

Being digital

Recognising plagiarism

1: Introduction

If you are new to academic study you may have heard of plagiarism but not be sure what it is. This activity helps you to recognise some of the forms plagiarism can take, so you can avoid it in your work.

Learning outcome

By the end of this activity you should be able to explain what is meant by plagiarism.

2: Exercise: What is plagiarism?

Test your knowledge of plagiarism with this short quiz.

Question 1

Read the four definitions of 'plagiarism'. Which one do you think is the correct definition?

- a) The name of software used by some universities to teach correct referencing
- b) Referring to a work which is copyrighted
- c) Using someone else's work without identifying where it came from
- d) A type of false memory syndrome

(You will find the answer to this question, and feedback on all the options, in Appendix 1 on page 5.)

Question 2

Read the statements below and select the ones you think are examples of plagiarism.

- Putting a paragraph together by cutting and pasting a few choice phrases from a number of different sources, and adding in some words of your own
- Cutting and pasting a paragraph by placing it in "quotes" and citing the original source
- Copying a paragraph, but making small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with words that mean the same thing
- Copying a paragraph word-for-word from a book, journal, web page or other printed or electronic source without acknowledgement

(You will find the answers to this question, and feedback on all the options, in Appendix 2 on pages 6 and 7.)

3: Exercise feedback

You have completed the exercise.

In the first question on what plagiarism is, you may have easily spotted the right answer. However, the next question shows that not all instances of plagiarism are clear-cut, and it is possible to be caught out inadvertently.

When in doubt, make sure you acknowledge other people's ideas in your own work. Even when you have referenced sources correctly, it is important to be sure that you have integrated them into your work in a way which demonstrates your learning.

4: Summary

Using other people's work without acknowledging it is plagiarism, even where you have made small changes. The Open University defines plagiarism as "using the work of other people to gain some form of benefit without formally acknowledging that the work came from someone else".

Plagiarism does not just occur in academic assignments. It may happen when you relay content in online forums or other social networking sites without acknowledgement. In a workplace situation, if you do not acknowledge evidence and statistics you have used to inform reports or presentations, for example, you will be committing plagiarism. You may be aware of some high-profile public figures who have lost their jobs when it was discovered they were guilty of plagiarism.

To sum up, plagiarism can involve:

- **Copying** a portion of text without giving credit to the resource, for example, copying and pasting some text from a website into your assignment.
- **Paraphrasing** text without crediting the source, for example, changing a few words from an article and including it in your work.
- **Incorrectly citing** a source, misleading the reader as to what is yours and what is from the source.

For more information, visit the Open University's [Developing Good Academic Practices](#) website, or Open University Library Services' [Referencing and Plagiarism](#) page.

References

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Appendix 1: Answers and feedback

Question 1

Read the four definitions of 'plagiarism'. Which one do you think is the correct definition?

The correct answer is c) "Using someone else's work without identifying where it came from".

Feedback on all the options is provided below.

- a) The name of software used by some universities to teach correct referencing

Feedback: No, this is not plagiarism. Universities may use **plagiarism detection software** such as Turnitin or Copycatch to identify where students have used material without acknowledging the source.

- b) Referring to a work which is copyrighted

Feedback: No, this is not plagiarism. All material used for study or work purposes should be clearly and accurately referenced so others can find it if need be.

- c) Using someone else's work without identifying where it came from

Feedback: Yes, this is known as plagiarism. Good academic practice is about acknowledging others' work in your own writing.

- d) A type of false memory syndrome

Feedback: No, this is not plagiarism - although forgetting what sources you have used in your work can lead to inadvertent plagiarism.

Question 2

Read the statements below and select the ones you think are examples of plagiarism.

The correct answers are:

- a) Putting a paragraph together by cutting and pasting a few choice phrases from a number of different sources, and adding in some words of your own
- c) Copying a paragraph, but making small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with words that mean the same thing

Feedback on all the options is provided below.

- a) Putting a paragraph together by cutting and pasting a few choice phrases from a number of different sources, and adding in some words of your own

Feedback: Yes, this is plagiarism, because it involves using other people's work without acknowledging who did it.

- b) Cutting and pasting a paragraph by placing it in "quotes" and citing the original source

Feedback: This is probably acceptable, and therefore not plagiarism. It shows that points being made are supported by other people, and the source has been acknowledged. However, lengthy quotes - for example, copying whole paragraphs - are to be avoided. This only shows you can read and write.

- c) Copying a paragraph, but making small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with words that mean the same thing

Feedback: Yes, this plagiarism, because it involves paraphrasing. Even if some of the words are your own, you must still acknowledge where you got the ideas from.

- d) Copying a paragraph word-for-word from a book, journal, web page or other printed or electronic source without acknowledgement

Feedback: Not recognising the intellectual input someone else has made to your work, and passing off their work as your own, is clearly plagiarism and is unacceptable. If you have not written in your own words, it is also likely that you have not understood the point you are making and this may cause you problems later on, for example, when revising for exams.