

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means presenting someone else's words and ideas as your own

Academic writing as it is practiced in the United States is normally concerned with creating a synthetic document: a document that is a synthesis of two or more views. You might relate the views of an author to your own views, for example. Quite often, you may create a synthesis of several views in a paper for a university course or a scholarly journal. Success in academic writing is commonly measured by your ability to combine ideas from several different sources and, in the process, arrive at conclusions that are uniquely your own. Plagiarism indicates a lack of ability to do this properly.

There are at least two excellent reasons to avoid plagiarism

1. Plagiarism indicates that you do not know how to do academic work. A writer who presents someone else's ideas as his or her own is said to be guilty of plagiarism and is considered to be incompetent or dishonest. Faculty found guilty of plagiarism may be removed from their positions. Students found guilty of plagiarism may be expelled.

2. Plagiarism is punishable under law. A second consideration concerns "intellectual property." Anyone, not only academics, can be taken to court for stealing intellectual property.

The difficulty of avoiding plagiarism

Avoiding plagiarism is not simply a matter of being honest. It also calls for a degree of patience and skill.

For example, it is important to keep notes as you review literature so that you will know where different ideas have come from. Even then, if you copy something word-for-word from a source, it can help to put quotation marks around it in your notes. Otherwise, you could easily go back to your notes later on and not remember whether you copied verbatim or paraphrased. Because it is now so easy for faculty and colleagues to find direct copying of text by using Internet search tools, you may be accused of plagiarism even if you believed you were acting properly.

A second example is the simple difficulty of paraphrasing well. It can be challenging to use your own words without changing the original meaning.

Resources

- The fifth edition of the APA Manual discusses plagiarism and paraphrasing on pages 349-350.
- As a Capella learner, you have access to SMARTTHINKING online tutoring.
- The Capella Writing Program offers guidance through the Online Writing Center and at Residential Colloquia in the Mobile Writing Center.