Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an unhappy misfortune that anyone can fall victim to. Whether the act is accidental or deliberate, it can hold grave consequences for one's future. Its imperative, therefore, that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and know how to avoid it in your work.

What is plagiarism?

Simply put, plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas, words or work, representing them as your own without giving the original author due credit.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- Using a definition from a dictionary, manual or other test without citing the source
- Quoting a phrase or verse from a song, poem or fictional work without crediting the artist who created it
- Using someone else's criticisms or arguments in you critique and presenting them as your own

The following examples, however, do not constitute plagiarism:

- Discussing your ideas with friends and colleagues
- Using others' feedback to improve your work
- Incorporating someone else's ideas or words into your work and giving them credit

What are the penalties for plagiarism?

Plagiarism is considered a serious offense in any academic or professional field. In school, the penalties for a specific act of plagiarism are determined by the instructor of the course in which the act occurs. You could receive an "F" for the paper or project in question, fail the course, or even be brought up for college disciplinary action.

How can I be sure I'm not plagiarizing?

- Document your sources carefully while researching your project. Doing so will help you keep track of what sources you are using and the instances in which you have quoted a source directly. Being organized from the very beginning will also help you reduce the chance of overlooking a quoted source as you are compiling the bibliography later.
- Be sure you understand your material. If you do not understand what the original source is saying, you are more likely to "plug in" the source's exact wording without noting the quote or giving proper credit. This is especially true when you are defining or explaining a term or concept.
- Check your work thoroughly when you are finished. Ask yourself where you found the information for each point that you made. Was this your idea or someone else's? Did you express the idea using your words, or did you use someone else's phrasing?

- Understand the attribution conventions for the field you are working in. Many specialized areas, such as engineering and science, demand specific conventions for citing sources. Other fields do not require you to document your sources so rigorously; sometimes you will need only to make judicious use of quotation marks or mention the original source within the test. Familiarize yourself with the conventions of the field to avoid accidental oversights.
- If you ever have any doubts about using a source or the proper method of documenting it, ask your instructor for help.

How can I be sure I'm attributing my sources correctly?
You have many resources at your disposal. The Augusta Technical College Library contains handbooks and style guides outlining conventions for academic papers and other documents. Again, if you are ever in doubt, consult your instructor for assistance.

(adapted from the Academic Development, [Carnegie Mellon University website](#))