

## 2.11 Plagiarism and using your own words

Plagiarism is the use of another author's words or ideas without acknowledgement. Avoiding plagiarism is important to good writing, and essential at University. This section explains the common ways people fall into the problem of plagiarism. The issue of plagiarism is, however, also a matter of being a careful writer, so take special note of the last part of this section.

You might have noticed that each year, in both the *School of Commerce Handbook* and in *The University of Adelaide Handbook of Academic Programs Part 1*, there are sections devoted to plagiarism. You can see that the University has stated 'Plagiarism is a serious act of academic misconduct'.

### **Plagiarism defined**

What does it really mean for you? The following (to be read in conjunction with the pages of your University Handbook) consider the definitions more closely:

- **Subsection (i)** This section details the fact that if you 'present substantial extracts... without clearly indicating their origin' you have copied phrases and passages directly without using quotation marks and without a reference. These phrases and passages might have been copied directly from your text books, books borrowed from the library, journals, articles, working papers, seminar or conference papers, lecture notes, information stored on computers or other students' work.
- **Subsection (ii)** If you use 'very close paraphrasing... without due acknowledgement' it means that you have used someone else's words, phrases and passages in a way which is very similar to their original form, and have presented them as your own without acknowledging this in a reference.
- **Subsection (iii)** Similar to subsection (i) in that if you 'quote directly from a source and fail to insert quotation marks' you have copied some other piece of work. Note that in this situation giving just a reference to the author is not sufficient acknowledgement.

These forms of plagiarism can arise firstly through not making an effort, and secondly, through a lack of care when you are doing your reading and research for your assignment.

If you copy down phrases and passages straight out of your source material, you might think that it is easier than the more difficult task of writing your own words. After all, composition is hard work. Or you might think that the author has expressed it so much better than you ever could, so why waste time trying?

If you take notes from your reading in the form of copying down phrases, sentences or paragraphs, and don't properly record that these were in fact someone else's (with quotation marks and a reference), then you might forget their source when you write up your assignment and express them as your own ideas.

Later in this section some guidance will be offered on how to avoid these forms of plagiarism. In the meantime, consider this. You might be tempted to use phrases, sentences and paragraphs from a source without acknowledging that they were someone else's ideas. Students often think, 'I'm sure that the lecturer won't have read that or won't remember where that idea came from'. Wrong! Lecturers know their courses inside out and are extremely well read and up to date. They are likely to recognise the source. They are also well-practised in discerning sudden changes in the style of writing when someone else's words are used.

### **Related forms of cheating**

These are explained in a straightforward manner in **Section 4, subsections i, ii, and iii**. Firstly, you must not hand in any work that is written for you by another student. Secondly, you must not submit work that you have copied from another student. Thirdly, two students must not hand in the same piece of work.

Copying the work of another student can occur deliberately or inadvertently. Do not get involved under any circumstances with deliberate copying. It is nothing more than cheating. Both parties involved can be heavily penalised.

Inadvertent copying can occur if you ask someone to hand in your assignment for you because you can't make it to the Commerce office that day. You might be the innocent victim of someone who hasn't done the assignment. Avoid handing the final copy of your assignment to anyone else. Nor should you ask others to print your assignment from your computer disk.

Please be careful with your assignments written on the computers in the Computing Lab. It's best not to leave your computer unattended with your assignment up on the screen. Make sure that when you have copied your latest version onto your floppy disk, that you remember to delete it from d: drive (formerly v: drive). Take the discarded printouts of your work home with you, rather than leaving them in the rubbish bin.

Students must not hand in the same piece of work that someone else is also handing in, for separate assessment. (This does not include group work that is assessable as a group). This includes assignments that you might have worked on together. It is quite acceptable for you to work together discussing assignments - for example interpretation of the question, problems, possible solutions and so on. But, you must not prepare your spreadsheets or your written work together and hand it up as independent work. Make sure your writing is your own. Students who hand in the same piece of work may both be given zero for their assignments.

A fourth and fifth form of cheating are explained in **Subsections iv, v and vi**, which deal with the same work being handed in for two different courses and cheating in exams.

