



9 Things You Should
Already Know About
PLAGIARISM

Plus...

6 Excuses That Don't Work

And...

3 Things You Don't Need To Worry About



NINE THINGS YOU SHOULD ALREADY KNOW ABOUT PLAGIARISM



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you reach your goals

After reading this information, we encourage students to view the accompanying presentation and take the included quiz to ensure the material is understood. Lack of understanding about academic misconduct is not an excuse for responsibility.

1. What is the point of writing assignments?

The point of any writing assignment is to improve your understanding of a particular topic or problem, to help you express your understanding in writing, and to let the professor evaluate your understanding and writing abilities. As with any assignment, the important part of a writing assignment is the opportunity to learn and grow.

2. What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct is being dishonest in your academic work. More precisely, it is any action that a student knows (or should know) will lead to the improper evaluation of academic work. Academic misconduct defeats the purpose of academic work because you are pretending to know more or write better than you actually do.

3. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct in which you represent someone else's words or ideas as your own. The basic expectation in every class is that whatever you write will be your own words, generated from your own understanding. It is acceptable to incorporate someone else's words in your paper only if you clearly indicate the words are someone else's. It is also possible to plagiarize other forms of expression such as computer code, mathematical expressions, technical designs and artistic works.

4. What's wrong with plagiarism?

First, plagiarism defeats the purpose of writing assignments. When you substitute someone else's understanding or expression for your own, you avoid using and improving your own expressive ability. Plagiarism also defeats the university's goal of teaching students to write, not just copy.

Second, plagiarism is a form of lying because the professor is expecting to read your words, not someone else's. Plagiarism destroys the mutual respect that should exist between professor and student.

Third, plagiarism defeats the purpose of scholarship. The goal of scholarship is to discover, understand, and create. That purpose is defeated when old knowledge is fraudulently presented as original and new.

THINK.

WRITE.

SIGNAL.

5. How do I avoid plagiarism?

There are three things you need to do to avoid plagiarism:

Think, Write, and Signal.

Think. Think about your paper topic and the research you have done. Make sure you have actually thought about everything in your paper well enough to explain it in your own words. Make sure you start the assignment soon enough to think and understand, not just research and type.

Write. Generate your own words to express your own understanding. If you are struggling to begin, get help from your professor or the Writing and Media Center. Other people's words should always be a supplement, not a substitute, for your own writing.

Signal. Clearly signal whenever you are using someone else's words, whether you are using them by direct quotation or paraphrase. Any direct quotation must be indicated by two things: quotation marks (or block quotation) and a reference (also called a citation) to the source. A reference alone or quotation marks alone is not sufficient to signal a direct quotation.

6. How do quotation marks, block quotations, and references work?

Quotation marks (“”) are a form of punctuation used to indicate that words were said or written by someone else. Put one quotation mark at the beginning of the quotation and another one at the end. Quotation marks are usually used with quotations no longer than 20 to 25 words.

A block quotation separates a quotation from the rest of the text by beginning a new line for the quotation, indenting it, then indenting each additional line of the quotation in the same way. "Indenting" means making the line of text farther from the left-hand edge of the paper, usually one inch farther than the rest of the text. Block indentation is usually used with quotations longer than 25 words.

A reference or citation tells the reader where quoted material comes from. The most common reference forms are text references, footnotes, and endnotes. Which form you should use depends on what class your paper is for. Text references provide source information within the body of the text, usually in parentheses. Footnotes and endnotes consist of a signal in the text, usually a numeral that is inserted right after the quotation or paraphrase then is reproduced, along with information about the source, either at the bottom of the page (footnote) or at the end of the paper (endnote). All three kinds of references may be accompanied by an extra page at the end of the paper, usually entitled "Bibliography" or "Works Cited", that lists all of the paper's sources in alphabetical order. Merely including the source in your bibliography does not sufficiently indicate that a passage quoted from that source is not your own writing.

Systems of citation can differ, so be sure to check the appropriate style for your paper and course. For the purpose of avoiding plagiarism, it doesn't matter what citation style you use as long as you clearly indicate where every quotation and paraphrase comes from.





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when you're not sure which way to turn

Paraphrasing is inappropriate where a reasonable person would say that you have stopped thinking and writing in your own words and are simply restating someone else's thoughts without admitting it.

7. What is "paraphrasing"?

Paraphrasing is repeating, in your own words, the thought expressed in someone else's words. Paraphrasing ranges from a very loose rewording of the text's basic idea (okay) to a nearly-identical version of the words or sentence structure of the original text (not okay). This spectrum means there is no sharp boundary between appropriate and inappropriate paraphrasing. Basically, paraphrasing is inappropriate where a reasonable person would say that you have stopped thinking and writing in your own words and are simply restating someone else's thoughts without admitting it. Here are three tips to avoid paraphrasing that could constitute academic misconduct:

Don't stop thinking. Understand your source well enough to explain its meaning in your own words. Never paraphrase by copying someone else's words into your paper and then changing them around.

