

Being an information literate researcher: tips for avoiding plagiarism

General points

- » Postgraduate research students in the UK are expected to understand the concept of plagiarism and their own responsibilities in avoiding it.
- » Be aware that as an author you can also become a victim of plagiarism.
- » Acknowledge all assistance provided during the preparation of your dissertation or thesis.
- » Many publishers (e.g. Emerald) will not accept papers for publication from authors (or co-authors) who have been found guilty of plagiarism in the past.
- » Recently, several prominent researchers have lost their jobs because of plagiarism offences which took place in their past, when they were postgraduate researchers.
- » Encourage your peers to adopt a responsible attitude towards plagiarism.
- » Don't believe people who tell you "you won't get caught" - it's not true and certainly not worth the risk!

Finding out about plagiarism

- » Ask for advice from your supervisor and from library staff at your institution.
- » Look at the JISC-iPAS website for detailed advice, links to quizzes and examples of good practice.
- » Check out acceptable and unacceptable examples of borrowing or paraphrasing texts.
- » Check out your institution or professional association's guidelines for citing sources.

Gathering information

- » Try to develop structured note taking, e.g. in tabular form, recording the source, quotations (marked as such), paraphrasing (marked as such) plus your own thoughts and ideas.
- » Keep careful track of references during the reading and note-taking stage. Note page numbers. Download references to bibliographical management software like EndNote. Alternatively, use 20 cm X 12 cm record cards. Be consistent and accurate. Don't rush it!
- » Keep copies of the articles you use whenever possible so you can refer back to them for cross checking.
- » When interviewing, if you are note-taking, differentiate between what the interviewee says and what you perceive.
- » When interviewing, if recording, ensure the transcript is marked clearly in a way that differentiates between what your interviewee said and your own comments. It is best to do this as soon as possible after the interview.

For details of more tip sheets in this series see www.jiscpas.ac.uk

Managing your research

- » Engage in careful time management. Structure your time and the research steps you will take.
- » Keep a research log or diary as you progress with details, e.g. of search terms used, sources retrieved.
- » As you progress, be sure to maintain different versions of your work. Retaining earlier drafts/versions helps you check the originality of your work and is proof of your developing thoughts.
- » Take care when proof-reading. Cross check notes and sources to ensure you have cited sources adequately and accurately.
- » Information in electronic form is much easier to store and organise for later review than printed material.
- » Take care when co-authoring or collaborating with others, especially when trading text. If you co-author is found guilty of plagiarism, you will be too.

Writing up

- » Use the style guide provided by your institution in a consistent fashion.
- » Give credit where it is due whatever the format, for example written, transcribed from interview, diagrammatic representation, data from a data archive, ideas or electronically available media.
- » Differentiate between common knowledge which you are free to use and original ideas which are the intellectual property of others. [Generally speaking, you can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources.] But, when in doubt, cite.
- » Develop a method of differentiating, in your notes, between other people's words; other people's ideas; and your own insights. Use, e.g., highlighter pens to clearly differentiate, or 'comments' boxes if you are using a word processor.
- » Take care when paraphrasing or summarising, e.g. try paraphrasing the text without recourse to the original, relying only on your memory and notes.
- » Use quotation marks when using exact phrases from the original text or around unique words or phrases that you wish to retain from the original.
- » Overuse of quotes can weaken your credibility and impede your own writing style. Try to achieve a balance.
- » Take care when cutting and pasting from electronic sources. Ensure you assign details of sources at the cutting and pasting stage.
- » Beware of technology-assisted plagiarism. If you use virtual communities of practice or discussion lists to exchange ideas and information, ensure you give credit to originators of ideas.

Text supplied by Pat Gannon-Leary and Moira Bent, co-authors of *Providing effective library services for research* (Facet Publishing, 2007).