University of Cyprus Library

ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM:

How to identify and avoid it

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HOW TO IDENTIFY AND AVOID PLAGIARISM

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is defined as "the misappropriation of other people's intellectual work" (*Babiniotis, 2006)*. It has to do with "the appropriation and use of other people's thoughts, words, writings or inventions and their presentation as one's own creations" (Oxford English Dictionaries). The definition also involves plagiarism of ideas, information, pictures, diagrams, tables etc.

The meaning of the term *plagiarism* entails:

a) copying a primary text/source (from books, articles, websites and other sources) without using references.

b) copying another student's work and submitting it as one's own.

c) copying from the Internet texts or other information whose author might be unknown.

Even if minor changes in the words or sentences have been made, it is still plagiarism.

The definition also involves collusion. In accordance with the UCY Statutes of Academic Affairs, collusion refers to "the submission and presentation of an assignment as a product of exclusively individual work, entirely completed by a single student, while it has been carried out in collaboration with other students". Collusion also includes cases in which the student "resubmits in whole or in part an assignment which they had originally written for the needs of another assessment, to meet the obligations of a new assessment procedure" (2015).

TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarising an entire source

This involves the use of someone else's work and, by extension, the collection of information and data from that person, which the plagiarist presents as their own. It involves the copying of any source (article, website, book), as well as the cases in which the student has either bought an assignment or copied it from a third person, presenting it as their own.

Partial Copying

This type of plagiarism mainly involves copying and pasting from either an electronic or printed source, as well as using ready-made videos, diagrams, photographs (and other pieces of information) without a reference.

The plagiarist incorporates verbatim expressions, paragraphs, sentences and content from the primary text without referring to the source, as they should.

Plagiarism through paraphrasing

Paraphrasing refers to the rewording of the original text in one's own words. Each time ideas or creations (short or long texts, images or other media) of other people (well-known or not) are used, references have to be used as well. Whether you use information from a text verbatim or paraphrase, it is necessary to refer to the sources from which the information was obtained.

WAYS TO BUILD YOUR ASSIGNMENT WITHOUT PLAGIARISING

In order to avoid plagiarism, you are advised to follow the helpful steps below:

Organising your assignment

This is the first step in order to lay solid foundation for your assignment. Make sure you understand your topic, break it down into subtopics and organise the collection of data accordingly. At this stage, try to form an opinion and some arguments on your topic so that you choose sources to back your opinion. This will clearly distinguish your own positions from those of the sources you have consulted.

Taking notes

Data collection is one of the most important steps towards a successful assignment. During this stage, it is necessary to **record your notes effectively.** Take notes from the sources that you wish to use, after checking their reliability. Make sure that you clearly signpost the different sources in your notes. Through note-taking you will be able to better understand pre-existing ideas developed by other authors and how they are related to each other. An in-depth understanding of pre-existing ideas, as well as your analysis, are very helpful in order to achieve the main goal of any assignment, which is **to develop your own argument and opinion**, substantiated with facts/data and analysed in relation to relevant pre-existing ideas for which references are provided.

Recording the information for each source used

In addition to your notes, it is important to **record the information for each source** (author, title, publication, date, website, date of access to the website etc.) to avoid referring back to the sources as the deadline for submitting your assignment approaches, when the pressure is at its highest point.

Always remember that, whether you are quoting a text verbatim or paraphrasing, you need to provide the relevant reference, based on a specific international bibliographic citation standard (MLA, Harvard etc.).

For information on **the various bibliographic and referencing standards**, you can consult the website of the UCY Library, https://library.ucy.ac.cy/research-support/referencing/?lang=en, or attend one of the special seminars on the use of citation management tools, e.g. RefWorks.

Paraphrasing

A **Paraphrase** is the restatement of an idea, found in a source, in your own words to incorporate it in your assignment without changing the meaning of the idea. The changes between the primary source and your text must be significant, especially in terms of the writing style. You should ultimately render the extract you quote in your own words and style of writing, providing the relevant references for the sources used.

In general, **an effective paraphrase** involves an in-depth understanding of your source, its transfer to 'paper' in your own words, and its felicitous usage in your assignment.

Steps to an effective paraphrase

- Read the primary source carefully to understand it in depth.

