



**UNIVERSITY OF  
STIRLING**

**THE LITTLE BOOK OF  
PLAGIARISM**  
**What it is and how to avoid it**

This short booklet is designed to help students to understand more fully what plagiarism is, and suggests strategies for avoiding it.

**It is important that this document is read in conjunction with referencing guidelines provided by Schools and Divisions.**

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For more information on plagiarism visit  
<http://www.plagiarism.stir.ac.uk/>

The latest version of this publication is freely available to University of Stirling staff and students on the University's website:  
<http://www.quality.stir.ac.uk/documents/BookofPlagiarism.pdf>

## WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Everyone in education knows that plagiarism is something to be avoided, but not everyone is sure precisely what it is. This short booklet is designed to help you to understand more fully what plagiarism is, and equally important, how you can develop practices to avoid it.

Intentional, or accidental, plagiarism is perceived as a specific form of cheating which usually occurs when a student is working independently on an assignment (e.g. essays, reports, presentations or dissertations). The University of Stirling uses the following definition of plagiarism –

“The practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own”.

(<http://www.quality.stir.ac.uk/ac-policy/assessment.php>)

This means taking other people’s work (intellectual property) and incorporating it into your own work without acknowledging the original source of your information or ideas. Examples of other people’s ‘work’ can include anything taken from Internet sources, the spoken word, graphics, data and written text.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- the inclusion in your work of extracts from another person’s work without the use of quotation marks and/or acknowledgement of the original source(s);
- the summarising of another person’s work without acknowledgement;
- the substantial use of the ideas of another person without acknowledgement;
- copying the work or ideas of another student with or without that student’s knowledge or agreement.

The key element of a submitted assignment is that it should be your own work entirely with all use of any resources appropriately acknowledged. For a group project, this would mean that the work should only be produced by members of the agreed group. Many modules now require that you sign a declaration on an assignment cover sheet. Here is an example:

Work which is submitted for assessment must be your own work. All students should note that the University has a formal policy on plagiarism which can be found at:

<http://www.stir.ac.uk/academicpolicy/handbook/assessment/#q-8>

**Please complete this statement:**

This assignment was prepared by ....., a student on module ..... at the University of Stirling. This is entirely my own individual work, all resources have been acknowledged and it has not been submitted previously for any other academic award.

Student signature: ..... Date: ....."

## WHY MIGHT PLAGIARISM OCCUR?

There are many reasons why students plagiarise, for example:

- When a student is not fully aware of what plagiarism is;
- When a student does not fully understand the conventions required in academic writing;
- It can be a panic response to poor time management when an essay deadline is looming;
- If a student feels a desperate need not to be seen as a failure and so copies to try to ensure 'success';
- It can be a response to different academic traditions;
- It can be a response to information overload and the ease with which text can be cut and pasted from the other electronic documents or pages on the Internet;
- It can be an attempt not to displease a tutor;
- The student may copy out text word for word during note-taking and then forget to reword (paraphrase) the text for the assignment.

Sometimes, of course, plagiarism is a determined and deliberate attempt to gain the credit for the module without doing the work.

If plagiarism is deemed to have taken place, the reasons for why it has happened **are not taken into consideration**. Plagiarism is always perceived as cheating and is dealt with through University procedures. It is seen as not only cheating the University, but also cheating other students. However, there are more reasons than the negative ones (cheating others, unfairness, and possibly discovery and disciplinary action) for not plagiarising.

## POSITIVE REASONS FOR NOT PLAGIARISING

### 1. Pride in Your Work

Students should be able to take pride in their work and in the achievements they have attained. There is considerable satisfaction in knowing that you are developing your writing skills, the work you have submitted is your own, all resources are appropriately acknowledged, and the marks obtained reflect your own effort and abilities.

### 2. Learning

It will not be possible to learn properly if you are not completing the required course work properly. For example, if you are required to write an essay or literature review, you will not just learn about the subject, you will also be developing a whole range of abilities such as literature searching, time management, organisation, analysis, evaluation, developing coherent arguments, referencing and academic writing. It is much more difficult to develop these aspects of academic study without practising them and getting tutor feedback. Completing your assignments provides you with an important opportunity to learn about your discipline area and communicate your understanding to others.

