

# How to protect yourself from committing plagiarism

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Much of the material in this handout is adapted from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab document entitled "Avoiding Plagiarism," which can be found at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_plagiar.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html). This use of their material is consistent with their stated acceptable use policy.

Plagiarism is presenting the intellectual work of others as if it is your own. It is considered to be the worst infringement of academic integrity, right alongside cheating on exams. In all reputable universities worldwide, plagiarism is grounds for expulsion from the university. Students put their academic and economic future in jeopardy when they commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is taken very seriously by Hanyang University, the Hanyang-Oregon TESOL Program, and by your professors. Any student who commits plagiarism in my classes will immediately fail the class. In this handout I would like to present a clear definition of what constitutes plagiarism, some inherent tensions that make plagiarism tempting and easy to fall into, and finally, give some concrete guidelines on how to avoid it.

## What is plagiarism?

Actions that may be considered plagiarism fall along a continuum, from the most deliberate to the possibly accidental. Of course the most deliberate forms of plagiarism are the most serious. However, there are more and less serious forms of "accidental" plagiarism as well. We will see some examples following this introduction.

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| Most deliberate -     | Buying, stealing or borrowing someone else's paper, assignment, test, or research plan or results.  |
|                       | Hiring someone to write your paper.   |
|                       | Writing a paper in one language and hiring someone to translate it into another language, and presenting the translation as your original work. |
|                       | Copying whole sentences or substantive sentence fragments without citing the source.  |
| Possibly accidental - | Presenting ideas that you got from others, in your own words, without citing the source.  |
|                       | Building on the ideas of others without citing the source.  |
|                       | Using a source too closely when paraphrasing.   |
|                       | Improperly or imprecisely citing a source.  |

Since professors may not distinguish between deliberate and accidental plagiarism, the only way to avoid being accused of plagiarism is to make sure you always give

credit where it is due. This means telling your readers whenever you are making reference to something someone else has published, written, emailed, drew, or mentioned in a personal conversation.

### Why does “accidental” plagiarism occur?

Accidental plagiarism often occurs because of a set of conflicting pressures that students and other scholars find themselves under. These conflicting pressures include the following:

<b>On the one hand scholars must . . .</b>	<b>On the other hand they also should . . .</b>
. . . demonstrate that they know what other authors have said.	. . . contribute something new.
. . . appeal to experts and authorities.	. . . improve upon, disagree and criticize experts and authorities.
. . . cite the source of all ideas that come from others.	. . . come up with their own brilliant ideas in a short period of time.
. . . write in fluent “academic” English.	. . . use their own words and “voice.”

### How to choose when to give someone else credit and when not to

Citing sources too often makes your writing cumbersome and hard to follow. It also may give the impression that you have no new ideas of your own. Furthermore, too many long quotes from external sources can cause you (and your reader) to lose track of the main point of your argument and give the impression that you have not thought through or understood the topic of the paper yourself. The following are general principles about when to cite and when not to cite sources:

<b>You need to cite a source . . .</b>	<b>No need to cite a source . . .</b>
When you are using or referring to somebody else’s words or ideas from a magazine, book, journal, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other public source.	When you are describing your own experiences, your own observations, your own insights, your own thoughts, your own conclusions about a subject.
When you use information gained through interviewing another person, either in person, by e-mail, telephone or letter.	When you are using “common knowledge” (see below) — folklore, common sense observations, shared information within your field of study or cultural group.
When you copy the exact words or a “unique phrase” from somewhere.	When you are compiling generally accepted facts.

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When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, tables, charts, and pictures.

When you are describing your own findings or experimental results.

### **What does it mean to “critically evaluate” the work of an esteemed professional scholar?**

Anyone can cut and paste quotes from a website or other published document. Writing a good academic paper requires the ability to *synthesize* and *critically evaluate* previous scholarship, rather than simply repeat what others have said. An excellent paper is internally consistent – it follows a clear, and well designed plan. If you borrow whole sections from someone else’s writing (even with proper citation), the result becomes a muddled combination of the original author’s plan and your own plan. Your reader is likely to become confused about what you are trying to say.

**Synthesis:** “Synthesis” means a “bringing together.” When you write an academic paper of any sort you are “bringing together” the ideas of several different people, including possibly:

1. One or more scholars who have written on the topic before.
2. Your professor.
3. General knowledge available to all members of your discipline or other culture group.
4. Yourself.

Different scholars use different terms to describe the same or similar concepts. For example, suppose scholar A uses the term “subject” to refer to “Lucretia” in a sentence like:

“Lucretia ate my turnips.”

Let’s say scholar B uses the term “agent” to refer to the same clause element, while scholar C uses the term “actor,” and scholar D just calls it a “noun.” What do you do?

First you must understand the concepts that all previous scholars intend by their use of terminology. Are they using different terms to describe the same concept, or is each one focusing on different characteristics of one complex notion?

Then you must decide for the purposes of your paper, which of the concepts intended (not necessarily the terms used) by each previous scholar is most appropriate for the purposes of your work. Then you *must define this concept clearly in your own words*.

This is the essence of synthesis – creating something new (and hopefully beautiful) out of the bringing together of thoughts and ideas of others.

**Critical evaluation.** “How can I critically evaluate the intellectual work of someone who has published famous books and is a recognized senior scholar in my field?” This is a question often asked by university students. Part of the answer to this is in