

## Plagiarism

### 1. What is plagiarism?

**Activity:** Can you come up with a simple definition of plagiarism?



### Discussion

Here are some dictionary definitions of plagiarism:

“The practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own” – *oxforddictionaries.com*

“to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source” – *merriam-webster.com*

“an act or instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization and the representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not crediting the original author” – *dictionary.reference.com*

## 2. Who plagiarises?

**Activity:** Find Wikipedia's list of plagiarism incidents – what kind of people commit plagiarism?



### Discussion

Plagiarism is often associated with students but it is far more widespread. Authors of books, professors completing their PhD, musicians, authors of journals, politicians – the list of plagiarisers is endless.

### 3. Plagiarism vs lack of originality

**Activity:** Is there a difference between plagiarism and a lack of originality? Can you think of examples of works that lack originality but are not plagiarised – and vice versa? You may want to return to this question at the end of the workbook.



#### Discussion

The term 'original' is used quite loosely – for example, how many times have you heard a new song and thought, 'that's nothing new' 'that's not original'. Of course, you're not suggesting it's plagiarised – just that it has nothing distinct about it.

However, lack of originality can sometimes amount to plagiarism. For example, if you find a journal that answers your exact essay question and paraphrase all of it, your work will certainly have a lack of originality *and* be plagiarised – even if you provide a reference.

Both plagiarism and lack of originality are to be avoided – both have negative consequences in an academic setting, whether this is low marks or disciplinary action.

## 4. Types of plagiarism

A lot of the time, it will be clear whether something is plagiarism or not. But sometimes, it is open for debate.

**Activity:** Complete the grid – is this plagiarism?

		YES	NO
1	Including another's exact words in your work , without giving any credit.		
2	Using a quotation, without giving credit.		
3	Taking another's words and changing them around so they aren't like-for-like, without giving any credit.		
4	Explaining someone else's idea in your own words, without giving credit.		
5	Including another's exact words or paraphrasing in your work and giving credit – where a large proportion of your final work is made up of the other person's words.		
6	Using another's words or ideas and giving the wrong information about the source of the words or ideas.		
7	Reusing your own words or ideas from an earlier piece of work that you handed in.		
8	Taking someone's words or artwork and making a version of them that means something different, even the opposite to that of the original. For example, one graphic on the Internet has turned "McDonalds - I'm loving it" into "Weight – I'm gaining it".		
9	Borrowing and 'retooling' an idea or concept – for example, as Quentin Tarentino does in many of his films.		
10	Using someone else's ideas because you forget that you saw or read them elsewhere and assume them to be your own.		
11	Creating a piece of work that shapes the meaning of another piece of work, such as retelling a Shakespeare play to make it more understandable or to put it in a modern context.		

## Discussion:

- 1, 2, 3, 4: Most people would agree that these are plagiarism.
- 5: This shows a lack of originality and could be viewed as plagiarism, especially if your entire essay is a rework of one or two sources. Even if you include many sources (with appropriate credit), you will earn very few marks if you fail to include enough of your own thoughts and reasoning. Remember that the idea of quoting or using sources is to support your own analysis and arguments – not to form the entire basis of your work.
- 6: It is a matter of opinion whether Number 6 is plagiarism - this often happens where a student adds extra references to their essay that they found cited in a source that they do own, where they have never actually read those extra references. There is a correct way to include such extra references though – you can write e.g. ‘Smith (1999) cited in....[the source that you do have]’ and this is acceptable.
- 7: This is called self-plagiarism – you can’t rehash previous work, on either a professional or academic level, but you can refer to it as long as you make the relationship between the old work and current work clear.
- 8: This is called ‘détournement’ (French for ‘rerouting’ or ‘hijacking’) but arguably also plagiarism.
- 9: This is called ‘homage’ but whether it also constitutes plagiarism will likely depend on whether credit is given – Tarantino, for example, uses homage extensively but always gives credit.
- 10: This is called ‘cryptomnesia’ (meaning ‘hidden memory’). It is plagiarism, albeit unintentional.
11. This is called intertextuality. It can be considered plagiarism - for example, the poem collection *Estación de infierno* (2001) by Spanish writer Lucía Etxebarria was found to contain metaphors and verses from Antonio Colinas. Etxebarria claimed that she admired him and applied intertextuality. There are however plenty of examples where intertextuality is not considered to be plagiarism. For example:
- *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006) by Matt Haig is a retelling of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, set in modern England.
  - *A Thousand Acres* (1991) by Jane Smiley is a retelling of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, set in rural Iowa.

