

# Plagiarism

## Academic Tip Sheet



### This academic tip sheet:

- defines plagiarism;
- explains why it is important to avoid plagiarism;
- looks at common areas that students find confusing;
- outlines a three-step process you can use to avoid plagiarism; and
- provides a checklist you can use to avoid unintentionally plagiarising.

### What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism refers to a process of presenting other people's work as your own without attributing it (i.e., referencing) correctly.

### Why is it important to avoid plagiarism?

At university, as you learn, you rely upon other people's ideas to understand and build or create your own knowledge. When you present your work for assessment, your lecturers want to be able to see where you've used ideas of others as building blocks

to create your own new knowledge. This requires you to acknowledge your sources by referencing correctly. This process of giving attribution is highly valued within all academic work as it not only shows a path for how new knowledge is built, but also gives credit to those from whom you have borrowed information. It shows you:

- have a clear understanding of the material you have read. You achieve this by explaining who said what about a subject;
- can situate (connect) your knowledge to an existing body of knowledge; and



- can distinguish your understanding of what you've read from an author's analyses.

### Am I plagiarising if I am using 'common knowledge'?

To decide whether the information is common knowledge or not, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I know this information before enrolling in this unit/course?
- Did this idea originate with me?

If you answered "no" to either or both of these questions, then the information is not common knowledge to you. In such cases you are expected to cite your source/s.

### Am I plagiarising when I paraphrase or summarise from sources?

Paraphrasing (i.e., stating ideas in your own words) and summarising can be used as long as you attribute the ideas to the authors and cite the sources by supplying both in-text and end-text references. Please note that paraphrasing is **not**:

- Changing just a word or two in someone else's sentence.
- Changing the sentence structure while maintaining the original words.
- Substituting a few words with synonyms.

To develop effective paraphrasing and summarising skills use the following steps:

- Read the source text carefully to understand the main idea made by the author.
- Write notes to capture the idea without looking at the source text. This will encourage you to put the idea into your own words and will prevent you from staying too close to the original.
- Insert the in-text reference into your notes.
- Analyse what you've read and revise your notes to draw the idea into your work (Ask yourself: Why is this idea relevant to my topic? How does this idea support my views?).
- Consider how the idea may relate to those expressed by other writers. Revise your notes even further to show the extent of your research and your understanding of the literature on the topic. Remember to insert further in-text references if you've referred to other writers.
- Consolidate the point and show how it links back to your argument/main idea.

### How can I avoid plagiarism?

Plagiarism is taken very seriously at ECU and is subject to academic penalties.

#### Step 1: Realise the positive aspects of using citations

Some students feel concerned about using too many citations. If you have established the relevance of the citation, then integrating citations into your work is highly beneficial because it:

- Shows the extent of your research.
- Demonstrates your understanding of the subject/topic.
- Differentiates what others have said from your own analysis.

Citations are an academic convention; make sure that you've used them to enhance your work.

#### Step 2: Improve your note-making skills

The risk of plagiarism begins at the note-making stage of assignment preparation. Careful note-making is the best way to prevent plagiarism. You should:

- Record the bibliographic details of the source for inclusion in your reference list. Write this at the top of each page of notes you make.
- When making notes as you read, try to do this without looking at the source – this will force you to use your own words. If you're experiencing a 'mental block' and cannot rewrite the ideas in your own words, then clearly indicate in your notes where the text remains unchanged by using quotation marks.

#### Step 3: Follow the referencing rules

Build up your 'Reference List' and insert your in-text references as you make your notes rather than leaving this task to the very end (when you are preparing your final draft).

Carefully record the details of each source you use. You may do this manually by following the *Referencing Guide* (Bennett, 2008), or by using referencing software tools such as EndNote. The guide is a useful resource that outlines the basic rules of referencing. It follows the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system. It is the standard used across all faculties and schools and is available to students in hardcopy and on line.

### Plagiarism checklist

- Have you enclosed all direct quotes in quotation marks and supplied the in-text reference?
- Have you supplied in-text references for all ideas that you've paraphrased?
- Have you supplied in-text references for sources you have consulted to support your ideas?
- Have you included all sources you've cited in your reference list?
- Have you correctly formatted all your references?

### References

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Bennett, T. J. (Ed.). (2008). *Referencing guide* (10th ed.). Perth, WA: Edith Cowan University.
- Gibaldi, J. (2003). *MLA handbook for writers of research papers*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Rosen, L. J. & Behren, L. (2000). *The Allyn & Bacon handbook*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Turabian, K. (1996). *A manual for writers of term papers, theses, and dissertations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, K. (1997). Can note-taking solve the plagiaphrasing problem? *EA Journal*, 15(1), 43-51.

### Acknowledgements

This material was modified from source documents prepared by Kuki Singh, ECU, 2007. Editor: Trevor Bennett.