

# Plagiarism

by Alison DeRudder



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial explains what plagiarism is and why it should be avoided. The following is a list of what will be covered:

1. The Role of Research
2. Defining Plagiarism
3. Examples of Plagiarism
4. Plagiarism as an Ethical Concern
5. The Consequences of Plagiarism
6. How Plagiarism is Detected

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## 1. The Role of Research

Research is an essential part of higher education. Knowing how to conduct research, incorporate it into your writing, and properly cite it will be crucial to your success in your classes. Research is important because it familiarizes you with what experts in a specific field have to say about a certain topic. But this is not just a passive exercise in collecting information. Incorporating research into your own work allows you to engage with those experts and join ongoing debates about your subject, contributing your own unique opinion.

Because research involves a synthesis of other people's work and your own, it is necessary to *cite your sources*—that is, to give other people credit when you use their work. When you fail to cite your sources, that's called plagiarism.

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## 2. Defining Plagiarism

So how can plagiarism be defined? In the broadest sense, plagiarism means taking someone else's words or ideas in your work and representing them as your own. Plagiarism is considered a violation of "academic honesty" because turning in plagiarized work amounts to lying about the source of your work and taking credit ideas that don't belong to you. Plagiarism can take many forms, so let's have a look at some examples.

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## 3. Examples Of Plagiarism

The most common type of plagiarism these days is the “copy and paste” variety—the appropriation of articles found on the internet. There are a number of ways to go about it: interjecting specific words and phrases here and there, taking whole sentences or passages, or just “borrowing” the entire article. While this last method may be the worst case scenario, what they all have in common is that they are all examples of plagiarism. But plagiarism is not just the theft of the work of unsuspecting third parties whose work is published on the web. Other popular ways to plagiarize include turning in a paper you have purchased on the internet or having a friend write a paper for you.

### IN CONTEXT

Given all this talk about the seriousness of plagiarism and its consequences, it would be understandable for a student to be wary and overly cautious when writing with research. Perhaps just to steer clear of academic dishonesty, a student might cite every bit of information that comes from an outside source. But not everything needs to be cited. You don’t need to cite what’s considered common knowledge, such as facts that aren’t any particular author’s intellectual property. For example, you may have learned that Montpelier is the capital of Vermont by reading an article about food cooperatives, but you wouldn’t need to give credit to that author for having taught you that fact. It’s common knowledge, and now you share it.

4. Plagiarism as an Ethical Concern People who submit plagiarized work may justify their actions to themselves in a few ways—they might claim they “had no choice” because they were so busy they couldn’t complete their assignment on time or that plagiarism is a harmless, “victimless” crime. Plagiarism is never justified. If you are unable to submit your work on time, being honest with your instructor is a far superior course of action. And, in fact, plagiarism is not a “victimless crime”—it’s not only a kind of lying but also a kind of stealing. It’s dishonest to submit work that isn’t your own, but you are also taking someone else’s “intellectual property.”



### THINK ABOUT IT

The word “plagiarism” is derived from the Latin word for kidnapping! While it’s an idea, and not a human child, that’s being taken when it comes to plagiarism, it’s still considered a serious issue. Questions of intellectual property have been and continue to be hotly debated, both academically and legally. In what ways can an idea be considered stolen? Is it the same thing to steal an idea as it is to steal a wallet? How is it different?

## 5. The Consequences of Plagiarism

Even though plagiarism is often committed casually, as if it’s “no big deal,” your institution takes it very seriously. Look up your school’s policies and procedures regarding academic honesty and familiarize yourself with them, as well as any information individual instructors provide on a course syllabus. Plagiarism can result in a failing grade for an assignment, a failing grade for a course, or even expulsion from school. Many institutions require their instructors to report instances of academic dishonesty to the school. In addition to the serious consequences, plagiarism is a risky proposition in that there’s a high probability of getting caught. In short, one thing is for certain—plagiarism is never going to be “worth it.”

# 6. How Plagiarism Is Detected

Your instructor knows the difference between the writing typically turned in by students in a given course and the writing done by scholars in the field. In addition, your instructor to some extent knows you, your ability, and your own writing “voice.” For these reasons, it is not difficult for your instructor to detect when phrasing is suspiciously sophisticated or inconsistent. And a quick Google search of the language in question will take them right to the source. Even without the benefit of their well-trained eye for plagiarism, instructors these days have new digital resources like the internet-based plagiarism-detection service [turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com), which scans your assignment and the internet for potential violations. In short, very it's easy for your instructor to figure out that you have plagiarized, which is another reason to avoid it.



