

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is defined as taking in part or in whole someone else's words, writing, research, ideas, artwork, music or other creative efforts and passing it off as one's own without giving due credit to the originator. This is just one definition for plagiarism, but the essence is this – it is copying, cheating or, more harshly, intellectual theft.

To understand what plagiarism is in terms of the written word and how it comes about, it is essential to look at what we mean by education and writing.

Education - Education is not just about grasping or cramming in a variety of information; it is about knowing how to develop and use your own critical and analytical abilities to process this information. In a way you could say that learning is about learning to come into your own as a thinking, creative person.

Writing - Writing is not just about setting down words in a certain way to give certain information, although it is that too. It is about learning to think with clarity and comprehension. If you can think clearly, this will reflect in your writing. Confused thinking leads to confused, garbled writing.

A failure to understand this – as well as perhaps the inclination to take the easy way out – is what gives rise to plagiarism.

On the other hand, if you take the time to ponder over a given issue on your own and take the trouble to write what you think about it in your own words, there is little chance of your being guilty of plagiarism.

I say 'little', because there is still the important matter of citing sources. Whatever we know or understand is more often than not the result of what we've read, seen, heard, come across or being told. We are indebted to other people for the knowledge we gain and, if that knowledge is not in the public domain or is not commonly known, it is crucial to cite the source of it.

Ways to avoid plagiarism:

Here are some tips on how to avoid plagiarism -

Paraphrase – Never use someone else's words – substituting synonyms is also a no-no. Don't use their sentence structure either. Write everything in your own words, as you understand it. The best way to do this is to go through the required reading material and then put it all away when you start writing. Refer to it only after you are done to check if you have got all the facts right.

Quotation Marks – If you need to use what someone else has written or said in your writing, write their exact words and put them in quotation marks. If you are omitting certain sections, put '.....' in between words to indicate this. If you are incorporating a word or words so that the sentence

makes reading sense, put those words in square brackets '[like this]'.

Cite Sources – You can either write 'According to Professor so-and-so....' or 'Professor so-and-so states that....' or you can provide links to websites you have referred to or you can list the sources after your article or do all of the above.

Manage your time – If you have to meet a deadline, start work early. So you have plenty of time to research and write. Lack of time is one reason many people – especially stressed-out students – intentionally or unintentionally plagiarizes.

Check for Plagiarism:

There are several online tools to check for plagiarism. Recently the very witty website of romance literature rooted out a romance writer by simply entering suspect passages from her books in the Google search engine; it was found that she had plagiarized material from several non-fiction, non-romantic sources. This particular writer says she had no idea she was doing something wrong, which may or may not have been the case, but it is not an excuse that the law allows. You must make it your business to find out what the rules are.

But you shouldn't avoid plagiarism just because the rules tell you to or because there is a risk of getting found out and the inevitable disgrace and penalties, you should avoid it because that is the right thing to do and you owe it to yourself to give your intellect a chance. Maybe your writing will not be first-rate – that takes time and repeated effort - but, understand this, it will *never* become first rate if you keep swiping other people's works.

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/ways-to-avoid-plagiarism.html>