



Avoiding Plagiarism Tip Sheet

What is plagiarism?

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines plagiarism as "to copy another person's ideas, words or work and pretend that they are your own" (p.1106, 2005). Plagiarism is any intentional or unintentional use of someone else's writing and thoughts.

Why should I care about plagiarism?

- It negatively impacts your credibility and academic reputation.
- By plagiarizing you are also cheating yourself of a learning process.
- The consequences are not worth it. The department of English Language and Literature at King Saud University has a **zero-tolerance** policy on plagiarism.
- In academic writing, it is important to give credit to information borrowed from other sources. This shows that you have an understanding of materials you read on a subject.

What are some common misconceptions about plagiarism?

1. ***I do not need to cite the source if I paraphrase or change some of the words.*** That is not true. Even if you change some of the words or rewrite in 'your own words', the ideas are **not** your original ideas, and you must give credit to the author(s).
2. ***It's not a big deal if I only 'borrow' small parts of a text. It's not the same as plagiarizing a whole paper!*** This is not true. Plagiarism is plagiarism, whether it is a few words or a whole paper.
3. ***My professor did not detect my plagiarized work and I got an A for the assignment. I have nothing to worry about now.*** That is not true. There are many cases where professors and professionals have caught students who have plagiarized long after they submitted their work (even after years!).
4. ***It's ok if I get someone to write my paper.*** That is not true. Even though you might think the instructor will not be able to detect this kind of plagiarism, remember that your instructor knows your writing style and ability. Most importantly, you are cheating yourself from a learning experience.
5. ***It is ok to write my paper together with a classmate for an individual assignment.*** Not really. Unless your instructor has specifically told you that you can, it is not acceptable to do your assignment with someone else. This might also mean that the chances of your paper being similar to someone else's are higher and you both might be accused of plagiarizing.
6. ***My friend says I can use her paper for my next assignment. She got an A in that class last year. Surely the professor does not have a copy of her paper, and of course she will not remember!*** Well you might be surprised to know how much your instructor remembers. Instructors also continue to have access to previous student submissions.
7. ***It's ok if I use a paper I submitted for a previous course.*** That is not true. It is considered self-plagiarism, since there is always room for revision or expansion.
8. ***I do not have to cite information from the internet because that is 'common knowledge'.*** That is not true. All information whether it is taken from books or an online source should be cited.

9. **My friend says all the information on my paper should be my own. I can't use information from other sources.** You can take information from any source. You just have to make sure to cite the sources.
10. **It is not plagiarism if it is unintentional.** It is your responsibility to make sure to properly cite all your sources. Even if it is unintentional, it is still considered plagiarism and punishable as such.
11. **It's ok if it only your first time plagiarizing. Your professor will understand and forgive you.** Sorry, it is still considered an offense. It is your responsibility to make sure you do not plagiarize at all.

What are some tips to avoid plagiarism?

1. **Start early.** Many students turn to plagiarism when they feel overwhelmed with deadlines. Rushing through your assignments also increases your chances of plagiarizing unintentionally as you might forget to cite a source.
2. **Taking notes.** It is good idea to use your notes to write your assignments but make sure you separate your own insights or ideas from the ones you borrowed from books, articles, your instructors, etc. It is good practice to write the source of each idea next to your notes as that will save you time and prevent unintentional plagiarizing.
3. **Paraphrase or summarize.** Try to do this from memory without looking at the original sources to make sure you use your own words and a different sentence structure. Then, check the original source to make sure you did not accidentally borrow phrases. **But remember you have to cite the source even if you paraphrase!**
4. **Use quotation marks when using direct quotes.** You can directly lift information from a source if you include it between quotation marks and cite the source properly using standards such as MLA or APA. Quotes should be carefully selected, particularly meaningful, and not long.
5. **Be careful with information that is considered 'common knowledge'.** It is only common knowledge if you can find it in different sources without citation. For example, '*Shakespeare was an English poet and playwright*' is common knowledge. However, the statement '*the Merchant of Venice has recently been considered a tragic comedy and not comedy*' would not be considered common knowledge and would require citation.
6. **When in doubt, seek help.** If you are unsure about plagiarizing and how to reference sources correctly, ask your instructors or visit the Centre for Writing in English.

References

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