## SUMMARY

This tutorial examined **the role of research** in higher education and then proceeded to investigate all facets of plagiarism, beginning with **definitions** and **examples**. Then the **ethics** of academic honesty and the **consequences** and **detection** of academic dishonesty were considered.



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial shows you how to recognize and avoid plagiarism by defining it, providing examples, thinking about ethical concerns and consequences, and exploring methods and best practices for citation and paraphrasing. This is a list of what will be covered:

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2. Defining Plagiarism
3. Examples of Plagiarism
4. Plagiarism as an Ethical Concern
5. The Consequences of Plagiarism
6. How Plagiarism is Detected
7. Citation Styles and Citing Sources
8. Paraphrasing
9. Plagiarism and Other Media: Images, Video, Music
10. Resources to Help with Citation

# 1. The Role of Research

Research is an essential part of higher education and knowing how to conduct research, incorporate it into your writing, and properly cite it will be crucial to your success in your classes. Research is important because

it familiarizes you with what the experts in a specific field have to say about a certain topic. But this is not just a passive exercise in collecting information. Incorporating research into your own work allows you to engage with those experts and join ongoing debates about your subject, contributing your own unique opinion.

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## 7. Citation Styles and Citing Sources

Avoiding plagiarism involves citing your sources—but how does citation work and what does it look like? There are three major styles of citation that you might be asked to use, depending on the subject you are working in or just the individual preference of the instructor:

1. MLA (Modern Language Association),
2. Chicago (named for the Chicago Manual of Style, but sometimes referred to as “Turabian”), and
3. APA (American Psychological Association).

Each style has a different approach to in-text citation and the format for a *bibliography* or “Works Cited” page. Make sure you know which style a given assignment is supposed to be cited in.

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### EXAMPLE

Let’s say you want to quote the following from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance,” which you find on page 269 of a book of collected essays of Emerson’s: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of

little minds.” How do you cite this in text in all three styles? In MLA and APA, you would cite in parenthesis between the end of the quotation and the period:

MLA: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” (Emerson 269)

APA: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” (Emerson, 1983, p. 269)

To use the Chicago style, you would use a footnote instead of a parenthetical citation.

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## 8. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is an integral part of writing with research that entails putting something you have read into your own words. If you want to summarize general ideas or information from an outside source, you paraphrase it. Paraphrasing is a good way to condense bigger chunks of information for efficiency, but it can also help you to isolate key points from your research.

When you work with outside sources, you want to move between your “voice” and the writers you’re quoting or paraphrasing as seamlessly and organically as possible. Try your best to translate the ideas you encounter into your own words in order to convey a sense of the original, but filtered through your own perspective. This way you are actively engaged with the research and your paraphrasing won’t veer toward plagiarism.

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## 9. Plagiarism and Other Media: Images, Video, Music

Plagiarism isn’t just limited to the realm of books and articles. Any time you use any outside media—that is, something that you did not create yourself—including images, videos, and music, you should provide a citation. All of these things are subject to copyright law and it is your responsibility to make sure you give the proper attribution when you make use of someone else’s intellectual property. Resources that help you with citation, which will be discussed next, will provide examples of how to cite all kinds of media.

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## 10. Resources to Help with Citation

If you are not sure how to cite in a particular style or you have a specific question about a minor aspect of citation within a style, there are several places you can turn to for help. The internet is chock full of resources for writers and researchers. One popular and useful website is the Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab). There are also several websites that will put a citation in the proper format if you enter the relevant information, such as [easybib.com](http://easybib.com) or [citationmachine.net](http://citationmachine.net).



**BIG IDEA**

Now that you understand the meaning and parameters of plagiarism, it will be easy to avoid. And you’ll find that academically honest students can put the same kind of digital resources that make plagiarism easy to detect to positive use. Our current “information age” is characterized by access to everything—good, bad, and

neutral. If you can harness the power of the internet for helping yourself learn things, and not for stealing ideas, you will find that it makes things like checking proper citation much easier.



## SUMMARY

This tutorial examined **the role of research** in higher education and then proceeded to investigate all facets of plagiarism, beginning with **definitions** and **examples** (including examples of citing **media** like images and videos). Then the **ethics** of academic honesty and the **consequences** and **detection** of academic dishonesty were considered. Finally, the tutorial covered **paraphrasing, citation, and resources** that can help with citation.