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All my own work: exploring academic integrity



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Introduction and overview

Introduction and overview

Welcome to the course *All my own work: exploring academic integrity*. As you might anticipate from the title, the aim of this short course is to help you explore the issues around producing your own work for academic purposes.

This course goes beyond the 'nuts and bolts' of referencing styles to enable you to understand what is meant by 'good academic conduct' and to explore why it is so important. Along the way, you will consider how you can avoid common pitfalls and difficulties.

This free course will take you around 6 hours to complete; you are able to work through at your own pace, pausing and restarting to suit your own timetable. As you progress through the material, you'll see that there are a number of straightforward activities to help you explore important ideas and concepts in more depth.

All my own work: exploring academic integrity is divided into three main sessions. In the list below, you'll see the suggested amount of time needed for each.

- Session 1: Exploring the concepts of ethics, trust and academic community, i.e. the 'why' behind the importance of producing your own work.

  You will cover the following topics:
  - What is plagiarism?
  - Demonstrating your academic abilities
  - The consequences of plagiarism: detecting plagiarism
  - The consequences of plagiarism: what happens next
  - Myth-busting

  This first session will take around 90 minutes to complete.
- Session 2: Exploring the 'when and when not' aspects of referencing

  In this session you'll cover the following topics:
  - Common knowledge
  - Quoting, citing and referencing
  - Challenges and temptations

  This middle session will take around 120 minutes to complete and will include working your way through an interactive.
- Session 3: Exploring the 'how' of producing your own work

  In this session you'll cover:
  - Paraphrasing
  - Using direct quotes
  - Learning together
  - How to avoid collusion
  - Study skills and time management
  - Asking for help

This final session will take around 120 minutes to complete.

At the end of the final session there will then be a quiz to check your understanding. By passing this quiz, which should take you around 30 minutes to complete, you will also have the opportunity to earn a digital badge as evidence of your learning. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand what is meant by plagiarism
- understand why it is important to produce one's own work
- recognise what is meant by 'in-text citation' and 'full reference'
- understand the difference between 'collaboration' and 'collusion'
- show knowledge of techniques to avoid plagiarism.

Moving around the course

In the ‘Summary’ at the end of each session, you will find a link to the next session. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on ‘Full course description’. From here you can navigate to any part of the course.

It’s also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page, to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you’ve come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

What is a badged course?

While studying *All my own work: exploring academic integrity* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are available on The Open University's OpenLearn website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor, but you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course.

How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read all sessions of the course
- score 50% or more in the end-of-course badge quiz in Session 3.

In the end-of-course quiz, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quiz, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can reattempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the OpenLearn FAQs. When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

You can now go to Session 1.

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Session 1: Ethics, trust and academic community: why?

Introduction

In this first session, you will explore the ideas around ethics, trust and academic community, i.e. the 'why' behind the importance of producing your own work.

The session has been divided into five sections which will cover:

1. **What is plagiarism?** – an introduction to plagiarism and examples of it from everyday life
2. **Demonstrating your academic abilities** – a focus on plagiarism in an educational setting and the importance of being a member of an academic community
3. **The consequences of plagiarism: detecting plagiarism** – a look at how educational institutions detect plagiarism
4. **The consequences of plagiarism: what happens next** – a look at what to do if your work is flagged for plagiarism concerns
5. **Myth-busting** – uncover some of the common myths about plagiarism.

This section will take around 90 minutes to complete.

1 What is plagiarism?

To begin, you will consider what you understand by the term ‘plagiarism’.



Activity 1

Allow approximately 5 minutes.

What do you think is meant by the term ‘plagiarism’? Spend a few minutes jotting down your thoughts.

Answer

You have probably been taught about plagiarism before or have a basic understanding of what it is: namely the use of other people’s material in your work without appropriate attribution. You have probably also been told that you shouldn’t do it, and that to do so is likely to result in some penalties. You may not have previously explored how it can arise, or what you can do to avoid it.

As explained in the Introduction and overview, this course will help you to consider why plagiarism is considered so seriously. To start this, you will take a step back and consider plagiarism in the context of everyday life and non-academic settings.

1.1 Plagiarism in everyday life

You may be aware that people sometimes copy material (such as images or even music) from a variety of sources (such as the internet) without thinking and most of the time there are few consequences to them personally. The owners of such materials often are not aware of who is copying material and do not usually investigate people or sue them for unauthorised use of their copyright. For example, have you ever shared or reposted a joke or meme online? Did you consider the original authorship of the material?

However, in some areas such as business, the art and music industries and publishing, the copyright holders are occasionally involved in suing parties for appropriating content or ideas that have been ‘lifted’.

Can you think of any cases of copyright holders suing parties that you have heard about in the media?

Answer

There have been lots of instances reported in mainstream media. One example is the legal battle between Led Zeppelin and the estate of the former guitarist Randy Wolfe from the band Spirit (Bro, 2018). They sued the 1970 rock band Led Zeppelin over the intro riff of the song *Stairway to heaven*, which the Randy Wolfe estate alleged was lifted from their instrumental track *Taurus*.