In summary, we now know that plagiarism is considered to be cheating. But students usually do it because they do not know what is expected for the assignment, there are no models, nor instructions provided. If you are in doubt

about what your tutors expect for the assignment, please ask them. They are nice people and they are only too willing to help you!

The penalties for plagiarism can be severe. You can fail an assignment, which might cause you to fail the whole course. Further disciplinary action may be taken by the Board of Conduct under Chapters XVII and XII of the University Statutes.

### ***Avoiding plagiarism***

The following examples of how to use your own words when writing assignments have been prepared by Carol Johnson, Head of the Politics Department. They are reproduced here, with her permission, to assist students who are having difficulty putting material into their own words.

The original passages are from a policy speech for the 1993 Federal Election by Paul Keating, Leader of the Australian Labor Party. These passages have been reproduced so that you may compare examples of good writing.

#### **• What not to do!**

This paragraph just strings together quotations and does not use the student's own words sufficiently.

Keating (1993) argues that unemployment is 'overwhelmingly, the principal concern of the Government.' While they've been able 'to achieve more economic growth than most other comparable countries', it hasn't been enough to generate sufficient employment. (Keating, 1993). Consequently, the Government's 'strategy is designed to assist recovery in business. Under Labor, business will pay a tax of 33 per cent on profits compared with 42 percent promised by the Opposition' (Keating, 1993). 'There will also be a business allowance of up to 20 percent covering investment over the future two years' (Keating, 1993).

This next paragraph includes examples of plagiarism because it does not use quotation marks - see above for where they should be.

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• **Good examples**

This next paragraph uses a good combination of quoting and putting things in the student's words.

Keating acknowledges that unemployment is still 'the greatest problem we face' and the government's 'principal concern', despite his government's success at achieving high levels of economic growth by international standards (Keating, 1993, p 6). However, he argues that an ALP government would be able to increase employment by providing greater incentives for business to invest. In order to achieve this aim, an ALP government would provide generous investment allowances for business and substantially reduce the business tax rate. Indeed, Keating claims that the tax on profit under a Labor government would be 11% lower than under a Coalition government (Keating, 1993, p 6).

The following paragraph makes good use of the student's own words.

Keating (1993) acknowledges that unemployment is still a major problem despite his government's success at achieving high levels of economic growth by international standards. However, he argues that an ALP government would be able to increase employment by providing greater incentives for business to invest. In order to achieve this aim, an ALP government would provide generous investment allowances for business and substantially reduce the business tax rate. Indeed, Keating claims that the tax on profit under a Labor Government would be 11% lower than under a Coalition government (Keating 1993, p 6).

As you can see in this last example, the author, Keating, is acknowledged right at the beginning as the source of these ideas and the reader is left in no doubt that the ideas continue to be his with 'he argues' and 'Keating claims' in the second and fourth sentences. The exact page number of Keating's claim about the reduction in the tax on profit is cited. All of the information, however, is in the writer's own words.

• **Some advice**

A good strategy for learning to put information from another text into your own words is to write without the other text in front of you. Of course, this means that you will need to understand and remember what is in the text. At first you may only remember the gist of a section. Write down what is relevant to your assignment as you remember it, and go back to the source for further ideas, but put the source aside before you write them into your assignment, having checked how they relate to what you have already written.

At all times you need to decide what is relevant to your assignment topic and be aware of where the ideas are coming from. Mapping out your ideas and how they relate in a diagram before you begin to write can keep your ideas separate from those of the writers who are contributing to your argument.

In taking notes from other sources, it is essential that you keep the details of your sources. When you copy directly from your source make that clear in your notes, along with the page number of

the quote. If you are noting, rather than quoting fully from a source, you will already be on the path of putting the ideas in your own words when you turn these brief notes back into prose.

### ***Using the ideas and words of other***

There are three ways of using the ideas, research findings and words of others in your writing. They are:

1. Quoting
2. Paraphrasing
3. Summarising.

Whether you are quoting, paraphrasing or summarising, you must cite your references.