Keep paraphrasing as short as possible. If your paraphrase goes over a sentence or two, you've probably stopped writing your own words.

Signal your source in the text, not just with a reference. If you are in a conversation and think someone else's words are important enough to repeat, you ordinarily explain who said it. Similarly, if a source is important enough to paraphrase, it is important enough to mention in your text, not just in a footnote.

8. What are the most common types of plagiarism?

At ISU there are three common types of plagiarism: whole-paper, cut-and-paste, and cut-and-paste with references.

Whole-paper plagiarism. In this form of plagiarism, all or most of the student's paper is taken from another student or a published source, such as the Internet, a book, or a print article.

Cut-and-paste plagiarism. In this form of plagiarism, parts of a paper ranging from phrases and sentences to entire paragraphs are taken from the Internet or somewhere else and incorporated into the student's paper with no signal that they are not the student's own expression.

Cut-and-paste plagiarism with references. In this form of plagiarism, words or ideas in a paper are included from another source, a reference to the source is included, but there is no quotation signal. Again, the problem is that a reference indicates only that the accompanying text is somehow derived from or related to the cited source. A reference alone does not show that the text is a direct quotation from that source. A direct quotation with a reference but without quotation marks is plagiarism.

9. What are the penalties for plagiarism?

At ISU, violations of the academic misconduct policy can receive institutional sanctions ranging from disciplinary reprimand to suspension or expulsion. Academic misconduct offenses can also receive grade penalties as determined by the instructor. Grade penalties are not restricted to the value of the assignment and may be as severe as receiving an F in the course.

SIX EXCUSES THAT DON'T WORK

"I didn't mean to plagiarize/cheat."

"I didn't mean to" is the most common excuse to a charge of academic misconduct. Often, the determining factor in an academic misconduct case is whether the student knew or should have known that his or her actions amounted to misconduct. As an ISU student you are expected to know the basic rules of academic integrity. Understanding basic academic integrity, how to cite, and how to properly paraphrase will help ensure you do not violate the academic misconduct policy.

"I just forgot to go back and add the references."

Another frequently-heard excuse is that the student included material from another source and then either "forgot to add the references" or put them in but "accidentally turned in the wrong draft." Even if such excuses are true, students will be held responsible for violating the academic misconduct policy. It is important that students take the time to turn in complete and accurate work.

"The material was too difficult to understand."

Sometimes, students turn to plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct when they don't understand the work. ISU has a variety of resources for students to avoid this including the ISU Writing and Media Center. We always recommend that students talk to their faculty one on one if struggling with course content. Not understanding is never an excuse to cheat.

"The faculty said we could consult with our classmates on the work, so my paper is the same because we studied together all semester."

Some faculty members allow you to work in groups for certain projects but expect that unique individual work is turned in by each student. If the content or writing of an assignment would lead a reasonable person to believe that the work was completed together, you will be held responsible for academic misconduct. Concerning group work, it is important to note that some faculty do not allow any group work; you should review your syllabus and course expectations before working in a group on any assignment, project, or exam.

"I didn't know they were going to use my homework/paper/test to cheat."

We often hear students say that they allowed someone to look at their homework, paper, or exam to assist another student in studying or preparing for the course. This is considered a form of academic misconduct; all students should complete their own work without the assistance of outside resources.

"I ran out of time to do the assignment."

Time management and adapting to college demands can be challenging for many students. It is not, however, an excuse for academic misconduct. It is important that students implement strategies for time management to ensure they are not relying on external sources to complete their academic work. We also often hear students say that they didn't consider the particular assignment a priority due to competing demands. Again, it is important for college students to develop strategies that allow all assignments to be completed with high academic integrity.

THREE THINGS YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT

"How can I ever do research for my paper if it's wrong to use other people's words and ideas?"

It's not wrong to use other people's words and ideas. It's wrong to present them as your own. Using other people's work without simply copying means you have to understand it well enough to explain it in your own words.

"How can I ever be sure my paper doesn't include some phrase I forgot I read somewhere?"

The "your own words" requirement doesn't mean you have to make up a language. Some English phrases are very common and will obviously show up in the writing of many different people. Plagiarism only arises when a string of words or thoughts is long enough that individual variations in expression should occur. Most people are unable to remember enough consecutive words from another source to make unintentional quotation a real problem.

"What if someone else had an idea first and I don't know about it?"

The "your own understanding" requirement doesn't mean you have to discover ideas no one else has ever had. It doesn't mean you have to give a reference for ideas or facts that everyone is aware of. It doesn't mean you are in trouble if a similar idea was expressed in a book you haven't read. A problem arises only when the idea is so unusual, or your expression of the idea comes so close to its expression in another text, that reasonable people would think it was copied.



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