However, in some cases, such as the evolution of modern electronic dance music, the liberal use of samples (vocal clips, drum loops, instrumental runs and riffs) was commonplace and in the early days these would have been used without any clearance of copyright or attribution to the sources for the samples. Take for example, the commonly found drum beats, the so-called 'Amen Break' (2021), which is found so ubiquitously in modern music thanks to DJ sampling – many popular music tracks would be unthinkable without it.

Examples of copying material in politics are also well-known: at the beginning of the British involvement in the war in Iraq, a weapons dossier was published that was found to be heavily plagiarised from a US PhD student. Thus what should have been a high-level intelligence analysis turned out to be a 'cut and paste job' designed to influence MPs to vote for military action in Iraq (White, MacAskill and Norton-Taylor, 2003).

There may be different standards and expectations around copying material depending on what you are doing, what material you are using, how you are using the material, what conditions exist around the use of the material, as well as the intentions behind the use of the material. For example, while using an image you found on Google images in a homemade birthday card is unlikely to cause you any problems, using the same image in an advert you designed for your small business could lead to litigation and a request to remove the image from your advert. In copyright cases like the Led Zeppelin vs Spirit case, there may be huge financial as well as moral reasons for protecting and claiming work, especially if one party feels the other party has become successful on the back of an idea that was lifted without permission. The example of the Iraq weapons dossier drives home the message that plagiarised material can have profound consequences on society, people's lives and the direction of history.

The point of this discussion on non-academic plagiarism is that using other people's content may on occasion be permissible, but passing content and ideas off as your own is a moral and often legal infringement that carries the risk of litigation or some form of reputational damage to yourself or an organisation.

Now that you've explored plagiarism in a societal context, you'll consider it from the perspective of higher education.

2 Demonstrating your academic abilities

In the previous section you read about some examples of plagiarism from everyday life. This session will focus on plagiarism in an academic environment. In academia, you are expected to produce work that demonstrates your own academic ability.

Activity 2

Allow approximately 5 minutes.

Spend a few minutes thinking about why it is important to ensure that the work you produce demonstrates a true reflection of your academic abilities.

Answer

You may have thought of several reasons.

One argument is that by ensuring the work you produce reflects your true understanding, you can get a realistic idea of how your studies are progressing. If you submit your own work, your tutor is able to give you personalised, accurate feedback and help with your specific learning needs and abilities. This will help you to assess your progression through the study material and identify particular strengths as well as any weaknesses. You will be able to make your study more effective and efficient, as you will be able to focus your attention on areas that need more improvement to ensure you progress. If the work that you submit for assessment is not your own, any feedback given will hold little relevance to your own academic development.

You may have also considered that by submitting work in your own words, your tutor is able to grade your work in an appropriate and fair manner. In fairness to all students, it is essential that the work you present for grading really is a true reflection of your abilities and does not consist of work produced by other people. Any qualification classification system must be able to measure and recognise each student's abilities, in a fair and consistent manner.

Producing study notes and assignments in your own words can sometimes be challenging and time consuming. Part of the reason it can be challenging is because it forces you to really think about what the original author is trying to say. In order to construct your own arguments, where you explain, analyse, critique or develop other people's ideas or concepts, you need to understand the original idea.

So, producing your own work helps you to develop, as well as demonstrate, your own understanding. In other words, it helps you to learn.

A quick word about the use of direct quotes

Direct quotes are where you repeat the original author's exact words (with appropriate acknowledgment).

You will explore the use of direct quotes in more detail later in the course. For now, however, you should be aware that using a direct quotation is quite passive. If direct quotes are used to *replace* rather than *support* your own arguments, you are unlikely to be developing or demonstrating your own understanding.

In other words, overuse of direct quotes is unlikely to help you learn.

2.1 Personal and professional audit trails

You might recall once upon a time playing the ‘supermarket game’. The first player starts off with ‘I went to the supermarket and bought…’. The next player continues with ‘I went to the supermarket and bought…’, only this time, the player must include what the first player bought before adding what they themselves bought. Whilst testing one’s memory and ability to quickly think of alphabetical supermarket items, this is a fantastically simple game that illustrates the notion of ‘giving credit’ to the ‘buyers’ of each food item. In ‘packing your trolley’ as it were, you must account for each player’s item.



Similarly, when you write for academic purposes, you are not only permitted but often encouraged to draw upon the works of others. For example, you may have come across the quote attributed to Isaac Newton in 1675, ‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’ (quoted in Billings, 2018). Every scientist builds on the work and understandings developed by other scientists. However, you must remember to acknowledge whose words, or whose items, you are ‘packing’ into your arguments.

Compiling an audit trail applies across all disciplines. For example, for any prospective lawyers, the idea of ‘practical legal research’ will be a skill fundamental to study and practice. Quite often, to develop that skill, law students will face a task whereby they have to construct the answer, moving from source to source to ensure any updates are covered. This ‘trail’ requires such findings to be logged so that, at any given time, if prompted or challenged on what an authority for such a statement is, it can be shown accordingly. Developing this audit trail is imperative.

