers; The story of success*. New York: Back Bay Books.

Pacorari, D. (2013). *Teaching to avoid plagiarism: How to promote good source use*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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Full URLs

Unfair means, cheating and plagiarism guidance: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/new-students/unfair-means>

University Library's referencing page: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/study/research-skills/referencing>

301 Academic Skills Centre: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/301>

University guidance on unfair means: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means>

Turnitin Guidance for students: <https://students.sheffield.ac.uk/digital-learning/turnitin>

301 Study Skills Online: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/academic-skills/study-skills-online/collusion>

Understanding Plagiarism tutorial

https://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/storyline/referencing/understanding-plagiarism/story_html5.html

Research Skills and Critical Thinking Workshops and Tutorials:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/study/research-skills>

mySkills: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/skills/myskills>

Library FAQs: <https://libraryhelp.shef.ac.uk/>

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