

Avoiding plagiarism: an introduction

1. Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work as your own without acknowledging the source.

This short audio podcast, lasting just over 3 minutes, explains how you can avoid plagiarism by developing your skills.

Podcast transcript

In this short podcast I am going to introduce the subject of plagiarism: what it is, the forms it can take, and how you can avoid it.

Part of the process of becoming a student is about developing academic integrity. This is about ethical behaviour, and ensuring that your desire to meet a deadline or achieve a result does not cause you to cut corners in your study practices. For example, if you are short of time you may not have time to read and digest material properly. If you are not confident in your writing you might be tempted to copy and paste someone else's words without changing them or clearly naming the author. If you are not used to managing information you might forget to keep track of sources you have used, and not have to hand the details you need to acknowledge these sources in your work.

The OU 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'. This definition could equally apply in the workplace.

Most plagiarism is not intentional, but occurs for the kind of reasons I have just outlined. Occasionally though, someone sets out to cheat deliberately, and the penalties for this kind of academic misconduct can be severe. However, if you develop your skills, avoiding plagiarism is straightforward. There are several key ways to do this.

Learn to write in your own words. This is about finding your academic 'voice' and it's a sign that you have really understood a topic. In the long run this will be more useful to you and also more satisfying.

Working with others can be very helpful in shedding light on a topic. However, be careful to ensure that any assessed work is your own, unless collaborative working is being assessed.

Likewise, when referring to online forum discussions, acknowledge who said what. It's always best to avoid copying word-for-word.

Learn how to organise information so you can find it when you need it, and have all the details to hand to enable you to produce accurate and complete references.

Finally, citing your references clearly and accurately shows that you have read around the subject and based your arguments on evidence from others' research. It enables whoever reads your work to see where you have got your ideas from and to follow up any sources they are interested in.

Your module materials are your first port of call for referencing advice. Some modules offer live online training sessions on referencing, to help students preparing to write assignments. Helpful guidance is also provided by OU Library Services, via the Library web pages, for example:

- the OU Harvard guide to citing references sets out how to reference different kinds of materials
- help and support is available on managing information
- there are various online tools that offer a handy way of keeping track of material you've consulted. The Being digital activity on 'Selecting a reference management tool' gives you some useful tips on how to go about choosing the right one for you. You may also find it useful to attend the 'Introduction to reference management tools' live online training session.

And of course Library Helpdesk staff will be happy to help you if you get stuck.

2. Summary

Summary

This podcast has given you an opportunity to think about what plagiarism is, and the steps you can take to avoid it.

Next steps

The following links will help you develop skills in this area.

- [OU Harvard guide to citing references](#)
- [Cite them right](#)
- [Selecting a reference management tool](#)

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