



FAST FACTS

Plagiarism

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What is plagiarism?

Simply put, plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas, words or works, representing them as your own without giving the original author due credit.

The Student Handbook defines plagiarism as:

... includ[ing] but not limited to failure to indicate the source with quotation marks or footnotes where appropriate if any of the following are reproduced in the work submitted by a student:

- a phrase, written or musical
- a graphic element
- a proof
- specific language
- an idea derived from the work, published or unpublished, of another person.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- using a definition from a dictionary, manual or other text without citing the source
- quoting a phrase or verse from a song, poem or fictional work without crediting the artist who created it
- using someone else's criticisms or arguments in your critique and presenting them as your own

The following examples, however, do not constitute plagiarism:

- discussing your ideas with friends and colleagues
- using others' feedback to improve your work
- incorporating someone else's ideas or words into your work and giving them credit

What are the penalties for plagiarism?

Plagiarism is considered a serious offense in any academic or professional field. In school, the penalties for a specific act of plagiarism are determined by the instructor of the course in which the act occurs. You could receive an “F” for the paper or project in question, fail the course, or even be brought up for university disciplinary action, possibly resulting in expulsion.

How can I be sure I’m not plagiarizing?

- Document your sources carefully while researching your project. Doing so will help you keep track of what sources you’re using and the instances in which you’ve quoted a source directly. Being organized from the very beginning will also help you reduce the chance of overlooking a quoted source as you’re compiling the bibliography later.
- Be sure you understand your material. If you don’t understand what the original source is saying, you’re more likely to “plug in” the source’s exact wording without noting the quote or giving proper credit. This is especially true when you’re defining or explaining a term or concept.
- Check your work thoroughly when you’re finished. Ask yourself where you found the information for each point that you made. Was this your idea or someone else’s? Did you express the idea using your words, or did you use someone else’s phrasing?

- Understand the attribution conventions for the field you’re working in. Many specialized areas, such as engineering and science, demand specific conventions for citing sources. Other fields don’t require you to document your sources so rigorously; sometimes you’ll need only to make judicious use of quotation marks or mention the original source within the text. Familiarize yourself with the conventions of the field to avoid accidental oversights.

- If you ever have any doubts about using a source or the proper method of documenting it, ask your instructor for help.

How can I be sure I’m attributing my sources correctly?

You have many resources at your disposal. The Carnegie Mellon Libraries contain handbooks and style guides outlining conventions for academic papers and other documents. Again, if you’re ever in doubt, consult your instructor for assistance.