- Paraphrase by expressing the idea presented in the source in your own words.

- Write next to it what you want to use it in your assignment for, e.g. to compare it to another point of view, to argue against/support an argument.

- Write down the details of the source to use it in your references according to the appropriate bibliographic standard pointed out by your professor(s).

- If there are specific extracts in the primary source that you have decided to incorporate verbatim in your assignment, these should be written within quotation marks.

When you wish to incorporate **a text extract verbatim** in your assignment, always remember that **it is necessary to use quotation marks ("…")**.

You should consult the guides on the various bibliographic and referencing standards. Use quotation marks, when needed, and be careful not to make any change to the word(s) used, word order, punctuation mark(s), spelling and, by extension, meaning of the text.

Some common reasons for incorporating an extract/a text verbatim include cases in which:

- You believe that the author has conveyed the meaning in a way that is better than you could possibly express it

- The specific extract presents the topic in such a unique way that if you try to paraphrase it, you risk altering its meaning

- You wish to incorporate the extract verbatim to support and emphasise your arguments.

References

There are many forms and ways in which references can be written. These vary according to the format of the bibliographic citation standard adopted by each Faculty/ Department, e.g. APA (American Psychological Association) MLA (Modern Language Association), etc.

You can get information regarding the format of the various bibliographic citation standards on the Library website: https://library.ucy.ac.cy/literature-support/ bibliography/.

You MUST use a reference when:

- You use verbatim a text from another source (texts, articles, websites).

- You use paraphrase to restate an idea/theory from another source (texts, articles, websites).

- You use diagrams, pictures, tables etc. that you have found on a website, in books and articles or from any other source.

You DO NOT NEED to use a reference when:

- You write something that is yours, your own opinion/idea/theory.

- You write about something that constitutes "common knowledge".

- You use diagrams, pictures, tables etc. that you have drawn yourself and which you have produced for the specific assignment.

END-OF-ASSIGNMENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

At the end of each assignment, you should include your bibliography, i.e. a list which will include the full bibliographic information (author, title, year, pages etc.) of all the sources that have been consulted during the writing of the assignment (books, articles, websites etc.). The formatting of each bibliographic list differs depending on the formatting standard used by each Faculty/Department. You need to be aware of the standard you must use for each assignment.

EXAMPLE

Text: Liasides, S. A. *Εγχειρίδιο Οικογενειακού Δικαίου [Family Law Handbook]*, Nicosia 2010, p. 454 - Chapter 17

The European Union estimates that a child's right to maintain a regular relationship with both their parents is a matter of priority. For this reason, the child has the right to express themselves regarding any issue related to parental care which concerns them, according to their age and maturity.

Text by Student A

The child, always depending on their age and level of maturity, may express their wishes and reservations about any matter that concerns them in the context of the care provided by the parents. This is essential for the child's benefit and, according to Judge Liasides, "a child's right to maintain a regular relationship with both their parents"[1] constitutes a highly important issue for the European Union.[2]

[1] Liasides, S.A. (2010). *Εγχειρίδιο Οικογενειακού Δικαίου [Family Law Handbook]*, Nicosia 2010, p. 454 – Ch. 17, Cyprus Legal Publications – Publication of the Cyprus Bar Association.

[2] Ibid

- This example **DOES NOT** constitute plagiarism. This paraphrase is an acceptable example since it restates the idea of the primary source using different language without altering the meaning, while it reinforces the specific view by quoting a sentence from the text. References and quotation marks are used correctly. It demonstrates that the student has understood the topic and can develop it.

Text by Student B

The European Union recognises the importance of the child's right to maintain continuous contact with both parents. For this reason, the child can express themselves, insofar as their age and maturity allow, and express their needs and wishes as regards parental responsibility.

- This is an example of **plagiarism** since no significant changes are made when restating the primary source. Minor changes or replacement of words with synonyms do not constitute a paraphrase. Also, there is no relevant reference giving credit to the primary source.

UCY RULES

In accordance with the UCY Statutes of Academic Affairs, plagiarism is considered a serious offence and can even result in expulsion from the University. Any complaints about possible incidents of plagiarism are investigated through the use of special plagiarism detection software (e.g. Turnitin) and are referred to the Students Disciplinary Committee of the Senate for disciplinary action (University of Cyprus, 2015).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Where can I find the different bibliographic and referencing standards?