Hopefully, these two simple examples illustrate the idea that an audit trail approach helps clearly illustrate where your material has been obtained from. This helps illustrate your wider reading as well as allow you to return to those sources for further information. It helps your reader look to your sources.

The term ‘plagiarism’ can be scary to hear, but one of the aims of this course is to break the stigma associated with it. Avoiding plagiarism is not only easy, but also an important skill. It is perfectly appropriate to use information from other sources when you are constructing your arguments. However, it is important to not only express the points in your own words, but to also provide the audit trail (i.e. provide references) so that the reader always knows *who* is saying *what*, and *when* and *where* they said it. Make it clear to your reader when you are using your academic voice and when you are using the words from others.

Figure 1 illustrates an academic audit trail, demonstrated by a full reference.

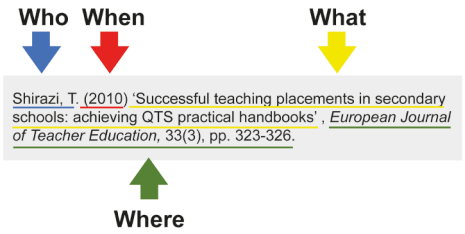


Figure 1 A full reference providing an academic audit trail

In this session, try not to get 'bogged down' by worrying about which part of your reference (if any) needs to be in bold or italics. Instead, focus on the key elements needed to help your reader find the original source. Your tutor will be able to guide you on the specific style requirements of your course.

2.2 Honest qualifications

Individuals choose to study towards qualifications for a wide range of reasons. You might be studying to follow a passion, to start a new career, or to help to progress in an existing one. You might be studying out of choice or be obliged to study for work-related reasons. Indeed, your reasons might be a combination of these, or something not listed here.

> Take a moment to reflect on your reasons for studying.
>
> **Discussion**
>
> Reflecting on your reasons for studying is a useful activity. Without doubt, studying can be hard work. Studying may involve financial commitment, alongside setting aside appropriate time. Thinking about your longer-term goals can aid motivation.

Regardless of your reasons for studying, gaining a qualification demonstrates that you have achieved a particular level of study.

- It shows that you have gained subject-specific knowledge. Your study pathway may have involved developing numerical or computer-coding skills, or the ability to analyse musical compositions. You have begun to gain expertise in a particular area.
- Studying towards your qualification will have developed transferable skills, such as the ability to write in a particular style, prepare reports, essays or case studies; or to give presentations to a variety of audiences.
- A core part of your study towards your qualification will have involved the ability to source and critique material from your academic discipline, and to demonstrate the ability to appropriately acknowledge these sources. Your study demonstrates your credibility.
- You will also have demonstrated the ability to successfully manage your time and perform to a certain standard.



It follows that individuals who plagiarise – i.e. who use the work of another person without appropriate credit – are devaluing their qualification. Anyone who draws heavily on the work of others, without demonstrating their own academic input, has not met the expectations for that level of study. Any qualification gained in such a way will not represent their real knowledge, competencies and skill set.

Take a moment to consider the following scenarios, which may help you to put the impact of plagiarism into context.

Imagine driving over a bridge designed by someone who used plagiarised material in their assignments, which assessed their understanding of loads, forces and appropriate building materials.

Imagine being given an injection by someone who had paid someone else to do their assignments on calculating dosage.

Imagine a particular recommendation for a change in policy, which had been written by someone who had plagiarised their reports and essays on aspects of social, demographic and economic reforms.

Answer

Plagiarism has implications beyond the assessment itself.

2.3 Being a member of an academic community

When you register on a course to begin studying, you are becoming a member of a diverse academic community.

All members of that community, whether new students or experienced academics, work to maintain standards of intellectual honesty and transparency.



If someone uses another persons' work without appropriate attribution – i.e. if they plagiarise – it demonstrates a lack of respect to the originators of that work.

Take a moment to consider how you might feel if you worked hard on a piece of work and then discovered that someone else had claimed credit for your carefully thought through arguments or calculations.

How might you feel about other students on your programme of study, who seemed to be doing better than you and were gaining higher marks, but who copied their answers from online sources or were submitting work that someone else had done for them?

How might you feel about the qualifications obtained from an institution which did not value academic integrity?

Answer

Your responses to these questions are likely to help to illustrate why institutions place such high value on you producing assignments that are all your own work.

Plagiarism indicates a lack of academic integrity which has impacts beyond the individual person or a particular assessment. It may result in loss of credibility and trust – at an individual, institutional and wider societal level.

3 The consequences of plagiarism: detecting plagiarism

For all the reasons considered so far in this course, educational institutions take plagiarism very seriously, and may use a variety of different mechanisms to identify potential occurrences of plagiarism.



Activity 3

Allow approximately 10 minutes.

(a) Plagiarism can be detected via automated means. Write down how you think plagiarism can be detected in this manner.

Answer

Automated mechanisms to detect plagiarism include the use of powerful text-matching software tools. There are several different tools available, such as Turnitin. These tools work by comparing the work submitted by students against pre-existing material, such as material in books and journal articles, as well as current and archived content from websites. Such software typically produces an 'originality' or 'matching' score, often expressed as a percentage.

