Additional reference material

Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism involves handing in work for assessment where part or all of the work is not entirely your own. It is widely considered to be a serious matter in academic institutions, with penalties including failing all or part of a course. Typical examples of plagiarism include:

- copying material from another source (e.g. textbook, internet text) without properly referencing it
- handing in work as your own which is not in fact entirely your own
- presenting any material, idea, research, argument, etc. as your own, which is actually from another source
- handing in work for assessment that you have already handed in for assessment somewhere else - so that you are gaining credit twice for just one piece of work.

Remember that using material without acknowledgement from any source is plagiarism - even if the source is not published, or is a lecture or even a conversation with somebody. There are other more detailed examples of plagiarism, e.g. copying an extract word for word and referencing it, but then forgetting to use quotation marks so that it looks like a paraphrase rather than a direct quotation. In short, anything 'borrowed' from another author must be 'given back' by acknowledging it properly and accurately. It is also important to realize that this process of acknowledgement and referencing applies not only to texts, but also to other forms of media, e.g. visuals such as graphs, illustrations, or photos; or machine code; or mathematical proofs.

There are, however, cases where you don't have to reference ideas. For example, if you mention that smoking can have many negative health impacts (i.e. smoking is unhealthy), this is so widely known and there are so many references for it that you probably don't need to add a reference. As a rule, you don't need to reference common knowledge, also known as knowledge 'in the public domain', i.e. things that most people know about. However, if you are unsure, check first or include a reference anyway.

Why is plagiarism unacceptable?

As in the wider world, basic honesty in the academic world is expected. Just as most people don't walk into a shop or a friend's house and steal something, they don't plagiarize. In an academic context, plagiarism is potentially both easy to do and easy to detect. At university, you are there to learn. Trying your best to complete an assignment independently, however difficult it might seem, is a good thing and you will learn from the experience. By plagiarizing, you won't learn very much, you won't be developing your voice and competence, and you won't be making progress. Most students work hard to produce their own carefully referenced work, and it is widely seen as unfair if a student plagiarizes yet receives the same qualification. A qualification is seen as an indication of a level of

knowledge and skills, and if plagiarism is involved, the student won't necessarily have such knowledge and skills. No one wants to be served by a pharmacist, for example, who isn't competent because they cheated in their coursework.

What happens if a student plagiarises?

The action taken in response to plagiarism varies across departments, institutions, and countries. First of all, an internal investigation is likely to take place, in order to determine whether the student actually plagiarized, or not. Often the distinction is made between intentional and unintentional plagiarism. Intentional plagiarism means that the student set out trying to cheat; unintentional plagiarism means it happened by mistake, without realizing. This latter action is usually seen as less serious. Most institutions have their own policy on plagiarism which is explained on their website. For example, the University of Oxford offers a clear definition, description, and advice on plagiarism at: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/goodpractice/about/.

What do tutors and professors think about plagiarism?

From the tutor or professor's perspective, plagiarism is both highly irritating and time-wasting. As experts in their field, they are also skilled at detecting plagiarism on the part of their students. The kind of 'telltale' practices they are looking for include:

- written work that is not properly referenced
- texts which have obvious differences in accuracy and style between sections, e.g. one paragraph contains mostly simple sentences and grammar with frequent elementary mistakes, and the following paragraph is sophisticated and accurate in grammar
- written work which is obviously and unmistakably above the level of the student.

It is also an unacceptable practice to get an excessive amount of help in writing assignments from a friend or family member (known as 'collusion'), or a professional agency outside the academic institution in question.

How can you avoid plagiarism?

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to follow these six stages:

1 Be informed - read the information on plagiarism on your university or college website, and make sure you understand it and keep up to date with it.

2 Be honest - don't try to deceive your tutor by handing in work which is not entirely your own.

3 Be professional - follow the academic conventions carefully by referencing all the material you have taken from other sources.

4 Be cautious - if you are not sure whether to include a reference, check with your tutor and if that isn't possible, include it anyway. In this way, you won't be accused of plagiarism even if the reference wasn't necessary.

5 Be individual - discuss ideas and assignments with other students, but when it comes to writing make sure you work individually (unless of course you are working on a group project).

6 Be smart - don't avoid plagiarism because you'll be punished, avoid it because you'll learn more and your readers will hear your voice rather than that of someone else.

Citation: summary, paraphrase, and quotation

What is citation?