On the Library website of the University, by clicking on "Research Support" and then on "Citation Management" or "Referencing", you will find various bibliographic and referencing standards. You also need to be aware of the bibliographic and referencing standard required by your Faculty/Department.

2. If I have an idea and it turns out that someone else has had the same idea, will it still be considered plagiarism even though I was not aware of the other person's idea?

It is impossible for two ideas to be identical, but even if they are, it is highly unlikely that they will be expressed in exactly the same way. Every person's way of writing and expressing themselves is different. Professors are able to identify which of the things you write are your own ideas, as they will be expressed in your own, unique style and will reflect your own knowledge and skills.

3. If I have written something that someone else had already written but I was not aware of this, will it be considered plagiarism?

Undoubtedly, various opinions and arguments will have already been stated and written on the subject of your assignment. Although this means that it is likely that you coincide on the subject, it is unlikely that you will write exactly the same ideas and arguments and that you will express them in exactly the same way. It is important to record the sources that you want to use to make sure that you have included them in your references.

4. How can I signpost in my assignment which parts are mine and which were expressed by other people?

Clearly signpost other people's words or ideas, as well as information from third-party sources you include in your assignment. You can do this by using specific verbs such as: *mentions, claims, argues, states, describes, asserts, analyses*, as well as expressions such as: *according to, based on, as mentioned in, has observed that, has proven that*, etc. Also, clearly signpost your own contribution in the analysis of that information. In any case, there should be references for any use of other people's words (verbatim or paraphrased).

5. If I write in my assignment some things that I have discussed with a fellow student, will it be considered plagiarism?

In some cases, you might be asked to work in groups for an assignment. In cases that your assignment is to be done individually, though, there is no harm in discussing with a fellow student or friend whom you consider knowledgeable on the topic to exchange views, provided that the assignment you submit will be the product of your own work and not the product of copying or borrowing other people's words and/or ideas.

6. How can I cite a website in which no author or date are mentioned?

It is advisable to first carefully explore the website since sometimes the information about an article/text may not be immediately evident. You can search for any links that could take you either to the home page, where you might find information, or to further useful links. In the case the website belongs to an institution, there will be no specific author. In these cases, you can mention the institution. As regards the dates, you could check when the website was last updated. If after following these steps you cannot be sure about this information, then it might not be a very good idea to trust the specific website, as its reliability is questionable.

7. How should I cite a source I find cited in a book without having read the original source?

This case concerns secondary referencing. For example, if you read an article by A in which there is a reference to an article by B and you have not found or read the one written by B, then you should write: "B (as mentioned in A, 2010) …". In your bibliography you will cite A's article, not B's. It is better to search for and read the original text so as to cross-check the information and be able to use the primary source. You should not give the impression that you have read sources that you have not actually read. Use secondary references sparingly.

8. How many references should I have in an assignment?

There is no specific number of references required per assignment. Referencing or citing sources in an assignment reflects the extent of the research conducted. As a result, your arguments become more credible through the use of the sources you have consulted and your assignment as a whole becomes more rigorous. An assignment that combines verbatim citations, paraphrasing, critical thinking and analysis of the information is certainly an example of reliable academic writing and it definitely involves a certain number of references.

9. I do not feel confident that I know my topic well enough to write a paper on it, which is why I keep referencing. Is this alright?

There is no harm in having a number of references in an assignment, provided that these references are further analysed by students through their own thoughts and arguments. The references are mainly used to support their arguments. An assignment that uses, to a great extent, information borrowed verbatim from other texts and/or paraphrasing instead of critical analysis and original ideas is more likely to be given a lower mark. In case you do not feel confident that you know your topic well, you should dedicate more time to research and read relevant sources in order to understand it more thoroughly and form a more concrete opinion to base your arguments on. Keeping in mind this shortcoming, make sure that you start in advance, allowing yourself the extra time necessary to cope. If you do not dedicate the required time and hand in an assignment full of paraphrasing and verbatim information from other texts, without providing your own critical thinking, you run the risk of committing plagiarism.

