

WRITING CENTRE

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Avoiding Plagiarism:
Answers to FAQs from CBU Students

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Everyone taking part in sharing or creating knowledge (which includes all CBU faculty and students!) must commit to upholding academic integrity in all academic work. This involves taking responsibility for ensuring all work is done according to the accepted practices of the given discipline. For students, academic integrity is also related to the fact that every grade awarded must be a grade earned – through effort, understanding, and a demonstrated ability to respond effectively to assignment questions while properly citing any sources used.

Plagiarism is one way in which students violate academic integrity. Plagiarism involves representing someone else's work as your own, either accidentally or on purpose. Acts like purchasing essays or assignments, copying others' assignments, or copying-and-pasting from the internet without proper attribution are obvious types of plagiarism. But students have told us that some of the rules around plagiarism can seem confusing, and that sometimes they think that a practice is okay when, in fact, it isn't.

We don't want students to feel confused; we want students to feel empowered and confident in doing their academic work with integrity! For this reason, we have created this guide of FAQs and answers.

a) Is it plagiarism if I memorize something from a book/article/website/etc. and then write it without a citation or quotation marks?

Yes. The fact that you've memorized information does not give you permission to use it without properly citing it. Find the original source and cite it properly. If you cannot find the original source, look for another source that gives the same information. If you cannot find any source that contains that information, you cannot use the information in your assignment.

Also, many sources do not have authors, dates, or page numbers, but this does not mean that you do not have to cite them – instead, find the correct format (ask the Writing Centre for up-to-date citation guides).

b) Is it plagiarism if I refer to common knowledge without citation?

If there truly is no source because the information is so basic (e.g., Canada is a country), then a citation is not required. But common knowledge is probably much less common than you think it is. Common knowledge does not mean things you know, or even things that a lot of people on the internet seem to know. When in doubt, cite. If you have to look something up, it is not common knowledge. Ask yourself, "How do I know this? Have I read it in a newspaper, magazine, or blog? Is it something my father told me when I was young? Is it something we learn as children?" And then identify that source in your essay ("according to my father," "in Western culture," "as explained in Encyclopedia Britannica," and "According to X" are all phrases you can use to identify your information source).

c) Is it plagiarism if I don't put quotation marks around copied words but still cite?

Yes. Not putting " " around copied words is plagiarism, even if you have provided a citation. This is because you are telling the reader that those words are yours, when in fact they are someone else's (and good sentences and phrases are hard to write, as you probably know!).

d) Is it plagiarism if I directly copy a few words or phrases and do not put quotation marks around them or cite them?

Yes. You always need to put quotation marks around any directly copied words or phrases and provide an in-text citation to show where they came from, even if they are short and appear in the middle of your sentence. Note that it is not true that you only need quotation marks if you copy more than 3 or 4 words in a row from a source; sometimes you need quotation marks around just a single word (e.g., Lee calls the film “shocking”).

e) Is it plagiarism if I use class materials in my assignment without citing them?

If you mention information from your current classes, prior education, or experience, you need to cite it or find a source to confirm it; otherwise, your reader will not know if it is valid. Citing lecture notes or prior education is as simple as writing something like “Professor X explained that . . .” This is an anecdotal, informal strategy for presenting evidence that can be related to the topic of your essay. There are also more formal ways to cite class materials and other experience, which you can learn by visiting the Writing Centre or consulting a style guide.

f) Is it plagiarism if I submit an assignment from one class for credit in another class?

Yes. Submitting the same assignment for more than one class without the instructor’s permission is called self-plagiarism. You can use related research that you’ve done for other assignments, but it should be used in a different way. Ask your professor about the extent to which you can use work you’ve done for another class in an assignment for his/her class.

g) Is it plagiarism if I cite a source in my bibliography but don’t include any in-text citations to show exactly where I used it?

Yes. You must include both in-text citations and a references page; just including a references page at the end of your assignment is not enough. Equally important is that all citations in your essay have an entry in the references page. In other words, if you mention a source in your paper it should also appear on your references page, and all sources on the references page should be mentioned in the body of your paper.

h) Is it plagiarism if I don't cite a source because I found it online?