### 3. Real Level of Attainment

It is possible (although unlikely) that someone might plagiarise widely and not be discovered throughout their University career. However, the discovery that their apparent attainment does not match their real abilities may then become obvious when they find a job. It is not worth the risk and worry this could cause.

### 4. UK Academic Traditions

It is important to recognise that plagiarism, as described here, is what is understood by the term in UK Academic Institutions. Rules and traditions which may apply anywhere else are not relevant in the context of UK Higher Education.

## **PLAGIARISM IN PRACTICE – WHAT IS IT?**

You should check the details of the next section carefully to ensure that you are fully aware of what constitutes plagiarism at the University of Stirling. If you are found to have plagiarised you may not be awarded credit or a grade for your assignment or module. Plagiarism in your Honours dissertation or project could mean that you don't get your degree. Plagiarism takes many forms. Some of the more common forms are identified here.

### 1. Copying from a single source

This is where the student uses one of the following as the basis for the whole, or a substantial part, of the assignment:

- published or unpublished books, articles or reports,
- the Internet,
- TV programme, radio programme or newspaper article,
- an essay from an essay bank,
- a piece of work previously submitted by another student,
- copying from a text which is about to be submitted for the same assignment (see also 'collusion' below)

Note that this list is comprised of both published and unpublished sources. Plagiarism is not copying just from published sources. It can also arise from the copying of unpublished sources like other people's essays.

You could be accused of plagiarism if substantial copying has taken place and the majority of the words, arrangement of material and ideas are exactly as in the original source but this has not been acknowledged. Without acknowledgement of the original source, the tutor would not know where the information came from. Even when an acknowledgment is included you would still require quotation marks to indicate which the original words were. Without quotation marks you could be accused of plagiarism as tutors would not know which words came directly from the source and which words were written by the student. This kind of plagiarism is increasingly detectable with modern software such as 'Turnitin' and when the copying is substantial, and without appropriate acknowledgment, it is usually viewed seriously.

### Common Assumptions

- A. *If a book has been written by the lecturer then they would expect to find their work repeated in the assignment.* - No, lecturers would expect several sources to be read and used, and would not be flattered to find their own work simply copied out.
- B. *The ideas and information came from a basic textbook and therefore do not require referencing.* – No, all sources of information used require acknowledgement.
- C. *As long as the book or article is cited in the reference list or bibliography it's OK.* - No, it is not enough to have a final or general list of resources. It has to be clear, within the body of the text, where information or ideas have come from and original wording has to be indicated through the use of quotation marks. An accurate reference list also has to be provided.

## 2. Copying from several sources

This is similar to the above, except that more than one source is used. A student obtains (say) 4 sources of information, and copies a sentence or group of sentences from A, then one from B, one from C and one from D and so on.

The sources used might well have been cited in the final reference list or bibliography, the essay might answer the question set and the organisation of the material may well be the student's own. However, this could still be considered to be plagiarism. Why? The reason is that although the structure and composition is the student's own work, the words are not. Rules of academic writing require that whenever direct quotations (the actual words) are copied from a source, this should be indicated by the use of quotation marks and appropriate acknowledgement.

If no quotation marks are included within the text, the work is being dishonest about who actually wrote what. As we will see later, the solution is not just to add quotation marks to each of the sections used because all this does is provide a long list of quotations and you are unlikely to gain a good grade. In such a case, the student's only contribution is cutting and pasting, which is not what the assignment was designed to assess, and there is no demonstration by the student of the required skills of analysis, interpretation, judgment or evaluation.

### Common Assumptions

- A. *The original sources put it better than anybody else could so it's OK.* - No, you are expected to use the sources constructively, demonstrate that you have understood them and have been able to use them effectively in the assignment. You need to use the sources in a way that demonstrates your understanding of the texts.
- B. *You can copy from several sources as long as you have quotation marks and a reference list.* - No, you are encouraged to use a variety of sources but you should not be copying extensively or directly from them. You should try and limit the use of quotations\* so that your essay does not become a 'patchwork' of other people's words or ideas. Any direct quotations you do decide to use should be within quotation marks and referenced correctly.

