

Understanding & Avoiding Plagiarism

“Plagiarism is presenting another person’s work as one’s own”

Georgia State University’s policy on Academic Honesty
<http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwfhb/sec409.html>

Blatant Plagiarism

Some forms of plagiarism are clear cases of cheating, and the only way to meet the basic standards of academic honesty is to avoid them:

- Buying a paper
- Having someone else write your paper
- Copying a paper
- Pasting large chunks of someone else’s writing into your own paper, without quotation marks and without citing the source

Incidental Plagiarism

Other forms of academic dishonesty are less obvious but are still plagiarism; they lead your readers to think that someone else’s work is your own:

- Using someone else’s words without using quotation marks
- Using someone else’s ideas or words without providing a clear citation – the information that tells whose ideas they are and where you found them
- Paraphrasing or summarizing material improperly
- Failing to clearly acknowledge the extent to which you use someone else’s work

When you commit incidental plagiarism, an instructor has no way of knowing whether you intended to misrepresent someone else’s work as your own. But it is your job to leave no doubt about which words and ideas are yours and which you acquired from others.

Why Plagiarism is a problem

Plagiarism indicates sloppy thinking

You are in school to learn. Using other people’s ideas to learn about your subject or support your points is an essential part of being a student and of writing papers. Failing to acknowledge the sources of that information indicates that you have not done the necessary work of distinguishing between their ideas and your own. Your reader does not know which are others’ and which yours, and you yourself may not know either.

Plagiarism indicates sloppy scholarship

It takes time and effort to learn how to use sources properly. A paper that plagiarizes several ideas, a few sentences, or a whole paper indicates that you are ignoring or don’t understand the ethical standards reflected by using proper quoting, citations, and a list of works cited.

Plagiarism is a missed opportunity

Clearly acknowledging that you got certain ideas from other people actually increases your credibility and backs up your points better than not having those sources cited. Plagiarism is stealing. Using someone else’s ideas or words in a paper you write or a presentation you give, without saying where you found them, is intellectual theft.



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Consequences for Plagiarism at Georgia State

See the university's policy on academic honesty for explanations of the procedures for dealing with plagiarism and possible disciplinary actions:

- A failing grade. A student who has plagiarized all or part of an assignment may, at the instructor's discretion, fail that particular assignment or the entire course.
- Transcript annotation. The instructor may also pursue further disciplinary action by having the student's transcript marked to show a history of academic dishonesty.
- Expulsion. In egregious cases, GSU may suspend or expel a student for plagiarism.
- Impact on the future. Anyone caught stealing someone else's ideas or words calls his or her overall honesty and reliability into question and will find it difficult to re-build trust with professors and peers or to get recommendations from them.

Consequences for Plagiarism Beyond School

Most students only think of plagiarism in the context of school, but claiming someone else's work as your own can have even more serious consequences outside of the classroom:

- Plagiarism kills careers. A person who cannot be trusted to act ethically may be fired, and plagiarism can end formerly promising careers in a given field.
- Plagiarism damages a company's reputation. Anyone who works for an organization represents not only themselves as a professional but the company as well. When an employee is known for or even suspected of plagiarizing others' work, the organization suffers the consequences.
- Stealing others' work ruins credibility. There are acceptable ways to collaborate with others or sometimes to cut-and-paste within company documents. Failing to learn and follow the standards of one's field and organization, whether as an employee or a business owner, loses trust of coworkers and clients.
- Plagiarism can risk lawsuits. Some forms of plagiarism are not only unethical but also illegal or in violation of a contract. Certain kinds of plagiarism expose an individual and an organization to being sued.
- Plagiarism spreads misinformation. When information is presented repeatedly without a clear original source, false information or opinion can become accepted as fact. Checking facts and properly citing sources can stop false rumors.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Establish habits that will consistently help you avoid accusations of plagiarism:

- Allow plenty of time to complete assignments. If you start at the last minute, you might be tempted to produce sloppy work or take unacceptable shortcuts.
- When collecting information from sources, take careful notes. You will then be able to see easily which ideas and words are someone else's.
- If you are not sure whether you are plagiarizing material, ask your instructor.
- Learn how to cite sources properly, use quotations, summarize, and paraphrase. Mastering the skill of using sources with academic honesty is a basic task of any student and scholar.