Yes. It does not matter whether a source is an online or print one: you still have to cite it!

i) Is it plagiarism if I use paraphrase (and cite properly) to avoid too many quotations?

Not IF you have paraphrased properly. However, many students think that they are paraphrasing properly when, in fact, they are not. Paraphrasing that is too close to the original is always plagiarism, even with a citation. When a student uses a citation without quotation marks around the words before the citation, he/she is telling the professor that the ideas belong to the author, but that the way it is worded belongs to the student. Successful paraphrasing means using completely different words and sentence structure than the original: changing verb tenses, word forms, moving some words around, or just using a few synonyms is not enough. The excuse, "But there is no other way to say ____" is not a valid one. Try, and if you don't succeed, quote the material (using " " around the directly copied words) and provide a citation. With practice, proper paraphrasing gets easier, but it is often challenging and time-consuming, so expect it to be hard work.

j) Is it plagiarism if I run my essay through a translator program to put it into proper English?

Most professors will not allow students to use a program to translate an assignment. Since the translation program chooses the words and sentences for you, the translated assignment does not fully represent your own work. Some professors may allow you to translate your assignments, but note that this would be quite rare, so be sure to ask your professor beforehand. If you do have permission to write an assignment and then run it through a translator, identify the program you used and include a copy of the original draft (the essay before translation) when you hand your assignment in.

While students are generally not allowed to use translators to write entire papers, they are encouraged to use translation dictionaries to learn the meanings of individual words and phrases. Translation

dictionaries can be great tools for understanding readings and learning new vocabulary. Note that translation dictionaries may suggest a word that is not commonly used, so it is wise to check the meaning of a word in a current English dictionary as well.

k) Is it plagiarism if I use non-English sources in my writing?

It's not plagiarism if you've cited the material properly, but use of non-English sources may not be permitted for your assignment. Therefore, always ask your professors whether you are permitted to use non-English sources in your assignments or not. Sometimes, professors will not permit use of such sources because they cannot read the original language and, so, cannot verify what the sources say and if you've used and cited them properly. Of course, if you are permitted to use them, non-English sources that you or someone else has translated must be cited. Check with the Writing Centre or a style guide for how to do this properly.

l) Is it plagiarism if a tutor or friend helps me with my essay or assignment?

It depends on what degree of help your tutor or friend gives you. If a tutor or friend asks questions like "What do you mean here?" or "Where is the verb in this sentence?" or gives comments like "That is a diction error" or "This sentence is very disorganized," they are guiding you towards revision rather than revising for you. However, if a tutor or friend says things like "Word it this way," "Add this," or "This word should be..." then this is heavy-handed tutoring. The more your tutor or friend provides answers or content, the more you no longer "own" the assignment; therefore, it would be plagiarism to submit it with only yourself listed as the "owner"/author. Instead of asking a friend or tutor for help with your paper, use the Writing Centre. Writing Centre staff know how to provide feedback on your writing and guide you in making meaningful revisions while also making sure that you maintain ownership of your work.

m) Is it plagiarism if I use an editing service?

Editing services involve a person or program doing parts of your work for you, so yes, it would be considered plagiarism if you use an editing service without permission from your professor and without

acknowledging that you've used it. If you do receive permission from a professor to use an editing service (note: this would be rare!), then acknowledge it at the front of your assignment and provide the name and contact information for the service. Note that the Writing Centre is not an editing service, because Writing Centre staff do not make changes to your writing for you but, instead, teach you how to improve your own writing.

n) Is it plagiarism if I use but don't cite sources that I am not allowed to use?

Absolutely yes. If you use a source in your project that you were not supposed to use (like Wikipedia), you still need to cite it (or, even better, find a source you are allowed to use that provides the same information and cite that instead).

o) Is it plagiarism if I use but don't cite sources in an essay where sources are not required?

Yes. If you are not required to conduct research for an assignment but you do anyway, it too still must be cited. Also, if you use more sources or quotations in your paper than required by your professor, you still need to cite them and put " " around any directly copied words.

p) Is it plagiarism if I just put my citation at the end of each paragraph so that it doesn't look like there are too many citations?