\*Check School/Divisional guidelines as these will vary depending on the subject area and assignment set.

### 3. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is re-writing someone else's views or ideas into your own words. To a certain extent any essay or assignment which relies on reading and analyzing a series of texts will contain a significant amount of paraphrasing. However, even if you paraphrase somebody else's work, you will still need to acknowledge the source of ideas or evidence upon which your own ideas are based. Therefore in this case remember to ensure that:

- You do not rely on only one source of material,
- You acknowledge all sources used,
- You take care when taking notes to remember what is copied from a text and what is in your own words.

#### Common Assumptions

- A. *Just changing everything into your own words is enough.* - If all you have done is summarised someone else's ideas then you have still copied because you have made it appear as if the ideas, arrangement of material etc. were your own.
- B. *It is OK to paraphrase everything as long as all sources are cited in the reference list or bibliography.* - Even when you paraphrase somebody else's work, it still needs to be acknowledged within the assignment. To simply summarise the work of others and not acknowledge this within the text (whether or not the works are in the reference list or bibliography) is still trying to pass someone else's work off as your own.

### 4. Collusion

This can occur when students work together, and it is very important to distinguish when this is required, and when it has to end. Some assignments require students to work together as part of a group project. Where the group as a whole gets the mark, then it is joint work throughout and the group co-operation is part of what is being assessed.

However, some group projects require students to work together at the planning stage, but then to submit individual assignments. Here the co-operation has to end at the point where you begin to compile your own individual submission, which must be your own work from this stage onwards. Acknowledgement should be made to the contribution or efforts of the other members of the group when this is drawn upon.

A difficult area is when students discuss their work together. A line needs to be drawn between legitimate discussion of the current assignment with student colleagues and collusion. The important thing to remember is that whilst general discussion of the issues involved, or approaches to be taken, is acceptable, the final submission must be your own individual effort. In a case where two or more students submit similar or identical work and culpability cannot be established, any penalties for plagiarism will be applied equally to both students. For more details on penalties see: <http://www.quality.stir.ac.uk/ac-policy/assessment.php>

## PLAGIARISM – HOW DO I AVOID IT?

The following guidelines will help you to avoid plagiarism. However, you have to be aware that different disciplines have their own conventions and Schools and Divisions produce their own guidelines to referencing and avoiding plagiarism. **Make sure you refer to your student handbooks for further guidance** and if in doubt, ask a tutor or lecturer.

### 1. Making Notes

During note taking it is possible that you adopt the language of your source and it is tempting to write out the notes word-for word to try to save some time. When you come to write your assignment, it can then be difficult to remember which notes are in your own words and which have been copied directly from your sources. One way to avoid this is not to take notes in the first instance. Instead read the text first, consider what the author has said and then summarise the work in your own words. If you do this, you will tend to copy less of the text and also test your understanding of the work. Another strategy is to write any notes in your own words in one colour pen and any direct quotations in another. When you go back to your notes to write your assignment it will be clear what is your work and what has been taken direct from somebody else's work.

When you are taking notes from other sources, remember to be systematic in recording all the necessary details about the source ready to prepare your final reference list. A template for recording this information is included at the end of this booklet. This will make collating your final reference list a much easier task.

### 2. Use of Quotations

Remember that if you use the exact words from your source these should appear in quotation marks (or for longer quotations be indented) and be fully referenced as required by your Division. Make sure it is clear where the quotation starts and finishes. As usual, all details of the source should be included within the reference list or bibliography.

The number of quotations that is acceptable in an assignment will vary depending on the discipline and the assignment task. For example, in an English assignment, a substantial number of quotations may be required to illustrate or support a particular argument. However, in the Natural Sciences it is less likely you would require numerous quotations to evidence your argument. Unless you have been advised otherwise, try to use quotations sparingly and make sure the reader knows why the quotation is important for your argument. Use quotations only when the author has expressed something so well and so succinctly that you feel that the words cannot be bettered. If you do this, you will probably reduce the number of your quotations and be more aware of when you are quoting.

