

# What is plagiarism?

*'Fine words! I wonder where you stole them?'*

Jonathan Swift

## A Reflection

Are there differences between how plagiarism is seen in your country and the UK?

- Tick if the statement reflects normal practice, put a cross if not, and a question mark if you are unsure. How can you explain any differences?

Statement	Normal practice in my country	Normal practice in the UK
I can use other people's original ideas without reference.		
I need to reference ideas which are commonly known or accepted.		
I can use/adapt the research of my friends.		
I can copy and paste information from the Internet into my essay without saying where it is from.		
I can submit the same piece of work twice, e.g., on a different course/module.		
I can pay someone to check through/proofread my essay to make minor improvements.		

## B Contextualization

Which aspects of the original sources are plagiarized in the student's first draft?

Original sources

- 1 'Students were less certain about the concept of using someone else's ideas (Qu.1b), with 40% of students not acknowledging that this was plagiarism' (Dawson and Overfield, 2006).
- 2 'A similar point could be made about Chinese academic norms, which are the result in part of a long tradition of reproducing Confucian teachings in civil service exams. The philosopher's words were known by and belonged to everyone' (Sowden, 2005: 227).
- 3 'We need to strike a balance between being sensitive to students' feelings, understanding potential cultural differences, and being clear and helpful in the messages we give through our feedback' (Hyland, 2000: 381).

First draft of student writing

*40% of students think that using someone else's ideas without reference is acceptable.*

*Often, it is East Asian students who find this a particular problem, because in the Confucian system knowledge is seen as something which is shared by society (Sowden, 2005).*

*It may also be a challenge for teachers when giving feedback, as they are often unaware of how to strike a balance between being sensitive to students' feelings, understanding potential cultural differences, and being clear and helpful in the messages they give.*

## How is plagiarism understood in the British university context?

If you come from a country whose university system is similar to the UK's, there may be many similarities in your answers on page 15. However, many countries have very different views about knowledge. These differences may be in areas such as:

- what the purpose of university education is
- where 'knowledge' comes from
- how 'experts' should be treated

These differences have a direct impact on the issue of plagiarism, and for many students this can be very confusing. It is important to emphasize that this does not mean one university system is better than another, simply that they are different. Since you are being assessed in an English-medium institution, you will need to understand and follow the procedures and practices of that institution.

### 'I can use other people's original ideas without reference.'

*This is not normal practice in the UK.*

Using other people's ideas without reference and pretending that they are your own is known as *plagiarism*. Plagiarism refers not only to text, but also to other people's words, data, diagrams, photographs, etc. Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously by the academic community. Punishment can range from a deduction of marks for your essay through to expulsion from the university. Nowadays, many universities use highly sophisticated computer programmes to detect cheating (such as Turnitin – [www.submit.ac.uk](http://www.submit.ac.uk)), so if you do plagiarize, it is likely you will be caught.

Of course, you are expected to use other people's ideas in your writing. Quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing are the best ways that you can do this and avoid plagiarism. These skills are discussed in detail in Step 4 and Step 5.

#### Note

'Plagiarism is a form of cheating and a serious academic offence ... A substantiated charge of plagiarism will result in a penalty being ordered ranging from a mark of zero for the assessed work to expulsion from the College.'

Extract from the plagiarism statement of King's College London

### 'I need to reference ideas which are commonly known or accepted.'

*This is not normal practice in the UK.*

Information which is 'commonly known', as opposed to somebody's 'exclusive discovery', does not need to be referenced. Sometimes, however, it may be difficult to know which category information is in. Knowledge which is generally considered to be 'common' includes that which is well known in either your field of study or in the wider world (for example, it can easily be found in a general work of reference such as a dictionary or encyclopaedia). As a general rule, if you are in doubt, it is better to be cautious and provide a reference.

### 'I can use/adapt the research of my friends.'

*This is not normal practice in the UK.*

There are some types of collaboration which, as a student, you are allowed to do, such as group project work. Such work is performed together and credit is received equally. You may not use or borrow someone else's ideas without their knowledge, or even if that person gives you permission.

