

How to Avoid Plagiarism

In life, if you want to avoid something, you first have to be able to identify it. If you want to avoid a money scam, for instance, you have to be able to recognise it as a scam before investing your money, lest you lose the lot. It's the same with plagiarism! To avoid plagiarism you need to recognise it before submitting your assignment, lest you receive a fail grade and a note on your permanent academic record.

Defining Plagiarism

A simple definition of plagiarism is found in the Alphacrucis student handbook. It states: "Plagiarism is essentially unacknowledged material, borrowed from another writer but presented as your own."¹ In this definition we could easily exchange the word 'writer' with 'author,' since plagiarism does not only pertain to words, but also relates to images, music, art and the like.

Why is Plagiarism a Problem?

1. Firstly, according to the Alphacrucis student handbook, plagiarism is a problem because "it represents an intention to deceive the marker."²

2. Secondly, plagiarism is problematic, since it does not give credit where credit is due. When it comes to assignments we are primarily referring to "intellectual property," that is, the "property of your mind or intellect."³ With this in mind, when someone copies information or "intellectual property," without citing the source of that information, they are essentially claiming that knowledge as their own and are not, therefore, giving credit where credit is due. Alternatively, if someone borrows the original wording of a text, without including quotation marks (even if they include a footnote) this is also considered plagiarism. The reason for this is that the wording is not the student's own work but, rather, that of another person who took the effort to construct a clear and succinct sentence. Once again, full credit is not being given where full credit is due. That is to say, "intellectual

¹ Student Academic Handbook SCD Undergraduate 2009, 31.

² Student Academic Handbook SCD Undergraduate 2009, 31.

³ Australian Government, "What is Intellectual Property?," <http://www.ipaustralia.gov.au/ip/index.shtml> [accessed November 10, 2009] .

property” has been stolen.

Examples of What Constitutes Plagiarism?

Given the need to avoid this problem, listed below are examples of the different sorts of plagiarism:

1. Quotations

a): A direct quotation from any source without quotation marks (i.e. “....”) or appropriate footnoting constitutes plagiarism.

EG a): In today’s postmodern situation there is a great deal of skepticism in relation to what is true and what constitutes knowledge. Indeed, opting for a much more holistic approach to life, **the postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth.**

The bold section of the paragraph above is a direct quote, that is, an *exact* copy of another source. They are not *my* own words but, rather, the words of Stanley Grenz from page seven of his text *A Primer on Postmodernism* and, as such, there should be quotation marks around this bold section as well as a footnote at the end of the quotation.

It should read:

In today’s postmodern situation there is a great deal of skepticism in relation what is true and what constitutes knowledge. Indeed, opting for a much more holistic approach to life, “the postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth.”¹

¹ Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 7.

2. Quotations

b): Using the above quotation would still be plagiarism if you:

- Inserted a footnote without the quotation marks.
- Used quotation marks without inserting a footnote.
- Switched a couple of words around.

EG b): Indeed, opting for a much more holistic approach to life, **postmodern people refuse to limit truth to rationality and therefore dethrone the intellectual ability as the arbiter of truth.**¹

¹ Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 7.

The bold section of the paragraph above is not sufficiently different to the original (only a few words have been swapped around) and, therefore, still amounts to plagiarism, even though a footnote is included.

EG c): Putting this in your own words, it might read:

The postmodern approach to life tends to be holistic and experiential. Rational reflection is not the only way to access truth. In fact, for the postmodern person, there are various ways to access meaning.¹

¹ Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 7.

In this above example *no* “intellectual property” has been stolen.

3. Borrowing Ideas and “Common Sense”

It is also considered to be plagiarism when one borrows an idea from an author, which is not deemed to be common sense. Thus, in the previous example (example c), whilst I did use my own words, I still rightly required a footnote.

According to Monash University, information can comfortably be considered “common sense” if one can easily find “the same information uncited in at least five other sources.”⁴

EG d): An example of information you would *not* need to reference might be: **When Jesus was ministering on earth, he went about healing the sick and telling stories to explain what God’s kingdom is like.**

This, one could safely say, is common knowledge.

EG e): **Jesus’ preaching of the eschatological kingdom was influenced by Jewish apocalyptic**

⁴ Monash University Library, Online tutorials, Plagiarism Quiz, <http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/citing-quiz/quiz.swf> [accessed January 12, 2010].

thought in the inter-testamental period.

On the other hand, example “e” would need to be referenced, as it would not be considered common knowledge. Even though the original wording has been *completely* changed, it is still not my own idea.

The question to ask is “How do I know this?” In the case of the example above, this information was gleaned from Christiaan Mostert’s book entitled *God and the Future*. As such, it should read:

EG f): Jesus’ preaching of the eschatological kingdom was influenced by Jewish apocalyptic thought in the inter-testamental period.¹

Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 27.

4. Unpublished author

If an author is unpublished you still cannot take their words and claim them as your own, especially if they are the words of a fellow student. On this point, if you lend your paper to a fellow student and they copy from you, you will be considered just as liable as them if they get caught. So do *not* lend your paper to anyone in the same class. This is not to suggest that you cannot discuss an essay question with your fellow class mates, rather this warning pertains to the specific sharing of essay structure, quotations, sources and conclusions. Also, if the words or ideas you want to use are those of a lecturer, spoken in conversation, then, you need to note this.

EG g): Bernard Lonergan’s theological method is a comprehensive approach to the theological task that is both rigorous and systematic.¹

¹ Shane Clifton, interviewed by author, Sydney, NSW, April 25th, 2009.

5. Self-plagiarism

If you wrote a paper last year on the theme of the ‘kingdom of God’ in a New Testament class and, now, in a theology class you are doing an assessment on this concept as well, you cannot halve your workload by simply copying and pasting sections from your other assignment. That’s right, you can’t even plagiarise yourself.

6. Critical Review

In doing a review of a book or an article you may be having trouble critically engaging with the text. If you locate a review of the same text in a journal article or on the Internet, even if you don't copy anything word for word, it is still plagiarism if you use the reviewer's ideas without acknowledging the source in a footnote. You can, however, note the reviewer's ideas if you *do* reference them correctly. But remember, a critical review is primarily about *your* response to a text, rather someone else's.

7. Imagery

Plagiarism, as mentioned at the start of this document, does not only pertain to words. If you copy and paste an image in your assessment you have to cite the source. Further, the image used should be in the realm of 'Creative commons' otherwise you might legally be required to pay for the use of that image. Websites, such as www.flickr.com, often have an advanced search function, which will allow you to search only for images within the 'Creative Commons' domain.

8. The 15% Rule

Finally, an assignment is not considered to sufficiently reflect a student's own work if it consists of more than 15% direct quotations. An essay should be the student's own writing, their own construction of ideas, and their own wording. Indeed, quotations should be kept to a minimum.