It is also important to minimise the number of 'secondary quotations'. This is where you lift a quotation from a source without studying the original piece of work. To understand a quotation within another piece of work, it is often necessary to go to the original sources and read the work in context. This also allows you to interpret the original work in a way which is meaningful to both you and the assignment.



### 3. Paraphrasing

If you rewrite the author's words into your own words, remember that you still have to attribute the broad ideas or content to the author in question. You will probably carry over some of their language, but as long as you are making it clear which sources you are using, and not attempting to pass it off as your own work then this should not arouse suspicion of plagiarism.

The more sources you look at, the less likely it is that you will seem to be repeating without acknowledgement the content of one of them. If you take care when you are taking notes (see above), you will also reduce the chance of unacknowledged paraphrasing.

### 4. Cite all sources used

You should cite all the sources you have used. This includes any web sources used, and any newspaper articles, reports, and TV or radio programmes referred to. If they have contributed to the completion of your assignment they should be listed along with the printed books and articles. If you only cite some sources and forget others, it could be perceived as an attempt to prevent the lecturer comparing your assignment text with some of the actual texts used. If there is considerable similarity (either direct copying or paraphrasing) and you have not cited the work in question, then this could be considered as a case of plagiarism. For guidelines on how to cite appropriately, please refer to your departmental guidelines.

Check your assessment guidelines to see if you are required to produce a reference list or a bibliography (see glossary). It is not good practice to pad out a bibliography or reference list with lots of titles which you have not read and in some cases you could lose marks for this. A short list of well-used sources is much better than a long list of sources which you have never looked at; the number of references expected within an assignment varies depending on the discipline area, the year of study and the assignment set.

### 5. How do I know when to include a reference in my work?

When you are writing an essay or completing a similar kind of assignment, it is not always necessary to include a reference to everything you say. If that were so, your work would be more references than substance. When you give a reference is partly a matter of judgment, and conventions will vary from one discipline to another.

This example from an English history assignment gives a good indication of when you would and would not give a source reference. For example:

*The Battle of Hastings was fought in the south of England in 1066...*

Assuming this was not a direct quotation, it would not need a reference to indicate where you obtained the information. This is because it is a very well known fact and is not contentious.

However, if you then wish to discuss the various opinions of historians on the conduct and outcome of that battle, then you would need to reference the

sources. This fictitious example illustrates the use of three sources which have been paraphrased by the student:

*Spring considers that the Norman tactics were misguided but ultimately successful.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Summer has long argued that it was only the exhaustion of the Anglo-Saxon forces which permitted the Norman victory.<sup>2</sup>*

You might then continue;

*A more modern view has recently been expressed by Winter who regards both these views as too simplistic.<sup>3</sup> This essay will consider this idea in more detail here.*

Note here, the way that you have moved from simply stating what scholars might think about this battle, to how *you* are going to consider and deal with their views. The acknowledgment of the original sources of information would (in this case as it is a history assignment) go in as a footnote or endnote; this is why there are superscript numbers included within the text.

In other subject areas, you would acknowledge these sources of the information differently. For example, following the Harvard System of referencing would look like this:

*The Battle of Hastings was fought in the south of England in 1066. Spring (2009) considers that the Norman tactics were misguided but ultimately successful. In contrast, Summer (2010) has long argued that it was only the exhaustion of the Anglo-Saxon forces which permitted the Norman victory. A more modern view has recently been expressed by Winter (2011) who regards both these views as too simplistic. This essay will consider this idea in more detail here.*

**It is your responsibility to check your School or Divisional guidelines.**

## 6. Your Lecturer's Views

It is a common assumption that your lecturer wants you to repeat his or her views in your assignment, especially if these have been published in a book or article. Try to remember that this is not the case. All lecturers want you to use the sources suggested in the reading list (including their own if relevant), but they want you to use them constructively to answer the question, or complete the assignment. They do not want you simply to repeat the views contained in their own works.

## 7. The Textbook

If a lecturer recommends a textbook, then obviously he or she wants you to read it. However, as above, they do not want you to copy it out when completing an assignment. Once again, the idea is to use the information constructively. You want to show that you have understood the issues and concepts involved, but in order to show that you have understood them, there has to be clear input from you. This cannot be shown if you simply copy out the text from the textbook,

however good this is. It is also the case that if you use basic textbooks, you still need to follow the referencing conventions.