**Activity:** Can you find any famous cases or examples of détournement, homage and cryptomnesia on the web?

## 5. Does intent matter?

**Activity:** Do you think it matters whether the plagiarism was intentional or not? Does your answer change depending on whether it is an academic or professional/commercial setting?

### Discussion:

In an academic setting, there is certainly a difference between intentional and unintentional plagiarism:

**Intentional plagiarism** includes rewriting books/journals or web pages and deliberately concealing the original source, or buying essays that others have written for you to use in full or part.

**Unintentional plagiarism** includes poor referencing because the student doesn't know how to reference properly, poor paraphrasing because of not knowing how this is done, and thinking that something is 'common knowledge'.

In a professional setting, the fact that plagiarism was unintentional is not seen as a valid defence to a charge of plagiarism (i.e. copyright infringement). For example, in the US in 1976, former Beatle George Harrison was sued for copyright infringement by the publishers of "He's So Fine," a song written in 1962 by Ronald Mack. The Court found that Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" borrowed substantially from "He's So Fine," and held Harrison liable for damages despite Harrison's claim that the plagiarism was unknowing and unintentional.

## 6. Is everything really plagiarised?

**Activity:** Some people argue that everything these days is plagiarised and that there is no such thing as original thought. People often use this argument to defend themselves when accused of plagiarism! What do you think?



### Discussion:

Here are some thoughts on this topic that may help you decide:

Indeed, literature always contains something borrowed: every author is also a reader. Everything I read and perceive in my everyday life flows through me and comes out in my writing at some point. - *Roland Koch, professor for creative writing at Siegen University.*

Originality doesn't exist anymore, only genuineness. - *Helene Hegemann, author of "Axolotl Roadkill"*

I didn't just copy this stuff. It's not about plagiarism but intertextuality. Very many artists use this technique ... by organically including parts in my text, I am entering into a dialogue with the author. - *Helene Hegemann, as above*

I don't think there are any ideas in this world, which are not build on other ideas. I think everybody copies and in fact copying is how we learn ... There is only one thing I call plagiarism and that is not naming your sources. - *Céline Keller, Motion Graphic Designer / Animator / Illustrator*

You can search 'is everything plagiarised' on Google, for many more articles and discussions on this topic.

## 7. Avoiding plagiarism

Generally, if you reference properly, you won't be accused of plagiarism. You need to check with your university or institution which referencing style they would like you to use for the course you are on. The most common styles are Harvard, Oxford/OSCOLA and APA – but there are many versions of Harvard and quite a few universities have their own 'house style' which is a version of a popular style.

Don't forget that if you rely too heavily on other peoples' work, even if you give credit, this shows a lack of originality. This can be very easy to do in some types of assignment.

**Activity:** Find out which referencing style is required for your particular course. Where can you find more information about how to reference in that style?



## 8. Tricky assignments

Sometimes you will be asked to write an 'annotated bibliography', a 'literature review' or an 'abstract'.

**Annotated bibliography:** this is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. *The key is to evaluate, not regurgitate.*

**Literature review:** new research builds on the findings of previous experiments and investigations. A literature review shows that you understand the previous research, showing how your work fits with what has gone before and putting it into context. *The key is to critically analyse, not regurgitate.*

**Abstract:** An abstract is a concise and clear summary of what you set out to do in your work and why, how you did it and what you found with recommendations. It is like a mini version of your work. *The key is to summarise, not regurgitate.*

**Activity:** What differences can you identify between these three types of assignment?

### Discussion

Many students faced with a literature review or annotated bibliography find themselves confused as to what is asked of them and end up simply paraphrasing the sources they have found. This shows a lack of originality and will earn you very little credit – it may even lead to an accusation of plagiarism if effectively you have just changed words around. An annotated bibliography is a selection of sources on a particular topic, which need to be evaluated. A literature review, often contained within a dissertation/thesis, looks at previous research on a topic and fits the current research into context. An abstract is a concise summary of a source, but needs to be original, not a copy of parts of the work.

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