

LECTURE FOUR

PLAGIARISM

1.1 Objectives

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

- a) Explain what plagiarism is
- b) Recognize the various forms of plagiarism
- c) Explain how to avoid plagiarism

1.2 Introduction

Plagiarism is an important topic in academic writing. It is good academic writing practice to present a clean, respectable paper. Plagiarism is academic theft, and never tolerated in academic circles.

1.3 Definition of Plagiarism

The Cambridge English Dictionary (2020) defines plagiarism as, ‘the process or practice of using another person's ideas or work and pretending that it is your own.’

To the University of Oxford (2020), plagiarism is:

Presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition. Plagiarism may be intentional or reckless, or unintentional.

Hence, know that you have committed plagiarism if you deliberately or inadvertently use another's actual words or ideas and fail to attribute them.

1.4 Types/Forms of Plagiarism

Some students have no idea they have plagiarized information. Jane couldn't understand why her instructor kept telling her she had plagiarized. She would copy chunks of text and cite the source at the end, but her similarity index said she had plagiarized. Thus, it's very important to know when you plagiarize information. The University of Oxford (2020) offers insight into the following forms of plagiarism.

1. Verbatim

Verbatim means word for word. This is the sin Jane kept committing without her knowledge. She would take the words of the author and paste them without quotation marks and indentation. It is advisable that you indent any verbatim words you are lifting or put them in quotation marks. Before or at the end of that quote, cite the source according to your university's style guide which often will include the author's name, publication year and page number. Indentation and quotation marks make it clear to the reader which words are yours

and which ones are not. Verbatim copy-pasting can come from all sorts of sources which include books, internal reports, unpublished theses, articles, conference papers, data from research, working papers, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, seminars and others.

2. Copy-pasting from the Internet

Many students carelessly cut and paste material from the Internet without clearly acknowledging the source. Material on the Internet is subjected to the same standards of law, such as copyright law. Therefore, information derived from the Internet must be cited and referenced. Again, each style guide provides a clear way to include these sources in the bibliography or reference page.

3. Paraphrasing

Sometimes we delude ourselves to think we can change a word or two of an author's sentences or paragraphs and that makes it okay. Merely altering a few words and changing the word order is still plagiarism. You can paraphrase but you must acknowledge that it was not your idea. The better way of paraphrasing is to write a brief summary of the author's overall argument in your own words and then cite. Providing a summary indicates that you have a genuine grasp of the argument.

4. Collusion

According to the Oxford University (2020), collusion involves 'unauthorised collaboration between students, failure to attribute assistance received, or failure to follow precisely regulations on group work projects.' Students should know how far they can collaborate and be clear about which work is theirs. To illustrate this point, think of a research student who decides to use the instructor's notes without acknowledging where that information came from.

5. Inaccurate citation

In an earlier class, we looked at citation and referencing. The whole purpose of citation and referencing is to alert the reader that you received help from certain sources to put your document together. Every institution has identified their style guide and it's advisable that you follow it to the letter. When you do, you will avoid plagiarism. The Oxford University (2020) further advises:

Additionally, you should not include anything in your references or bibliography that you have not actually consulted. If you cannot gain access to a primary source you must make it clear in your citation that your knowledge of the work has been derived from a secondary text (for example, Bradshaw, D. Title of Book, discussed in Wilson, E., Title of Book (London, 2004), p. 189).

6. Failure to acknowledge assistance

There are people who come in to assist but you may not think that you should acknowledge them. Suppose you are doing a research paper in Agriculture and while visiting a farmland, the extension officer inadvertently gives you an idea which turns out to be your topic of

research? Somewhere in your document, you must acknowledge him/her. This, however, does not apply with your supervisor or tutor.

7. Material from professional agencies

Unfortunately, there are unethical, unscrupulous individuals who have turned writing into a profession. They exist both in physical offices and on online platforms. These purport to offer academic assistance but what they offer is facilitation of academic theft. Many governments are grappling the world over to stop the vice. Stay away from such. The consequences of plagiarism as we shall come to see later are grave.

8. Auto-plagiarism

Though not very common, some students end up submitting work they had previously submitted. For instance, suppose you change universities and happen to repeat a course. If responding to a similar question, it is wrong to pick the same paper and submit. The paper you are now submitting had already been submitted and graded. The simple and best thing to do is to do the work afresh. Auto-plagiarism is also known as self-plagiarism. Take the example of research students who had published a portion of their work in a journal. Once that work is published, if they want to cite parts of their own work, they must cite themselves. Otherwise, they too have committed the sin of plagiarism, only this time against themselves.

In addition to the above points on plagiarism, be careful about copying creative and visual content such as pictures without acknowledgement. Others include diagrams, computer source codes, music and so on. Also note that fabricating or altering data to suit one's study is plagiarism.

