

Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism

Definition: *Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.* This definition applies to texts published in print or on-line, to manuscripts, and to the work of other student writers.

Note: See essay prompt for examples of how to cite in-class sources

There is a difference between:

1. **Plagiarism:** submitting someone else's text as one's own or attempting to blur the line between one's own ideas or words and those borrowed from another source
- AND
2. **Misuse of sources:** carelessly or inadequately citing ideas and words borrowed from another source.

A student who attempts to identify and credit his or her source, but who misuses a specific citation format or incorrectly uses quotation, has not plagiarized. Instead, such a student has failed to cite and document sources appropriately.

Why do students generally plagiarize or fail to document sources appropriately?

- Students may fear failure or fear taking risks in their own work.
- Students may plan poorly for the time and effort required for writing a paper, and believe they have no choice but to plagiarize.
- Students may view the course, the assignment, the conventions of academic documentation, or the consequences of cheating as unimportant.

Students should understand writing assignments as opportunities for genuine and rigorous inquiry and learning. Such an understanding involves:

- Acknowledging clearly when and how they are drawing on the ideas or phrasings of others;
- Learning the conventions for citing documents and acknowledging sources appropriate to the field they are studying;
- Consulting their instructors when they are unsure about how to acknowledge the contributions of others to their thought and writing.

The implications of plagiarism. The goal of research and writing is to engage a scholarly discussion of issues that are sometimes passed over in daily life. Understanding, engaging in, and challenging the work of others are part of becoming an effective citizen in a complex society. Plagiarism does not simply devalue the institution and the degree it offers; it hurts the inquirer, who has avoided thinking independently and has lost the opportunity to participate in broader social conversations.

Why do we cite sources? The purpose of documenting sources is to give the reader a way to find more information, to give credit to the original creator of the ideas presented in the paper, to give the writer credibility, and to avoid plagiarism.

How to find out various citation methods: Students are responsible for knowing the proper citation techniques for any paper. If students are still unclear about how and when to cite sources, they may contact the instructor through email

Policy on Plagiarism: Misuse of sources (see above) will result in a loss of points, but not failure on the paper. The consequences for student plagiarism, however, depend on the severity of the offense. At the very least, it will likely result in a zero or “F” on the assignment, possible failure in the course, and in the most egregious instances, referral to the campus’s office for student affairs.