This matching score is often misunderstood, and there are no clear-cut rules as to what an 'acceptable' score is. A high match does not necessarily indicate that the work lacks originality; it may reflect that someone has included quotes and referenced appropriately, or perhaps they repeated the assignment question before they provided their answer. A low match may not mean the material is free from plagiarism.

Figure 2 illustrates how some plagiarism-checking software reports on submitted work. The black text on a grey background represents the students submitted work. The text highlighted in colour represents text that 'matches' with other sources. A summary of the locations for those highlighted sections is also provided.

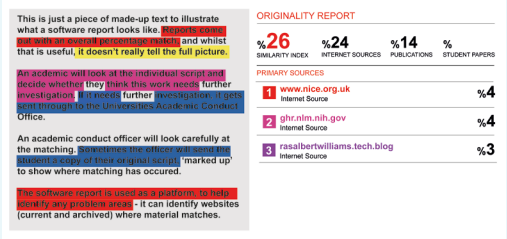


Figure 2 An example of a report generated from plagiarism-checking software

(b) Plagiarism can also be detected via manual means. Write down how you think plagiarism can be detected by manual methods.

Answer

Outputs produced by automated software are usually manually reviewed by subject specialists who apply their academic judgement to interpret the software reports.

In addition, plagiarism may also be identified ‘by eye’.

Those who are teaching modules and marking assignments are familiar with academic and professional literature and often recognise a ‘choice phrase’, or particular argument or writing style.

They are also often familiar with an individual student’s academic ‘voice’ and will notice unusual changes.

Instances of plagiarism are sometimes reported to institutions by other students. For example, where a self-help group has over-stepped boundaries and members of the group feel uncomfortable with sharing of information.

4 The consequences of plagiarism: what happens next?

If your work is flagged due to plagiarism concerns, you may feel worried or upset. As difficult as it may seem, try to stay calm.

The expression ‘bury your head in the sand’ means to try to ignore a problem, in the hope that it will eventually go away. This approach to avoiding trouble has become associated with ostriches. However, ostriches, as you may be aware, do not really do this – and nor should you.



Instead, actively engage with the tutor or other representative from your institution, who has raised the matter with you.

Make sure you read all the communications you receive about the matter, follow the instructions provided and be open and honest.

Procedures are likely to vary from institution to institution, but in general terms, a formal investigation is likely to be opened, where you would be asked to explain the potential plagiarism to members of a specialist team. It is important to recognise that the consequences of plagiarism can be significant, and may depend on the circumstances, level of study and institution. Following the investigation, if plagiarism has been considered to have taken place, the outcome could range from a reduction in marks on an individual assignment, failing a module, through to expulsion from an academic institution.

Furthermore, a damaged academic record may have wide-reaching consequences in terms of future study or entry into certain professions. Students on professional programmes of study, such as social work or medicine, apprentices and those in work-based learning may have additional consequences depending on the requirements and regulations of their employer and/or professional body. Further investigations may be triggered – such as those relating to Fitness to Practice. Fitness to Practice investigations involve a multi-stage process, in addition to the Academic Conduct process, which could lead to a student being removed from a programme of study.

Whilst it is important to be aware of the consequences outlined above – please don’t panic.

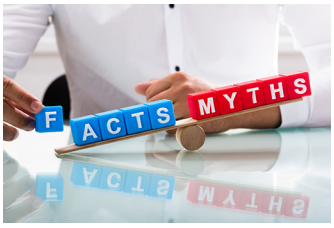


By developing the study skills needed to be able to produce work written in your own words and by gaining confidence in your own academic voice, you can avoid the consequences outlined above.

As you continue to work through this course, you should feel strengthened in your understanding of good practice, so that you do not experience the above consequences yourself.

5 Myth busting

To conclude this first session, have a go at Activity 4 which uncovers some of the common myths around plagiarism, referencing, collaboration and collusion.



Activity 4

Allow approximately 10 minutes.

Your task is to try to identify whether a statement is true, false or not always.

There is an acceptable threshold I can plagiarise before it is an issue.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

False: No plagiarism is ‘acceptable’. If you are able to identify material in your work that has been derived from another source it should be referenced and written in your own words. Do not assume that ‘not a lot of plagiarism’ is not an issue, nor that it is an acceptable defence.

If someone copies my work, it is they who has plagiarised.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

Not always: Firstly, if someone copies your work but cites and references to illustrate that is what they have done, they have not plagiarised. Secondly, it may actually be you that has plagiarised by ‘making available’ your work such that it encouraged or enabled plagiarism. For example, sharing your assignments (unmarked or marked) with other students or posting your answers online, may be considered to ‘enable plagiarism’ and might be covered by your institutions Plagiarism Policy.

Avoiding plagiarism is a writing skill that I can develop.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

True: Plagiarism is not always wilful cheating. Most often, it is a lack of good academic writing practice where material you have used has not been referenced correctly. This is something you can learn.

