Plagiarism in Higher Education
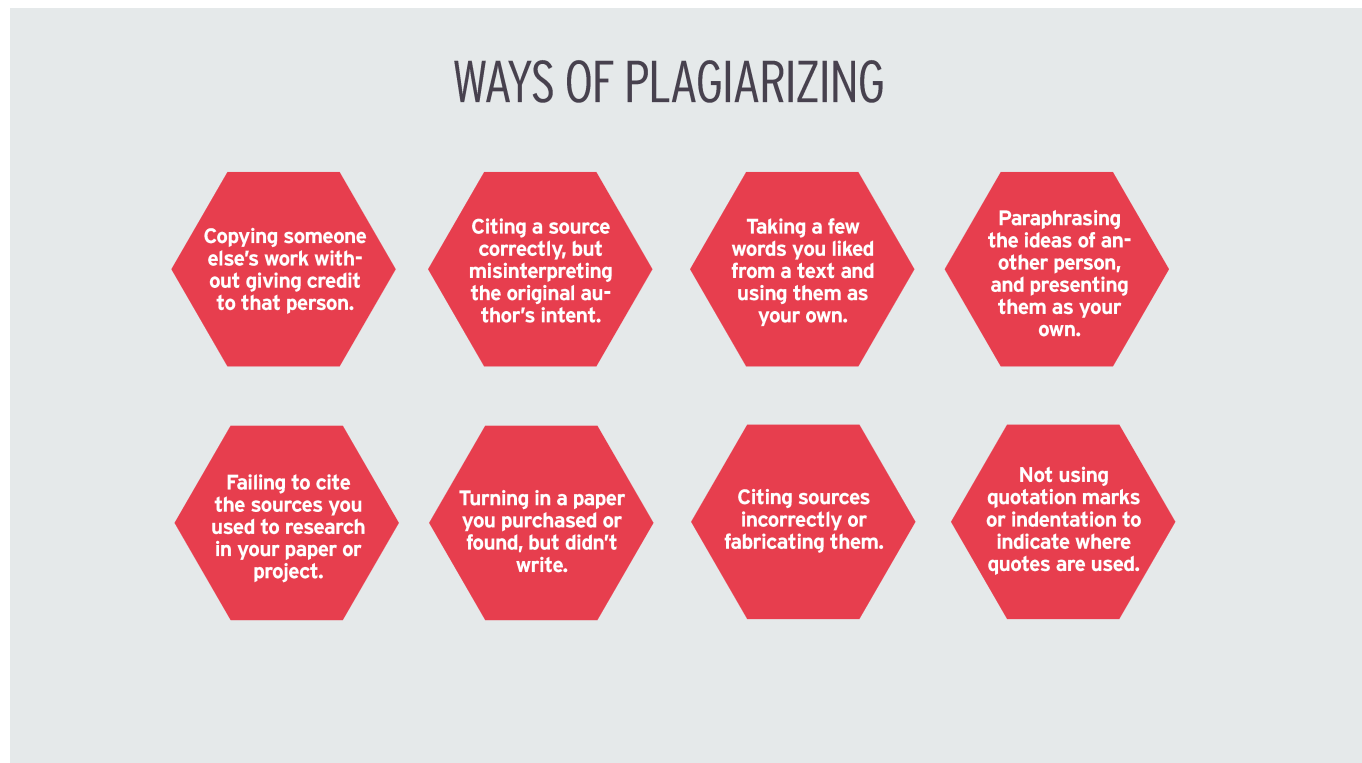
by Sophia

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.

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

for ideas or words that don't belong to you. Plagiarism can take many forms, so let's have a look at some examples.

WAYS OF PLAGIARIZING

Copying someone else's work without giving credit to that person.

Citing a source correctly, but misinterpreting the original author's intent.

Taking a few words you liked from a text and using them as your own.

Paraphrasing the ideas of another person, and presenting them as your own.

Failing to cite the sources you used to research in your paper or project.

Turning in a paper you purchased or found, but didn't write.

Citing sources incorrectly or fabricating them.

Not using quotation marks or indentation to indicate where quotes are used.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Plagiarism

The act of taking someone else's words or ideas and presenting them as your own. When you do this, you are stealing and being dishonest, even if that is unintentional. Plagiarism is a serious issue in higher education and can result in failing an assignment, failing a course, or being expelled from school. Therefore, it's crucial that you give the original author or creator credit when you draw from sources that are not your own. To avoid plagiarizing in higher education, you will use specific guidelines for citing the sources in your papers and assignments.

3. Plagiarism and AI

The emergence of AI-powered chatbots like ChatGPT has created a new type of plagiarism: copying and pasting the output of these chatbots and presenting it as your own. Even though you're not stealing the work of another person, you're committing an act of academic dishonesty if you turn in a paper or project written by AI. Because this technology is relatively new, the safest approach is to ask your instructor if there are specific rules about whether it's ok to use AI technology at all in your course, and if so, in what ways.

⇄ **MAKE THE CONNECTION**

Many colleges and universities have published AI use policies for faculty, students, and staff. To learn more about how generative AI works and how to use it responsibly, you can review Sophia's policy on **Ethical**

4. 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.
- "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.

5. 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."

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?

6. 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."

7. 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, inconsistent, or, in the case of AI-powered chatbots, bland and uninspired. 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 internet-based plagiarism-detection services like Copyleaks, Turnitin, or Grammerly, which scan your assignments and the internet for potential violations. Sites like these also allow you to check your work for potential plagiarism issues before turning in your paper or other written assignment.

In short, it's very easy for your instructor to figure out that you have plagiarized, which is another reason to avoid it.

SUMMARY

Research plays an essential role in higher education. **Plagiarism is defined** as taking the words or ideas of someone else and presenting them as your own. Some **examples of plagiarism** include copying someone else's work or not properly citing. **Plagiarism is an ethical concern** because it is considered dishonest and should be avoided. Higher education institutions take this very seriously and enforce **consequences of plagiarism**. Your instructor can easily **detect plagiarism** by using internet-based plagiarism detection services.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

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The act of taking someone else's words or ideas and presenting them as your own. When you do this, you are stealing and being dishonest, even if that is unintentional. Plagiarism is a serious issue in higher education, and can result in failing an assignment, failing a course, or being expelled from school. Therefore, it's crucial that you give the original author or creator credit when you draw from sources that are not your own. To avoid plagiarizing in higher education, you will use specific guidelines for citing the sources in your papers and assignments.