

What Is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism constitutes theft, lying and fraud. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's words or ideas as your own. These words or ideas may be published (in encyclopaedias, books, or journals, for example), or they may be unpublished (e.g. a purchased paper, the product of mom or a boyfriend). Plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional (e.g. the product of careless, sloppy note-taking or ignorance). Nonetheless, plagiarism, deliberate or accidental, is still plagiarism.

Plagiarism ALWAYS counts, even if you . . .

- plagiarise by accident
- change a word or two in each sentence
- use material from a reference text such as an encyclopaedia
- tack a reference on to the end of each paragraph
- are just using a statistic or two

You can also plagiarise yourself if you submit the same essay or parts of the same essay in different courses without receiving the permission of all instructors involved.

What needs to be documented?

1. All quotations, even from reference texts such as encyclopaedias
2. Paraphrases or summaries of opinion
3. Statistics, study results

In short, all information that you receive from sources that is not "common knowledge" must be documented. Common knowledge can be difficult to determine, however, especially when you are researching a topic that is new to you, and can depend on your audience. But a claim made in many of your sources is probably common knowledge. You may need to discuss what is considered common knowledge or basic fact in a specific subject with your instructor.

Avoiding plagiarism

The most important point to remember in order to avoid plagiarising by accident is to research and take notes systematically. You are dealing with other people's ideas and language – be careful. Create your own system of identifying text that needs to be cited.

Pick up the Writing Centre handout on "Incorporating Source Material" to supplement this information sheet.