#### 8. Diagrams, graphs, tables

Any graphs, tables, data or diagrams that are not the result of your own work, also need to be fully acknowledged. It is usual to include a title and to reference the source of the information or graphic in the usual way.

#### 9. Collusion in individual assignments.

Collusion occurs when students work together on an assignment that should be an individual piece of work. To avoid suspicion of collusion you are advised to do the following:

- have any discussions and sharing of ideas *before* you start completing the assignment;
- do not ask to look at anyone else's assignment and do not show yours to anyone else if they ask to see it;
- remember that if sequence, style and content are very similar between two pieces of work it will lead the lecturer to wonder whether there has been collusion;

#### 10. Copying from the Web or purchasing essays

There is only one simple piece of advice here – **do not do this**. You may know some fellow student who has done so and “got away with it”. However, remember, that such a student may not have similar “success” next time, and that even if he or she has been successful in passing off work which is not their own, it does not mean that you will be. The University of Stirling's penalties for such activities, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, are explained under section 6.8 on <http://www.stir.ac.uk/academicpolicy/handbook/assessmentincludingacademicmisconduct/#q-8>

#### 11. Check which referencing system your Division uses

It is important to note that different disciplines, Divisions and different publications very often have a preferred system for referencing. The common referencing systems are the Harvard system, the Numeric system (both described on the University of Stirling Library Web site under ‘Students - Research’ - <http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/research/citing/index.php>) and the APA referencing system. Schools and Divisions will have chosen a preferred referencing system which is compatible with the software – RefWorks.

RefWorks is available on all University computers. This software will help you keep a database of references, and will assist with citations and creating a final reference list.

Remember it is your responsibility to check which system is appropriate for the assessment you are completing. Please check your student handbooks or ask a tutor for further guidance.

## WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

### 1. Using software to manage your resources.

RefWorks is the University supported personal bibliographic software. RefWorks will help you manage your resources by -

- Quickly storing references directly from resource databases
- Creating lists of references for different projects or essays
- Allowing you to share your references for group or collaborative work
- Using [Write-N-Cite](#), create accurate reference lists, bibliographies and citations directly in Word
- Allowing access to RefWorks using your Smartphone or handheld device.

RefWorks is a web-based application so you can access your user account anywhere; just remember to first log on to the University Portal. More information and instructions are given on –

<http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/help/training/refworks/>

### 2. Electronic 'Detection' Software

There are now various and increasingly sophisticated electronic aids to assist lecturers who may be in doubt about the originality of work submitted. These include programmes which look at linguistic similarities and others which can identify when essays have been bought from websites. They can only be used on assignments which are submitted electronically and will only flag up potential plagiarism against other electronic resources.

The electronic 'detection' software 'Turnitin' is in use at the University of Stirling. It is used in a variety of ways by different Divisions. However, all students should automatically have access to Turnitin through the module Succeed sites and are encouraged to use it as a learning tool. Information on how to use Turnitin is given on -

<http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/teaching/turnitin/students/index.php>

Staff can also use Turnitin once assignments have been submitted. Your student handbook will say how the Division is using this software.

### 3. Penalties

Regrettably, plagiarism does sometimes occur. The University has penalties for students who plagiarise and it does use them. The relevant regulations and procedures are used to investigate the suspicion of plagiarism and if there is evidence that plagiarism has taken place, various penalties are imposed depending on the severity of the case. Information on the relevant regulations and penalties are available through the student portal or from the following web site – section 6.8

<http://www.stir.ac.uk/academicpolicy/handbook/assessmentincludingacademicmisconduct/>