I only used materials or textbooks that were provided to me, so I did not need to reference.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

False: If it is not your own words then it must be referenced. Regardless as to whether you are using course materials, online materials or any other source, if you have taken material from somewhere else, it is the work of somebody else and must therefore be attributed accordingly. Think back to the idea of an 'audit trail'. Even if you have written something in your own words, it may be appropriate to include a reference to acknowledge the source of the original ideas.

My university may still take action even if my tutor has not found any plagiarism in my work.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

True: Although tutors have an appropriate expert knowledge and are familiar with a wide variety of specialist academic texts, they are not expected to be able to detect all instances of plagiarism in assignments. The process of checking assignments for plagiarism and the process of marking are often separate processes. This means that your university may still take action even if your tutor has not identified instances where plagiarism has occurred.

It was unintentional so does not count.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

False: Plagiarism requires no intent. Whether you intended to plagiarise or not, or indeed whether you realised or understood plagiarism to have occurred, does not render the plagiarism having actually occurred any different. Plagiarism is plagiarism, whether or not you intended it.

Difficult personal circumstances are not a defence to plagiarism.

- ○ True

- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

True: Institutions cannot take account of personal mitigation, such as recent poor health, computer issues or rushing to get the assignment in, when considering whether plagiarism has or has not occurred. It either has or has not, regardless of any other factors. These factors may, however, allow a more practical study plan to be put into place to help avoid any later issues. Many institutions have appropriate mechanisms in place to support students experiencing difficult circumstances.

Collaboration is encouraged.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

True: Collaborative learning is encouraged. Good collaborative practice involves individuals working together to help each other understand or discuss a topic or task in a general way. On the other hand, collusion is not acceptable. Collusion can occur when working too closely with others to discuss and/or draft answers. It can also happen by sharing notes, ideas or other study materials with each other.

Plagiarism is when you try to cheat.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Not always

Answer

Not always: Plagiarism is simply the absence of a formal acknowledgement that you are using the thoughts and ideas of someone else. ‘Formal acknowledgement’ is in the form of an appropriate reference (in-text and at the end of your work). If you are using direct quotes, you need to specify exactly which words are those of the other author(s). A direct quote should have a clearly defined beginning and end. You do not have to intend to plagiarise or intend to seek an unfair advantage. You will still have plagiarised if you have not illustrated to the reader that certain parts of your work have come from another source.

6 Summary of Session 1

In this session you explored ethics, trust and academic community, i.e. the ‘why’ behind the importance of producing your own work. You will build on this foundation in the next session, where you will explore when to reference and when it is not required.

You can now go to Session 2.

Acknowledgements

This free course was written by Karen New, with academic input from Ian Johnson, Dean Fletcher and Volker Patent. Acknowledgement is also given to the related OpenLearn course *Developing Good Academic Practice*. *All my own work: exploring academic integrity* was first published in September 2021.

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Session 2: When and when not to reference

Introduction

In this session you will explore the ‘when and when not’ aspects of referencing by considering the following:

1. **Common knowledge** - what is common knowledge and what should be referenced?
2. **Quoting, citing and referencing**
3. **Challenges and temptations** – a look at how to overcome challenges and temptations while studying by working through an interactive film to help a university student reach her deadline and avoid plagiarising.

This middle section will take around 120 minutes to complete.

1 What is common knowledge?

It is often stated that common knowledge does not need to be referenced. However, this raises the question over what is regarded as common knowledge.

A definition of common knowledge is surprisingly tricky – a broad definition would be 'information widely known'. However, this in turn brings into question what is meant by 'widely known' and 'by whom'.

When writing, it is important to keep your audience in mind:

- Common knowledge can be subject-specific: concepts and information that are widely known to an environmental scientist, for example, may not be widely known to an art historian, and vice versa.
- Common knowledge may also have a cultural element: beliefs, viewpoints and rules may not be the same across different cultural groups.
- Common knowledge also depends on the level of study: what might your audience already know? For example, if you are new to a subject area, you will have less knowledge and understanding about the topic than if you are an expert. The more experience you develop, the more your subject-specific language will develop – but, at the same time, you will also use more specific evidence from other people's work to support your own work and ideas.

Figure 1 outlines how you might identify common knowledge.

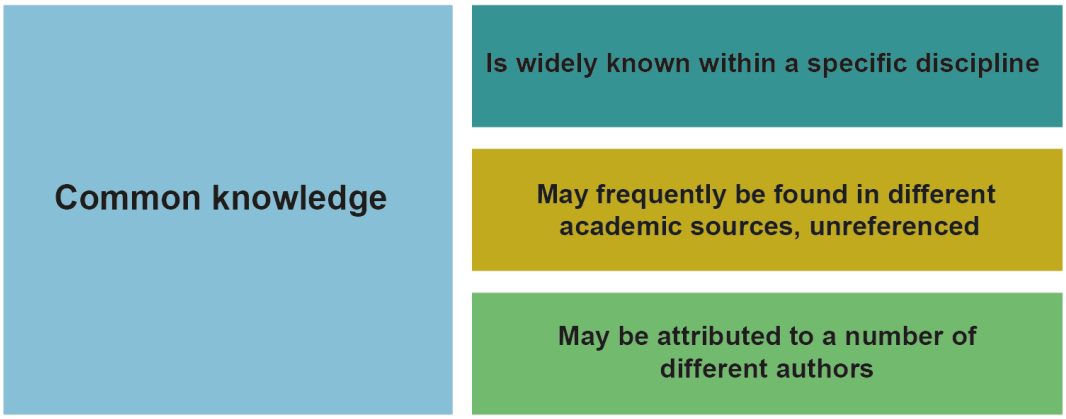


Figure 1 Factors associated with 'common knowledge'

1.1 Referencing common knowledge

Now that you have an understanding of what common knowledge is, consider the following statement.