Citation refers to the incorporation of material from another source into your writing in order to add support and exemplification. The main forms of citation are summary, paraphrase, and quotation. With all of these, you need to reference the material correctly. If not, it will be plagiarized.

What is summary?

Summarizing a text allows you to incorporate a large amount of information concisely into a small number of words. A summary of a text is shorter than the original text, but there is no special length for a summary. You can summarize many types and lengths of text, including: a few sentences or a paragraph; a section or chapter in a book; part of an article; the work of a particular researcher. A summary should:

- be as brief as possible
- be clear to understand - perhaps written in simpler language than the source
- include the main points of the source text, but not the details such as examples
- use original language, i.e. not closely based on the language of the source text
- only include information in the source text, and not include added information such as evaluation which is not in the source text.

In many contexts summary is the most frequent type of citation. It is an efficient and concise way of presenting ideas and information from other sources.

What is paraphrase?

In order to incorporate the same ideas as the source text, including the main idea and any examples, you can paraphrase part of the text. The focus of a paraphrase is the idea or information, rather than the particular language of the original text. A paraphrase is normally quite short: a phrase, part of a sentence, a whole sentence, or perhaps more than one sentence. It is a similar length to the source text. It is unusual to paraphrase a longer text - write a summary of it instead.

To paraphrase successfully you have to do all the following:

- Incorporate all the ideas and information in the source text.
- Keep the same meaning as the source text.

Use mostly your own language, which may mean a different sentence structure, different phrasing, different general and academic words (using synonyms and rephrasing) but the same technical and conceptual words, e.g. cell, globalization.

- Make sure your paraphrase is not too similar in language to the source text, but is of a similar length.
- Ensure that the paraphrase is accurate in terms of language and content, and is clear.

The best way of paraphrasing a short piece of text is to read it carefully, note down the information it contains, and then write your paraphrase based on your own notes. You can then check your paraphrase against the original using the points above as guidelines. Transforming a short text word by word, phrase by phrase, and sentence by sentence does not make an effective paraphrase. For example, compare paraphrases 1 and 2 of the following extract from *The Globalization of World Politics* (4th edition) by Baylis, Smith, & Owens (2008, p.352):

Original text

Economists claim that globalization's opening up of markets can increase efficiency and reduce pollution, provided that the environmental and social damage associated with the production of a good is properly factored into its market price.

Paraphrase 1

Economists argue that globalization's development of markets may enhance efficiency and lessen pollution, on condition that the environmental and social harm caused by production of a good is correctly reflected in its real cost (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2008, p.352).

Paraphrase 2

Positive effects of globalization identified by economists can include efficiency gains and pollution reduction, although the price of a good should reflect the full costs of producing it, including environmental and social costs. (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2008, p.352).

Both paraphrases 1 and 2 are correctly referenced, of a similar length to the original text, and contain all the points of the original text. Also, they keep the same technical terms such as *globalization*, *good* (i.e. *product*), and *environmental*. However, paraphrase 1 is unsuccessful because it follows the structure of the original text too closely - it is not sufficient to simply change a few words using synonyms and rephrasing. Paraphrase 2 is successful because it expresses the ideas of the original text using an original structure, with appropriate use of synonyms and rephrasing, e.g. changing word forms and phrases: *can increase efficiency and reduce pollution → can include efficiency gains and pollution reduction*. The clauses of the original (verb + object) are converted into noun phrases.

What is quotation?

A quotation from an original source uses the same language, and you can incorporate part of a sentence such as a word / phrase, a whole sentence, or occasionally several lines. The main reason to use quotation rather than paraphrase is that the language (words / phrases) of the original source is particularly clear and significant. Quotations are often used for definitions, such as in the following extract from *The Globalization of World Politics* (4th ed.) by Baylis, Smith, & Owens (2008, p.214):

> Because war is a fluid concept, it has generated a large number of contradictory definitions ... A more useful definition in this sense is Hedley Bull's. It is 'organised violence carried on by political units against each other' (Bull 1977: 184). Bull goes on to insist that violence is not war unless it is both carried out by a political unit, and directed against another political unit.

This extract forms part of a longer paragraph which presents and discusses different definitions of war. It is appropriate to use quotation because the language of the original sources has been carefully written and it is useful to present this original language without changing it, i.e. by using a quotation. Notice that in the last sentence of the above extract, the writers of the textbook (Baylis, Smith, & Owens) add further clarification to the definition by using a paraphrase or summary. On the other hand, if you want to incorporate some information or an idea where it is not particularly important or useful to keep the original language, a summary or paraphrase sounds more natural, for example:

> Recent estimates suggest the number of international tourists exceeds 600 million per year (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2008, p.17).