10. I have used information from our professor's lectures. Do I have to cite it?

Yes, you do have to cite any information you get from a source. Your professor's lectures or slides are sources. This information may be the product of your professor's research, ideas or writings. Whether the source you have used has been published or not, is immaterial. You can look up how to cite these sources in the style guide used by your Faculty/Department. Lectures and slides should be used sparingly.

11. I had no idea that what I did constitutes plagiarism. I did not mean it.

Even if you did not intend to commit plagiarism, this does not annul the fact that plagiarism has been committed. Plagiarism is considered an offence which falls under the UCY Statutes of Academic Affairs.

12. So, do I have to cite everything I use in my assignment?

Whenever you use the words and ideas of others, whether through paraphrasing or by citing information verbatim from a text, you must cite the primary source. This is not necessary when what is written is a product of your own thoughts and ideas or constitutes "common knowledge". This category involves facts or information that can be easily checked from reliable sources and/or are widely known to the public, while they are not subject to copyright issues. If you are unsure whether a fact falls within this category, then opt for citing it.

13. Is it possible to commit plagiarism without realising it?

It is possible to commit plagiarism without having the intention to deceive. When writing, try not to be preoccupied with the fear of committing plagiarism. This will prevent you from thinking clearly when writing your assignment. How to proceed: Firstly, manage your time and organise your different tasks. Set feasible goals that can be attainable within reasonable time. Also, organise your time having in mind that the research and the processing of the sources are an important part of the assignment. Always keep a balance between the sources that you will use and your own ideas. Moreover, it is necessary to take very good notes from the sources that you want to use. This will help you to identify which of them you will use verbatim and which you will incorporate in your work through paraphrasing. In addition, your notes should include the information you will need for your references so that you do not need to visit your sources every time you wish to make a citation. You should be aware of the bibliography and referencing standard that your Faculty/Department wants you to use. At the source listing stage, you should make sure that your sources are reliable.

14. I will not be able to express myself as well as the author of a source I have read, so I have to use some words verbatim.

If you think it is necessary to include an extract verbatim in your assignment because you feel that the author has managed to convey the meaning a lot better than you could have done, go ahead. This will reinforce your arguments, provided that you will proceed to further analyse the idea to show that you have understood the topic sufficiently and that you are not simply quoting verbatim from the text. Do not forget to credit it to the author using quotation marks and making the appropriate citations/references. However, try to avoid including extracts verbatim frequently and make sure that you have consulted a number of sources before starting to write your assignment. This will help you form a sounder opinion on the topic and, as a result, you will be able to express your arguments in your own words. If you only consult one or two sources, you will get the impression that everything has been stated in the best possible way and that you cannot discuss it properly. Trust your own potential.

15. What can I do to make sure that my assignment does not contain any phrase from a source I have consulted but I cannot remember exactly which it was?

During the research stage, always remember to take notes while reading your sources. You can write down the source, what you will use from it, the author's name and the information needed for the references. In this way, the chance that you will use any phrases without knowing whether you have read them somewhere or not is very slim.

16. What should I do if I cannot remember where I found an idea I wrote about in my assignment?

Try to go back to your sources and remember which of them you considered important. Always record your sources very carefully (title, author, date, website, etc.) and do not leave the compilation of your references for later on. This will help you keep track of your sources, organise them properly and save time as well. If you really want to use something, take the time to search for the source you have used. You can also ask a librarian for help. Otherwise, it is better not to use it, since any other option will be regarded as plagiarism.

17. To what extent do I have to change a primary source when paraphrasing in order to avoid committing plagiarism?

There is no specific percentage to be used as a benchmark (e.g. that 15% similarity between two texts is acceptable). If you are asking yourself this, it means that you are focusing on a specific part of the text rather than on its general idea. The changes must be obvious and significant. Some useful advice to make it easier to paraphrase is to use synonyms (without changing the meaning), to use verbs instead of nouns and vice versa, and to use adjectives, wherever possible. In addition, when paraphrasing you can provide a definition or some explanation for some terms. This will show that you have understood the primary source and that, by making necessary changes to the original formulation, you have managed to integrate it into your own assignment. The key is to use the vocabulary, syntax, and grammar in your favour. As university students, you should be able to express yourselves using your own style and words. If you can manage that, there is no reason to think about the extent to which you change the information used from the primary source.

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