1.5 Why do some students plagiarize?

1. Laziness

Some students are just too lazy to be bothered to do the right thing. The attitude that studying is too much work gets in the way of a sound academic paper. Such students will copy and paste from the Internet without any qualms and even submit work that still has links in blue colour. There was the case of a student who submitted a paper that bore someone else's name. When pressed, he admitted that he had stolen his friend's work and simply fixed his name. I also encountered students who submitted identical work, word for word. When I enquired, they revealed who had copied from the other.

2. Poor time management

Many students procrastinate. They are issued assignments way before the due date but attempt the assignment a few hours to the deadline. What happens is panic and anxiety attacks set in. Unable to think straight, they resort to copying and pasting unacknowledged chunks of material. Thus, attempt your assignments way ahead of time to give you time to consult your sources and learn how to cite and reference them.

3. Lack of self-confidence

Some students don't believe in themselves. They want to score high grades but are handicapped in one way or another. Such students think the author says it better than they do.

I would encourage you to believe in yourself. Even those authors started at some point and I bet they were not as good then. Write down points from your mind and readings and go ahead to use your own words. It's better to have faulty presentations with grammatical errors than be guilty of academic theft.

4. Difficulty integrating source materials into own arguments

My students have told me some authors use difficult words and statements which they don't understand. They get frustrated trying to incorporate into their work what an author is saying. I advise my students to always write down their ideas before they consult any source. Write down your hypothesis first then consult sources. You will now only be seeking assistance or validation concerning your work.

5. Erroneous thinking that learning is a passive process

Due to the teaching methods from generations past, most students think teachers know it all. When I reported to one university and went to class, I noticed these students were different. The moment I opened my mouth to begin the lesson, everyone leaned forward to start writing. I stopped and asked them what they wanted to write. They said that's how they learn- you speak, I write, end of lesson. You need to take an active position as a student. Think through issues. Participate in class and know that you are an academician in your own right. So, yes, consult sources, but ensure your voice stays consistent throughout your paper.

1.6 How to guard against plagiarism

1. Use own words and sentence structure

I earlier mentioned that you could summarise or paraphrase. However, ensure that you have used your own words and sentence structure.

2. Get connected with the material

You cannot summarize what you do not understand. Yes, some topics may be difficult to understand but extensive reading and consultation should help you grasp these difficult concepts. This calls for hard work and commitment. Laziness is therefore not going to help here. The more you read and interrogate the salient issues, the more you will become familiar with the work and establish a connection. Once you have established the connection, you will be able to form appropriate responses that will help you avoid plagiarism since you will now find it easier to use your own words.

3. Handle quotations properly

Including verbatim material without quotations is plagiarism. Therefore, ensure you have put quotation marks and followed all the rules according to your style guide. For instance, in APA, you must indent a quotation which carries more than 40 words.

4. Avoid self-plagiarism

Yes, you are the author, but rules are rules. Self-plagiarism is equally not acceptable. Simply cite yourself.

5. Do proper referencing and in-text citation

Referencing is part of the process of avoiding plagiarism. Your readers expect you to cite and reference your source of ideas. When you do, you provide the necessary documentation the readers can check for clarity or further reading. Citing and referencing is a sure way for your readers to separate your ideas from your source's ideas. You must cite facts and statistics that are not common knowledge. For example, when you say that China currently has 81,000 people infected with Covid-19, you must cite a source. However, you don't need to cite facts which constitute common knowledge such as dates of historical events, scientific facts (the earth going around the sun), folk tales and so on.

1.7 Consequences of Plagiarism

To Self

Imagine you are an average person who occasionally runs into trouble. On this day, you can't explain what happened, but you have been caught shoplifting at the supermarket. The supermarket authorities lock you up in a tiny room at the back for 8 hours before they call your parents. When your parents come, they are forced to pay 10 times the amount of the stolen item. In this country, anyone caught shoplifting must pay 10 times the value of the item and has their picture taken and hanged at the door for one month, with the words, "Shoplifter of the month." How would you feel?

One consequence of plagiarism is **loss of a physical benefit**. There are individuals who have had their degrees withdrawn for plagiarism. In 2019, a Kenyatta University (KU) lecturer was stripped of his doctoral degree after a senior lecturer at Usmanu Danfodiyo University in Sokoto, Nigeria, complained to KU that he had allegedly plagiarized her work. After investigation, the committee found him guilty and not only withdrew the degree, but also relieved him of his duties (Wanzala, 2019).

At the university level, plagiarism is regarded as a disciplinary issue. If caught, you may have your marks deducted or fail a paper altogether. It can also result in failing a degree or even being expelled from the university.

Another consequence is **loss of trust**. Take the same example above. It will be very difficult for the above lecturer to be employed by any university unless he acquires another degree legitimately. At the core of every university is research. How can any university trust that the lecturer will ever embark on his own research and be truthful about it? According to Oxford University (2020), plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. You are telling the world that you cannot be trusted with academic honesty. You are telling the world that you are not fit to graduate.

One can also suffer from shame and **loss of self-esteem**. How did you feel when you were locked up in the small room for 8 hours after shoplifting? Did you want to face your parents? How about if that supermarket is located near your school and your classmates keep seeing your picture as the shoplifter of the month? That's a similar effect you would experience when caught in plagiarism.