> 'Common knowledge doesn't need to be referenced.'
> Do you think this statement is accurate?

Answer

While the statement is generally accurate as there is no need to provide a reference for a piece of factual information that is deemed to be common knowledge, as you saw in the previous section, it is not a simple distinction to make. Deciding whether something is 'common knowledge' is a matter of academic judgement.

If you are in doubt whether something is common knowledge, the best approach is to assume the point is *not* common knowledge, and therefore you should supply a reference. In general terms, it is better to supply a reference (and for it to not be needed) than to not include one, and discover it was necessary. It is also a good idea to discuss your concerns with your tutor, who can give you advice specific to your subject and level of study.

The following list provides some examples of common knowledge:

- that the Earth revolves around the Sun
- the name of current Prime Minister of the UK
- that football is a popular team sport played around the world
- that Twitter is an example of a social media platform.

You can consider these as common knowledge because:

- most people know these things;
- they are easy to verify by referring to a number of different, easily accessible sources (e.g. a dictionary, encyclopaedia, basic internet search engine query, asking friends, etc.).

Anything that has to be looked up in a specialist reference book or is attributable to a specific author would not count as common knowledge.

Activity 1

Allow approximately 5 minutes.

Are the following general examples common knowledge?

1. The capital of France is Paris.

Answer

Even if you didn't know the capital of France, you would probably have no difficulty in finding this information. This can, therefore, be regarded as common knowledge.

2. A red traffic light means a car driver must stop at or behind the white line (or where otherwise indicated).



Answer

This is common knowledge in the UK (and many other countries too). It is also in the Highway Code, in the section on ‘Signs and Signals’. So you would reference it if you wanted to prove to somebody that this was in the Highway Code; otherwise, you would not.

3. The population of England and Wales in 1700 was about 5.5 million.

Answer

Think about how difficult it would be to find this information. Even though this figure might not be contested, it is not the kind of thing that people commonly know and it would be tricky to look up. It is, therefore, not common knowledge and would need a reference.

4. Consider the following statement:

‘Obesity is a medical term describing a condition in which a persons body mass index (BMI) exceeds the recommended level for someone of the height and weight.’

Is this common knowledge?

Provide your answer...

Answer

There is currently a lot of concern about obesity in the UK. You may have seen similar statements in a variety of easily accessible sources, including mainstream media and online sources. As it stands, this statement might be considered common knowledge.

However, it is easy to move beyond common knowledge. For example, questions have been raised about the relevance of the BMI as a measure of obesity as it does not distinguish between fat and muscle; so, for example, many athletes have a high BMI. Questions have also been raised about whether using the term ‘obesity’ stigmatises people who are overweight. Is obesity really a disease? Or is it one of a number of risk factors that may make people more susceptible to conditions such as diabetes or coronary heart disease? Are we focusing too much on reducing weight in individuals and making them feel to blame, rather than tackling environmental causes of obesity, such as over-reliance on motorised transport, manufacture of highly processed foods and lack of safe places to play? As you can see, once you

start to explore interpretations or arguments, you need to use references to acknowledge the writers and researchers who generated these ideas.

2 Quoting, citing and referencing

At the start of this course, it was outlined that the detailed ‘nuts and bolts’ of referencing styles were not going to be covered. Part of the reason for this is because every educational institution – and every discipline within that institution – is likely have its own preferred format and style.

Instead, this course focuses on the importance of ‘all my own work’ – the ‘why’. Nonetheless, it is important to add a few words on this important aspect. We have hinted at quoting, citing and referencing elsewhere in the course, now have a go at Activity 2.

Activity 2

Allow approximately 10 minutes.

What do you understand by the term ‘quoting’?

Answer

Quoting is where you incorporate the exact words of the original author into your arguments. In some disciplines, use of direct quotes is encouraged, for example in history. In other disciplines, direct quotes are very rarely used. The key thing to remember with direct quotes is to make it obvious to your reader, which are your own words, and which are those of the original author. Typically, this is identified through the use of quotation marks around the original authors words, in such a way that you clearly identify the beginning and the end of the quoted material. The quote should be followed by an in-text reference (sometimes called an in-text citation). If you are using a quotation of more than one sentence, it is often written as a separate paragraph, intended to show the text as a quotation. When in doubt, check with your tutor.

Note that a quote should be used to support your arguments; you might include the authors original words to draw emphasis to a point which aligns to your arguments, or one that you wish to critique. A quote is not a ‘space filler’ nor is it a substitute for your own thoughts.

