

# Avoiding Plagiarism

## Introduction

Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is contrary to the principles of academic study. The University treats plagiarism very seriously and if you plagiarise it can have a very serious impact on your studies. Plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional. However, unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism and can be penalised - ignorance is no defence. Accordingly, it is very important for students to be aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

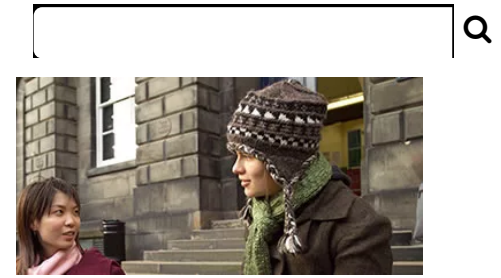
## What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the act of including in one's work the work of another person without providing adequate acknowledgement of having done so. This might be copying the work of another student, or copying material from the internet or from a published author. To take text verbatim (word for word) from another source and not place it within quotation marks is plagiarism.

All material you submit for assessment at the University of Edinburgh must be your own, original work, carried out specifically for your Edinburgh degree qualification, and must not be work submitted for any other assessment or qualification. Although you should make wide use of published work, and you may cite ideas from lectures and class discussions, you must always make clear that you are doing so.

All plagiarism is academically fraudulent, unfair to other students and an offence against University discipline. It will be punished severely.

## Types of plagiarism



There are three areas where plagiarism commonly occurs and it is worth knowing about these so you can avoid inadvertently falling foul of the rules on plagiarism.

## 1. Copying another student's work

This is cheating and will be treated as such. The most extreme forms of cheating involve copying online essays written for payment, or submitted to other degrees, but passing off other Edinburgh students' work as your own is also cheating. It is also an offence for a student to knowingly allowing their work to be copied. Of course, you may work on joint projects and exercises with other students. In those cases, ensure that work you have been asked to submit individually is in fact entirely your own and that you are offering your own analysis and presentation of any jointly gathered information. Where you are drawing upon data collected or analysed by others in your group, be careful to state that this is the case. Examples of ways to acknowledge the work or ideas of other students are as follows:

*'I am grateful to Jane Smith for suggesting the relevance here of rational choice theory'; 'the data in this table comes from questionnaires distributed by all the members of our group; data entry was by John Brown and Anne Cox performed the SPSS analysis'.*

## 2. Resubmitting work which was previously submitted for assessment at this University or for any other degree or qualification

This is called 'self-plagiarism'. We mark assessments on the understanding that they are the product of work produced for a specific assignment. If you re-use work you have already received marks in a previous assignment you are gaining an unfair advantage over other students by a) short-cutting the research and writing process; b)

benefiting from feedback from a previous assignment; c) gaining two separate marks for one piece of work. Self-plagiarism is still plagiarism and is subject to the same penalties.

### 3. Misuse of published work

Lifting portions of text from *any* source without acknowledgement is cheating. If you want to quote directly from a book, article, website, etc, put the material in quotation marks and state its source clearly through in-text citations, or footnotes, and full bibliographic references. All material used must be acknowledged in your bibliography. If you are unsure how to set out a Bibliography, please consult your course handbooks and ask your course tutor for further advice.

You will frequently draw on published material without directly quoting it. When you do this, you must:

- state the source, and
- put it into your own words.

It is not enough simply to alter a few words, cut some out, and add some: that is still plagiarism.

Here is a real-life example, taken from the plagiarism guidelines of the Department of Sociology at Brunel University. First is the original source, then a student's essay (with plagiarised phrases marked in *Italics*).

*Mike Featherstone, Consumer Culture and Postmodernism (London: Sage, 1991), p.14:*

If from the perspectives of classical economics the object of all production is consumption, with individuals maximizing their satisfactions through purchasing from an ever-expanding range of goods, then from the perspective of some twentieth-century neo-Marxists this development is regarded as producing greater opportunities for controlled and

manipulated consumption. The expansion of capitalist production, especially after the boost received from scientific management and 'Fordism' around the turn of the century, it is held, necessitated the construction of new markets and the 'education' of publics to become consumers through advertising and other media (Ewen, 1976). This approach, traceable back to Lukacs's (1971) Marx-Weber synthesis with his theory of reification, has been developed most prominently in the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), Marcuse (1964) and Lefebvre (1971). Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, argue that the same commodity logic and instrumental rationality manifest in the sphere of production is noticeable in the sphere of consumption. Leisure time pursuits, the arts and culture in general become filtered through the culture industry; reception becomes dictated by exchange value as the higher purposes and values of culture succumb to the logic of the production process and the market...