#### 4. Where to go for advice

- Divisions  
Your student handbook/s or assessment guidelines should give you information on how to avoid plagiarism and which referencing system to use. If you have further questions or something specific to ask, you could also approach your lecturer, tutor, module co-ordinator or advisor of studies. Some students will also have a peer-mentor whom they could ask.
- The Library  
The library staff have produced a leaflet called 'Guide to Citing References'. An excellent introduction to the different referencing systems is available on the Library web site under – Students – Writing & Research.  
<http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/research/citing/index.php>
- University of Stirling Students' Union  
USSU provides peer advice on academic issues for all students at Stirling and can assist with appeals where needed. If you have any questions that you don't want to take to your department or the University, USSU can help. For more information on the services that USSU offer call 01786 467166, e-mail [theunion@stir.ac.uk](mailto:theunion@stir.ac.uk) or see your student officers Monday to Friday, 9-5 in the Office just past Studio.
- Student Learning Services (SLS)  
Student Learning Services provide additional academic advice for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students at the University of Stirling. It provides 'Learning Strategies' modules, workshops and one-to-one tutorials on issues such as referencing, essay writing and avoiding plagiarism. You can check out the Student Learning Services' Succeed site, e-mail [sls@stir.ac.uk](mailto:sls@stir.ac.uk) or look at the web pages [sls.stir.ac.uk](http://sls.stir.ac.uk)

### **CONCLUSIONS**

We hope that this short booklet has assisted you in identifying how you could avoid the risk of plagiarism. We have shown how students may plagiarise without being fully aware that they are doing so and have identified some strategies to help you avoid plagiarism. It takes time and practice to fully develop your academic writing but in the meantime you need to do all you can to avoid plagiarism.

If you are in doubt, look again at the example declaration at the start of the booklet. If you think you have not quite met the requirements of this kind of declaration – look at your work again before you submit it, and make sure that it is wholly your own work and all sources have been fully acknowledged. If you are still concerned – ask your tutor before you submit the assignment. If you follow this advice and ask for guidance when you need it, you should be able to produce work that conforms to academic conventions and reflects the time and effort you put in.

## GLOSSARY

Here are some key terms which you may see in student handbooks.

**Citing** - Formally acknowledging within your writing, the source or sources from which you obtained the information. An example is 'Spring considers that the Norman tactics were misguided but ultimately successful'<sup>1</sup> while Summer has long argued that it was only the exhaustion of the Anglo-Saxon forces which permitted the Norman victory.<sup>2</sup>

**Citation** - When you have included information from published sources in your work, you must acknowledge this information fully and accurately. The inclusion of information from other resources can be in the form of summarising, paraphrasing or as a direct quotation and is known as a **citation**.

**Reference** - This is the description of the source from which you have obtained a specific piece of information. This is a reference to the original source of information.

**Reference List** – This is a list of all the sources that are explicitly referred to within the assignment. It does not include additional background reading which may have informed your work but which was not used explicitly within the assignment. In the fictitious example above, you might list the details of the work as:

1 - Allan Spring, *The Norman Conquest: new approaches*, 134-168 (Oxford, 1998).

**The exact format would depend on the referencing system you were using. The format shown above is used in the History Division. Other Divisions may use very different formats. Please refer to your departmental guidelines.**

**Bibliography** - This is a list of all the sources which you have used to complete the assignment. A bibliography usually includes items that you have read but which you did not directly refer to within the text.

The terms 'bibliography' and 'reference list' are often used interchangeably. **Check your student handbook guidelines to clarify what is expected of you.**

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained within this booklet is correct at the time of publication. The booklet is not intended to be relied upon as the sole source of material and it is the student's responsibility to check the most up to date guidelines provided in their departmental student handbooks.

This booklet has been adapted from Leeds Metropolitan University's *Little Book of Plagiarism* for student use at the University of Stirling. If you have any feedback please contact either USSU or Student Learning Services.

This template can be used to remind you of the information you may require when you collate your final reference list. As you are researching for your assignment, write down the details of all the sources you are using. Remember that your final reference list has to be in the format requested by your Division.

**Book or Extract from Book**

Book Title  
Authors/Editors  
Year of Publication  
Edition  
Place of Publication  
Publisher  
Library Number

**Extract (information above plus)**

Chapter Number & Title  
Chapter author (If different from book)  
Page numbers

**Journal Article**

Article Title  
Author/s  
Journal Title  
Year  
Volume  
Number/part  
Article page numbers

**Electronic Media/World Wide Web**

Article/Report Title  
Author/s  
Organisation  
Year  
Date You Accessed Site (Day, Month, Year)  
URL: http: