

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the presentation of ideas, words, images or creations without acknowledging where they came from. It is a form of cheating.

Most assignments require you to read widely and refer to the work of other people. In both written work and oral presentations, you need to refer to the published work of others as evidence of the accuracy and reliability of the ideas and information. Failing to acknowledge the source (plagiarism) can be a very serious offence in academic studies. Plagiarism can be avoided if you reference your sources properly. Therefore, it is important to know how to correctly acknowledge the sources you use and to be familiar with the referencing style(s) used in your courses.

How plagiarism occurs

In written assignments, plagiarism occurs if the sources of information are not acknowledged when:

- using words or sentences 'word-for-word' from the original text (quoting)
- presenting someone else's tables, graphs or images
- expressing ideas from a text in different words (paraphrasing)
- giving a short version of someone else's ideas (summarising).

Plagiarism can also occur if:

- you copy another student's assignment, in part or in whole
- you write your assignment in conjunction with other students without prior permission (This does not mean you shouldn't meet with other students initially to discuss the assignment topic and/or analyse the question.)
- the assignment you submit has already been submitted for assessment in another course
- you give a direct reference to an author you have not read (although you may have read about them)
- you falsify data.

Whether plagiarism occurs deliberately or by accident, it is still your responsibility.

Example of plagiarism—misuse of sources

If the following words appeared in an essay,

... to be a successful tertiary student you need to be an independent learner.

the reader would assume that these ideas, words and thoughts were the writer's own. However, these words have been directly copied from a text book.

Why is this plagiarism?

- a) It appears in the writer's essay without quotation marks.
- b) There is no reference to the original author.

Avoiding plagiarism

Referencing

Accurate referencing is the key to avoiding plagiarism. There are several referencing styles used at RMIT. Check with your course guide or lecturer/teacher for the appropriate style to be used in your assignments. Referencing guides are also available from the RMIT Library website:
<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=8rwjnkcmfoeez>.

Referencing has two parts: in-text referencing and the reference list.

In-text referencing

Within your text, there are two main ways of incorporating information to avoid plagiarism:

- **Paraphrasing** - rewriting other people's ideas in your own words and citing (referencing) them. When you paraphrase, you must use your own words and sentence structure.
- **Quoting** - writing the author's exact words using quotation marks and citing (referencing) the quotation.

Paraphrasing is a more effective strategy than quoting because you can demonstrate your understanding of the information and ideas. It also helps you to maintain your 'voice', or authority, in your writing. Only use quotations for definitions or when the author's writing is particularly apt.

The reference list

In addition to in-text referencing, you must also provide the bibliographic details of the source material in your reference list. RMIT Library referencing guides mentioned above have examples of reference lists in many styles.

The Study and Learning Centre Learning Lab has additional information on referencing:
<https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/referencing>

An online tutorial is also available on paraphrasing:
<https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/paraphrasing>.

Turnitin

Turnitin is an online service which can check for plagiarism in written work. Students can submit an assignment to review their citations to see if improvements in referencing are required. For student FAQs about Turnitin see <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=itqvf0papnlm>.

Good note taking

Much accidental plagiarism is the result of poor note taking skills. Make sure you accurately record the bibliographic information when you make notes. Also, when writing your notes, take great care to distinguish between your own words and any you copy directly from the text. Mistaking quotes or material cut-and-pasted in to your notes for your own words can result in plagiarism.

Protect your own work

Avoid becoming an unwitting accomplice in someone else's attempt to cheat by protecting your own work. Don't leave assignments lying around for others to read or copy, and take care not to leave your USBs (memory sticks) behind in the library or computer labs.