What do you understand by the term ‘referencing’?

Answer

Referencing is the process by which you acknowledge other people’s work. Your references need to be sufficiently detailed, such that your reader could locate the precise sources you have used. One widely used and highly regarded referencing guide is ‘Cite Them Right’ (no date). This comprehensive online guide contains lots of examples of how to reference (cite) material. Your educational institution is likely to have a detailed guide to support your understanding of format/style required. When in doubt, check with your tutor.

Using the ‘Cite Them Right’ referencing approach, there are two steps involved in referencing material. The first step is the ‘in-text reference/citation’ which, as the name suggests, appears within the body of your text. This is the point in your work where you first acknowledge that you are referring to someone else’s original thoughts. If you are drawing on the work of the original author to construct your own arguments, there are typically three ways you might include an in-text reference:

- Recent work by Shirazi (2010) supports this argument…
- Recent work (Shirazi, 2010) supports this argument…
- This argument is supported by recent work (Shirazi, 2010).

If you were using a direct quote from the original author, this in-text reference might look as follows:

> "Managing student behaviour is one of the most important issues that can cause concern and anxiety to a student teacher" (Shirazi, 2020, p. 324).

The second step in the process is to include a 'full reference' to the source at the end of your work. This full reference needs to be sufficiently detailed so your reader can identify the 'who, when, what and where' aspects of the source. Think back to the need for an academic audit trail from Session 1.

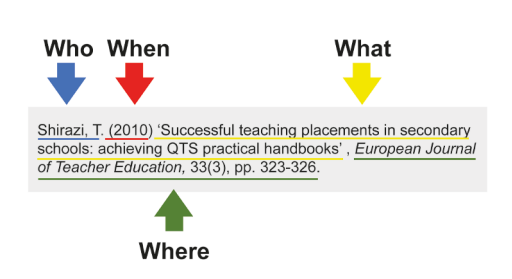


Figure 2 A full reference providing an academic audit trail

The full referencing list at the end of your work should include all the sources you have used. Every in-text citation should have a corresponding reference in full, in your list at the end. Academics are curious by nature – they have a keen interest in their specialism and enjoy 'reading around a subject'. Your reader should be able to use your in-text citation to identify the full reference in your list. From your full reference, your reader should be able to go back to your original source to find out more.

As mentioned previously, the focus of this course is not on the specific format of your references (i.e. which parts should be in bold, or italics) instead, you should focus on the different elements that make up a reference. Ask your tutor for guidance on the precise format needed for references on your course.

As an aside, in academic disciplinary cases, students often say that they have accidentally plagiarised because they 'have trouble understanding referencing'. Actually, one of the main reasons individuals are found to have plagiarised is not that the individual has not referenced correctly, rather it is that they have not written material in their own words (i.e. they have too closely paraphrased or used quotations inappropriately).

3 Challenges and temptations

Your study journey may not always run as smoothly as you hope. You may find a range of potential stumbling blocks along the way. At different points in your academic life you may find yourself facing a wide variety of challenges, ranging from illness, technical/computing problems, juggling work or caring responsibilities, alongside understanding tricky aspects of your subject and preparing assignments. There may even be occasions when you become aware of, or even tempted by, a short-cut.



Activity 3

Allow approximately 60 minutes.

You will now meet Grace, a university student who is preparing for an assignment.

Work your way through this interactive to follow Grace's experience and see what you would do in a similar situation. You should open the interactive in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link.

Can you list some of the temptations Grace faced?

What will you do if you face challenges as you prepare your assignment?

Answer

Some of the temptations Grace faced include:

- discussing how to tackle specific aspects of an assignment with a fellow student
- members of a social media support group sharing assignment answers
- cutting and pasting a 'perfect quote'
- sharing an assignment to help a friend
- using the services of an 'essay mill'.

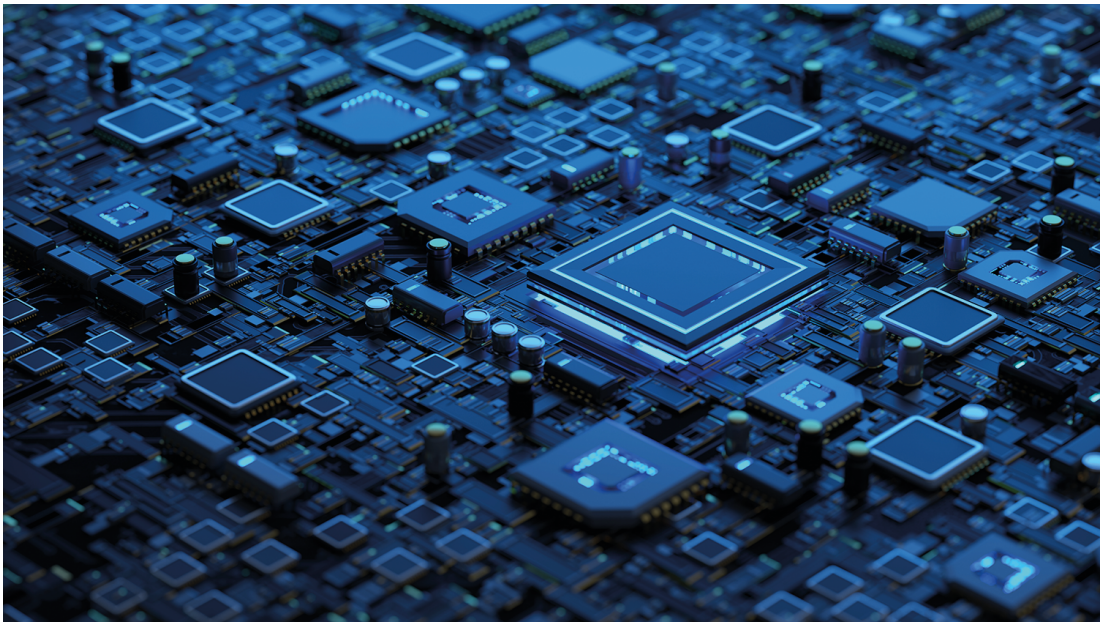
If you face challenges as you prepare an assignment you should ask for help from your tutor. At the end of this course, you'll learn about several different support services.