#### Student essay:

From the perspective of some twentieth century neo-Marxists these developments *produce greater opportunities for controlled and manipulated consumption*. On the one hand critical theorists from the Frankfurt school *stress that the same commodity logic and instrumental rationality manifested in the sphere of production is also noticeable in the sphere of consumption. Leisure time pursuits, the arts and culture become filtered through the 'culture industry': the mass media and popular culture. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). Reception becomes dictated by exchange value as the higher purposes and values of culture succumb to the logic of the production process and the market.*

As the Senior Tutor in that student's department commented: 'Clearly, this student did not express the idea in their own words; there is no way of knowing whether he or she understood the original. The student was

convicted of plagiarism.' The student may not have intended to deceive, but, to repeat, inadvertent plagiarism is still plagiarism, and will be punished as such.

## Avoiding inadvertent plagiarism

The way to avoid slipping into inadvertent plagiarism is good note-taking. Either take notes in your own words of the main points made in an argument, or carefully copy pertinent extracts verbatim and mark the quotations with inverted commas ('xxx xxx'). In either case, always take down the source details: author, title of book or article, publication details (for a book this means: place of publication, publisher, date; for a journal, it means: journal title, volume and/or part number, date, page numbers for start and finish of article), and **page number(s) of the quote or argument summarised**. You must cite page numbers for ideas and arguments, as well as for quotations. If an idea comes from an unpublished source (such as a lecture or another student), record that fact in your notes.

A good way of learning to use your own words is to read the source, then put it aside and write your notes from memory. You will find that you soon start to put the ideas in your own words automatically.

Learning to take notes well, and to acknowledge sources properly, is not merely a matter of avoiding plagiarism and its consequent penalties: it is learning an important writing skill that is a vital part both of academic life and many other careers. Appropriate acknowledgement and referencing will be rewarded positively in the marks you get. Staff are here to help you learn that skill. If you have any doubts, for example over when exchanging ideas starts to slip into plagiarism, or whether your referencing is adequate, please consult your course teachers.

## How we deal with plagiarism

## Prior to assignment submission

We assess your work on the basis that it is **yours and yours alone**. Prior to electronic submission of every assignment you will need to check a box on ELMA to indicate that you abide by the Declaration of Own Work ([http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/96268/Declaration\\_of\\_Own\\_Work\\_Statement\\_August\\_2012.pdf](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/96268/Declaration_of_Own_Work_Statement_August_2012.pdf)) when submitting. Please read this Declaration. By signing the checkbox, you declare that the submitted work is your own and that you are aware of what plagiarism is and the penalties it involves. If you are not sure, ask!

## Post-submission

All coursework is submitted electronically and checked using the 'Turnitin' system. This cross-checks your work against the world wide web, databases of published material, as well as content previously submitted by other users. It highlights sections of text that are duplicated in other sources. Markers look at the Turnitin results to check whether such duplication is a possible case of plagiarism. Markers may also use other methods to identify plagiarism (e.g. inserting essay text into search engines).

In many cases, duplicated work will be correctly cited, and will not count as plagiarism. However, if plagiarism is detected, it is referred to the Graduate School Academic Misconduct Officer and (in particular serious cases), the College Academic Misconduct Officer. If you are suspected of plagiarism, the Misconduct Officer is likely to call you to interview to discuss your work. Major cases of plagiarism are likely to result in a reduced mark or a mark of zero for that piece of work. According to University regulations, you are not allowed to resubmit work for assessment, and so proven plagiarism is (at the very least) likely to adversely affect your overall degree result. In the most serious cases, a

student committing plagiarism may be excluded from the University and debarred from graduation. If plagiarism is detected after a student's graduation their award can be changed or withdrawn.

## Further advice

**There is a fuller student guide on 'How to avoid plagiarism' at:**

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/PlagiarismStudentGuidance.pdf>  
(<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/PlagiarismStudentGuidance.pdf>)

**More general guidance and details of University procedures** for dealing with plagiarism for MSc taught and research students are at:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/postgraduate-taught/discipline/plagiarism>  
(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/postgraduate-taught/discipline/plagiarism%20>)

**Analogous guidance for Phd students is at:**

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/postgraduate-research/discipline/plagiarism>  
(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/postgraduate-research/discipline/plagiarism>)

**More details on the Turnitin plagiarism detection software:**

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/learning-technology/assessment/plagiarism/turnitin>  
(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/learning-technology/assessment/plagiarism/turnitin%20>)

If in any doubt, you can also speak to your course convenor, supervisor or programme director.