



What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism at UNSW is using the words or ideas of others and passing them off as your own. Plagiarism is a type of intellectual theft.

Plagiarism can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement. Consequently, whenever you use the words or ideas of another person in your work, you must acknowledge where they came from.

Three steps to learning about plagiarism

It's important to **know what plagiarism is, and what form it takes** (some **common types of plagiarism** are listed here). It's also important to **know how plagiarism happens**. The final step is to **develop effective academic skills**. Many students who plagiarise do so unintentionally, often because they don't have the academic skills to avoid over-reliance on the work of others or because they aren't sure what constitutes plagiarism. So, it's important to take every opportunity to **develop your academic skills**.

On this site, there are resources on **avoiding plagiarism** and **how to be organised**, so students can develop good academic practice, as well as a list of **other resources and links**.



Why do I need to know about plagiarism?

One of the contradictions of academic writing is that, while you are expected to research and refer to experts and authorities, you are also expected to produce original work. This is based on the assumption that you are very clear about your own ideas and about how the works of other scholars have influenced your understanding.

It is important to recognise that all scholarship involves understanding, researching and building on existing research to some degree. Undergraduates, for instance, often base their assignments on selecting, ordering, summarising and interpreting what others have said to support their own academic arguments. Therefore, it is important to learn how to **reference well**; that is, how to consciously and clearly acknowledge the sources you have used in your work. Then your own contribution can be clearly identified and appreciated.

As part of an academic community, and thereby benefiting from your membership, you are expected to abide by its ethical practices. It is partly this tradition of **acknowledgement of sources**, in the form of **'in-text' citation** or **footnotes**, that separates academic writing from other forms of knowledge: it is part of the strength of academic research.

Why is it wrong to plagiarise?

Plagiarism is unethical for three reasons.

- Firstly, it is unethical because it is a form of theft. By taking the ideas and words of others and pretending they are

your own, you are stealing someone else's intellectual property.

- Secondly, it is unethical because the plagiariser subsequently benefits from this theft.
- Thirdly, a degree is evidence of its holder's abilities and knowledge. If a student gains employment on the basis of a qualification they have not earned, they may be a risk to others.

No doubt some students do cheat. They deliberately take the results of other people's hard work, use it to gain credit for themselves, and learn little or nothing in the process. But most cases of plagiarism are accidental, and could be avoided if students become more conscious of their own writing and research practices. Most students who plagiarise do so unintentionally, usually because they don't have the skills to avoid over-reliance on the work of others or because they aren't sure what constitutes plagiarism. Both intentional AND unintentional plagiarism are violations of **UNSW Plagiarism Policy** (PDF).



See next: **Common forms of plagiarism**

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