## 'I can copy and paste information from the Internet into my essay, without saying where it is from.'

*This is not normal practice in the UK.*

A distinction has to be made between 'searching' and 'researching'. At a British university, you are not assessed on your ability to find information, but rather on your ability to understand and process it. Be careful when downloading information from the Internet that you would like to paraphrase or quote in your essay. Mixing up your own words and original material is dangerous. This kind of **ACCIDENTAL PLAGIARISM** is treated just as seriously as deliberate plagiarism.

## 'I can submit the same piece of work twice e.g., on a different course/module.'

*This is not normal practice in the UK.*

This kind of plagiarism, often referred to as **self-plagiarism**, is also unacceptable. Every piece of work which you present for assessment should be unique.

## 'I can pay someone to check through/proofread my essay to make minor improvements.'

*This is normal practice in the UK.*

The key word here is *minor*. Normally you may use proofreaders to improve the grammar or language in your essay. However, as soon as the proofreader makes significant or fundamental changes to your essay – for example expressing his or her own point of view in 'your' essay – then plagiarism has occurred.

### Essay-writing services: a warning

Using an essay-writing service – a phenomenon which has become increasingly popular in the last few years – is completely unacceptable. Since the overwhelming majority of essays which you can buy are already known to electronic software, you will be caught anyway, and the process will also have cost you a considerable amount of money.

## Plagiarism in context

### First draft of student writing

40% of students think that using someone else's ideas without reference is acceptable.

Often, it is East Asian students who find this a particular problem, because in the Confucian system knowledge is seen as something which is shared by society (Sowden, 2005).

It may also be a challenge for teachers when giving feedback, as they are often unaware of how to strike a balance between being sensitive to students' feelings, understanding potential cultural differences, and being clear and helpful in the messages they give.

### Problem

This data comes from an original piece of research, and therefore the source needs to be provided, i.e., '(Dawson and Overfield, 2006)'.

This is, arguably, common knowledge. The basic principles of Confucianism are well known in academic circles (and can easily be found in a general reference book). Therefore, the source does not need to be acknowledged.

This is someone's original idea, and therefore needs to be referenced, i.e., '(Hyland, 2000: 381)'. The student has copied and pasted the author's words and provided no reference. This is clearly plagiarism.

**D**

## Activation

Look at the following sentences and underline the correct statement.

1. Plagiarism **is/is not** considered to be a serious offence by universities.
2. If found guilty of plagiarism, you **can/cannot** be expelled from the university.
3. I **am/am not** allowed to copy and paste material directly from electronic sources into my essay.
4. I **am/am not** allowed to discuss my essay with a friend.
5. Universities **do/do not** have a range of electronic software to detect plagiarism.
6. I **have to/do not have to** reference every single fact in my essay.
7. If I pay someone to proofread my essay, he or she **can/cannot** change the content and ideas as well.
8. I **can/cannot** resubmit a piece of my work for assessment.
9. I **should/should not** use other people's ideas in my essays.

**E**

## Personalization

- Make a list of the differences which exist between the UK and your home country in terms of plagiarism. Knowledge of these specific differences will help you to avoid plagiarism.
- Go to the website of the university you are attending (or hope to attend) and read its plagiarism declaration form.
- Read through your last essay. Are there any parts in the essay where you feel:
  - you have used somebody else's ideas without proper acknowledgement?
  - you have copied and pasted information directly from the Internet?If so, what strategies could you use to solve these problems?

**F**

## Extension

- Step 4 and Step 5 focus on **QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, SUMMARIZING** and **REFERENCING**, which represent the main ways of avoiding plagiarism. In addition, Step 31 analyzes **reporting verbs**, which can be a useful tool for explaining what other people have said.
- Step 8 develops your **critical thinking skills**, so that you can manipulate, adapt and utilize your source material.
- Step 10 provides tips on **note-taking**. Good note-taking skills are one of the best ways to avoid accidental plagiarism.
- Step 14 extends your knowledge on **brainstorming** and **outlining**. These skills can help with your time management; poor time management is a major factor which results in students plagiarising.
- Appendix 4, Step 3 provides hyperlinks to the plagiarism statement from King's College London and to a plagiarism detection system website.