> Baylis, Smith, & Owens (2008, p.17) state that 'over 600 million tourists are on the move every year'.

While both these types of citation are correct, the first one - a paraphrase - is preferable because the main information is simply a number. There is no particular reason (such as significant choice of language in the source text) to use a quotation as in the second example.

Proofreading and self-editing

What are proofreading and self-editing?

Proofreading involves checking for mistakes in certain language areas, such as the following:
- spelling
- punctuation
- subject-verb agreement in the present simple
- tenses in general
- extra words such as determiners
- missing words such as determiners
- connections between sentences
- prepositions
- word class
- word order in noun phrases
- voice (active / passive)
- register

Self-editing is where you alter the text in one way or another such as changing the order of words, or inserting or expanding information, or redrafting.

Proofreading and self-editing do not just happen at the end of the writing process - they both take place while writing is in progress. The process of writing involves looking backwards at the text you have already written, but also forwards at what you are about to write. To help these two processes operate effectively, it is useful to stop writing periodically in order to review the text.

After you have finished writing a text, it can be difficult to do both the proofreading and self-editing simultaneously, so focus on them separately. Also, each time you self-edit a text, proofread it afterwards because you may have 'edited in' mistakes.

Why are proofreading and self-editing important?

Learning to take responsibility for your written work is an important part of the academic process. The student who hands in work in the hope that their tutor or professor will simply 'sort it out' is both unrealistic and lazy. Having to proofread and self-edit puts you in the position of the people who will ultimately read your writing. In this respect, it compels you to think about the effect on the reader of what you have written and how you have written it. If your work contains grammatical, spelling, or punctuation mistakes, for example, these will inhibit understanding of the main points you want to get across. If the number of such mistakes is high, the reader will become frustrated and may even stop reading altogether.

What strategies can you use for proofreading?

There are a number of things you can do to proofread your written work effectively. Try some of the following techniques and add to or delete from the list as you become more experienced at recognizing what does or doesn't work in your particular case.

1. Compile a list of mistakes you personally make repeatedly and check for these in each text.
2. Make a checklist of common mistakes made by most people to check your text.
3. Categorize both types of mistakes in 1 and 2 to help you recognize them.
4. Check for one type of mistake at a time as you proofread, e.g. spelling. If you find other mistakes at the same time, also correct them but don't lose your focus.
5. Put your text aside for a period of time, at least twenty-four hours if possible, and then proofread it again.
6. If your text has been typed, print it out and then look for mistakes that you commonly make when typing.

Read your text aloud as you may notice mistakes more quickly and clearly.

Practise proofreading using your own texts. When you give a text to your teacher for correction, keep a copy. Once the original has been corrected and returned to you, try correcting the clean copy of the original yourself. Finally compare it with the teacher's corrected version.

Practise correcting mistakes with other students as part of your independent study. First, select a paragraph of approximately 120 words from the internet. Then introduce ten different categories of mistake. Next, print out a copy for a partner to find the mistakes, and finally let them compare their corrections with the original text. Set a time limit for the whole task.

Discuss your mistakes with other students, check if you make the same type of mistakes, and discuss the reasons why.

Make a list of mistakes made because of mother-tongue or first-language interference.

Number and date all texts you hand in for correction to monitor your progress over the course of your academic studies.

What strategies can you use for self-editing?

As with proofreading, there are a variety of strategies you can adopt when self-editing. Try some of the following and, again, add to or delete from the list as you become more experienced and self-aware.

Keep copies of drafts of your writing before you edit the final text. You may need to refer to the previous drafts again.

Edit by hand on a printout and then type in the edits on computer.

Print out your text. Then cut it into sections and reassemble them, making any changes and inserting any additions. Number the changes and additions so you can check you have made all of them. It is also a useful way of seeing a part of a text you are editing in relation to the whole text.

Check the terminology is consistent throughout your text.

Check for irrelevant information.

Check that the connections between the paragraphs and the different stages in the text fit together.

Ensure there is coherence between the text title and the text throughout - as an initial check, read the introduction, the thesis statement, the topic sentences, and finally the conclusion.

Read the text aloud, or record yourself reading it or get someone else to read it to you, to check general comprehension.

Write a brief summary of your text in bullet points and then compare your summary with the text. Redraft and repeat the process.

At the end of the self-editing process, proofread your text again to check you haven't introduced further mistakes.