Definitely yes. It is not enough to simply put a citation at the end of a paragraph if the paragraph contains a lot of information from the same source. There is no specific formula for the number of in-text citations you should put into the text of your paper. The rule-of-thumb is simply that it should be clear how you know each piece of information that you've included. Make it clear where the information in each sentence came from by putting a citation at the end of each sentence or by using your wording to show that material in more than one sentence is from the same source (for example, "According to X, . . . X also shows that . . . Furthermore, she points out that . . ."). Note that having many citations does not show that you didn't do any work, as you might fear. Actually, it shows that you did lots of research, and that you were careful to cite it properly. This is a good thing.

q) Is it plagiarism if I cite the wrong source?

This is called false citation, and while it can happen accidentally, it is also used by some students to make it difficult for professors to find plagiarized material. A false citation is a form of academic dishonesty in that, rather than claiming it as yours, you are claiming you found it in the work of a particular author when in fact you did not.

r) Is it plagiarism if I summarize an article or other source in an exam or test but do not cite?

Yes. No matter what the occasion, if you are writing a short or long answer to an essay question that involves using material from a source, you must cite it in some way. (For example, you would not be expected to remember the exact page number of the material, but you must still note that the information/idea came from author X.) You do not, however, need to cite lecture notes in an exam or test unless you are specifically asked to do so.

s) Is it plagiarism if I use graphs, tables, or illustrations without citing the source?

Yes. Plagiarism does not just apply to words and sentences. Using someone else's speech in a communication class without indicating where you took it from, using someone's painting in an art class without indicating that it is a copy – these all count as plagiarism. All graphics which appear in your assignment that you did not create must be acknowledged. There is also a proper way to acknowledge when you've adapted, or changed in some way, another's graph, table, etc. Visit the Writing Centre or consult a style guide for more information about these rules.

t) Is it plagiarism if I cite too much?

No, this is not plagiarism, but it might mean that you are not following the assignment instructions properly. For example, if all the material in your essay is cited (because it comes from other sources), and your professor instructed you to critically evaluate, analyze, or interpret, the professor will have no evidence of original thought or ideas. Essays requiring your critique should always have a solid core of your ideas. Essays that involve analysis or proof of understanding of particular theories will tend to have more citation.

General rules to prevent slipping into patterns that could lead to plagiarism:

1. Always remember, there must be 2 types of citations in all papers that include research: citations in your paper (in-text citations) and citations on a separate references page at the end of your paper (bibliographic citations).

In-text citations are brief, and usually involve putting some information in parentheses – () – such as the authors' names and the year their research was published. Bibliographic citations are complete citations that include much more information, like the title of the work the research came from, the year it was published, the publisher, the place of publication, etc.

2. Remember that, when incorporating research into your assignment, you only have 2 choices: (1) quote the material directly, in which case you must put " " around the copied words and include an in-text citation, or (2) put the material in your own words by summarizing or paraphrasing, in which case you must include an in-text citation but don't need to use " " .
3. Avoid any situation where someone else is adding material to your essay or assignment.

In study groups, study together but write or complete the assignment alone. Learn to say "no thank you" to friends who want to help you by telling you the answer or fixing sentences or paragraphs for you. Having someone tell you what to say means that they are doing the writing for you. Always ask your professor about what is and what is not permitted when you are asked to work in a group but must submit an individual assignment.

Also avoid heavy-handed tutors. Some tutors are not able to or interested in teaching students the material. A heavy-handed tutor is one who corrects your draft. The final product will neither sound like you nor reflect your level of knowledge, and will often result in a plagiarism charge.

4. Use signal phrases, such as “According to . . .” and “X says/ argues/shows/concludes” and similar phrases, as much as possible when you are putting research into your paper. They keep the source in the forefront as a reminder for you to add the proper reference and they distinguish your ideas from your source’s, creating greater clarity while adding “flow” to your writing.
5. When in doubt, ask. It is not a defence to say “I thought it was okay”; if you are wondering if something you are doing is okay, that means that you do not know. Ask your professor or make an appointment at the Writing Centre.

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