Plagiarism is wrong because it hinders you from producing the highest quality material.

To the Institution

Going back to the example above, when KU received communication to the effect that one of their own had committed academic dishonesty, they immediately started investigations. Their investigations took almost 6 months. The action by KU shows that plagiarism is not tolerated. It puts a stain on the integrity of the institution. It's the reason universities today insist that you submit your paper through the university library's plagiarism checker which produces a similarity index. People tend to shun institutions that relax their rules on plagiarism.

To the society

The same reason as institutions apply. A country that has many institutions that do not take issues of academic theft seriously will no doubt be shunned. To quote the Oxford University (2020), 'Students who plagiarize undermine the ethos of academic scholarship while avoiding an essential part of the learning process.'

1.8 Examples of Plagiarism

The following examples have been provided by the Oxford University (2020) and copied verbatim to help in illustration:

Source text

From a class perspective this put them [highwaymen] in an ambivalent position. In aspiring to that proud, if temporary, status of 'Gentleman of the Road', they did not question the inegalitarian hierarchy of their society. Yet their boldness of act and deed, in putting them outside the law as rebellious fugitives, revived the 'animal spirits' of capitalism and became an essential part of the oppositional culture of working-class London, a serious obstacle to the formation of a tractable, obedient labour force. Therefore, it was not enough to hang them – the values they espoused or represented had to be challenged.

(Linebaugh, P., *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1991), p. 213.

Plagiarized Example 1

Although they did not question the inegalitarian hierarchy of their society, highwaymen became an essential part of the oppositional culture of working-class London, posing a serious threat to the formation of a biddable labour force. (This is a patchwork of phrases copied verbatim from the source, with just a few words changed here and there. There is no reference to the original author and no indication that these words are not the writer's own.)

Plagiarized Example 2

Although they did not question the inegalitarian hierarchy of their society, highwaymen exercised a powerful attraction for the working classes. Some historians believe that this hindered the development of a submissive workforce. (This is a mixture of verbatim copying and acceptable paraphrase. Although only one phrase has been copied from the source, this would still count as plagiarism. The idea expressed in the first sentence has not been

attributed at all, and the reference to ‘some historians’ in the second is insufficient. The writer should use clear referencing to acknowledge all ideas taken from other people’s work.)

Plagiarized Example 3

Although they did not question the inegalitarian hierarchy of their society, highwaymen ‘became an essential part of the oppositional culture of working-class London [and] a serious obstacle to the formation of a tractable, obedient labour force’. (This contains a mixture of attributed and unattributed quotation, which suggests to the reader that the first line is original to this writer. All quoted material must be enclosed in quotation marks and adequately referenced.)

Plagiarized Example 4

Highwaymen’s bold deeds ‘revivified the “animal spirits” of capitalism’ and made them an essential part of the oppositional culture of working-class London. Peter Linebaugh argues that they posed a major obstacle to the formation of an obedient labour force. (Although the most striking phrase has been placed within quotation marks and correctly referenced, and the original author is referred to in the text, there has been a great deal of unacknowledged borrowing. This should have been put into the writer’s own words instead.)

Plagiarized Example 5

By aspiring to the title of ‘Gentleman of the Road’, highwaymen did not challenge the unfair taxonomy of their society. Yet their daring exploits made them into outlaws and inspired the antagonistic culture of labouring London, forming a grave impediment to the development of a submissive workforce. Ultimately, hanging them was insufficient – the ideals they personified had to be discredited. (This may seem acceptable on a superficial level, but by imitating exactly the structure of the original passage and using synonyms for almost every word, the writer has paraphrased too closely. The reference to the original author does not make it clear how extensive the borrowing has been. Instead, the writer should try to express the argument in his or her own words, rather than relying on a ‘translation’ of the original.)

Non-plagiarized Example 1

Peter Linebaugh argues that although highwaymen posed no overt challenge to social orthodoxy – they aspired to be known as ‘Gentlemen of the Road’ – they were often seen as anti-hero role models by the unruly working classes. He concludes that they were executed not only for their criminal acts, but in order to stamp out the threat of insubordinacy. (This paraphrase of the passage is acceptable as the wording and structure demonstrate the reader’s interpretation of the passage and do not follow the original too closely. The source of the ideas under discussion has been properly attributed in both textual and footnote references.)

Non-Plagiarized Example 2

Peter Linebaugh argues that highwaymen represented a powerful challenge to the mores of capitalist society and inspired the rebelliousness of London's working class. (This is a brief summary of the argument with appropriate attribution.)

1.9 Activity

Pick a journal article and go to the results section. Summarize that section using your own words, then run your answer through 'Turnitin,' a plagiarism checker. Rectify your document when you get your plagiarism report and keep checking until you get a score of 0 or 1.

1.9 References

Cambridge English Dictionary. (2020). Plagiarism. Retrieved from

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Wanzala, O. (24 September 2019). Kenyatta University revokes lecturer's PhD over plagiarism. *Daily Nation*. Retrieved from

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