3.1 Generative artificial intelligence

In the previous section, you explored some of the temptations Grace faced when preparing her assignment. There are other s , of course, and in this section you will consider one more closely: generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

A full exploration of what GenAI is and how it works is beyond the scope of this short course. For our purposes here, GenAI is a type of artificial intelligence software which can generate content – including text or images – typically in response to the user's prompts. Over time, GenAI may bring significant benefits to society; but there is also the potential for negative and damaging results , such as generating fake news and biased or partial outputs.

A further temptation that Grace might face , then, is the potential for using GenAI to tackle her assignments.



Before exploring the potential of GenAI in *your* studies, you should check your institution's policies to see whether you are permitted to use GenAI to support your learning. If its use is permitted, check that you fully understand how you are permitted to use it, and how you need to reference your use of GenAI in any work submitted for assessment.

In most institutions, failure to declare using GenAI to produce assessed work would be considered academic misconduct. After all, if someone used GenAI to produce an assessment without declaring its use, they would be deceiving the reader, who would be expecting the work to have been created by the person submitting it. As you will have realised as you have worked through this course, it is important to always be clear 'what is your own work and what is not'.

Whether your institution permits GenAI or not, it is useful to consider some of the potential concerns with using it to generate academic text :

- Data and information contained within generative AI tools is gathered from a wide range of sources, including ones that are poorly referenced, out of date, or irrelevant. GenAI ' hallucinates ' (i.e. it makes errors). If you are permitted to use GenAI, it is your responsibility to ensure you are sufficiently skilled in your subject that you recognise when GenAI gets it wrong.
- GenAI produces seemingly original output by learning patterns in its database or from the internet, which predict a sequence of words (in the case of text). It **appears to understand the sources it uses and the generated results, but in reality, it does not *understand* it** and the concept of 'intelligence' is misleading.
- Gen AI tools produce answers based on information generated by humans. You do not know what sources it has used, and these may contain societal biases and stereotypes that, in turn, may be replicated in the generative AI tool's response.
- Learning to write in an academic style takes time; like any skill, your academic writing will not develop without practice. Overuse of GenAI may reduce your opportunities to practice your writing skills, which you will need throughout your studies, in your workplace and in society in general, where the skills of conducting ethical and accuracy checks on any information you produce or handle will be required.

Interestingly, AI developers around the world have not ignored the need to support the responsible use of GenAI. Techniques such as watermarking AI-generated text are used and continuously improved to keep pace with this rapidly moving field.

3.2 Falsification

Whereas some instances of academic misconduct could potentially occur without intent, falsification is a type of academic misconduct where someone uses information that they know to be wrong (or believe to be wrong), but present it as being true . In other words, there is a deliberate attempt to deceive. In the case of GenAI, it is not a valid defence that you did not check the information produced by GenAI ; not checking its output and then submitting it in an assignment can be regarded as falsification where there is inaccuracy or fabrication of data or information as a result of your not having scrutinised it.

However, it is important to remember that falsification is not limited to GenAI use. An individual might be tempted to undertake other actions which fall under this heading. Consider the following:

- Which of the following acts are considered examples of falsification?
  - referencing a work which does not exist
  - attributing ideas to an individual, piece of work, or other source which does not contain those ideas
  - citing material you have not read
  - manipulating images (e.g. photographs, electron microscopy images)
  - adding or removing data points
  - claiming to have conducted experiments/carried out research which you have not carried out
  - inventing research, evidence, experimental results or other false content
- All of the above are considered as falsification:
  - The first three options (referencing a work which does not exist; attributing ideas to an individual, piece of work, or other source which does not contain those ideas; citing material you have not read) all relate to the falsification of citations
  - Manipulating images and adding or removing data points are examples of falsifying data
  - Claiming to have conducted experiments or carried out research which you have not carried out is a clear example of falsification
  - Inventing research, evidence, experimental results or other false content is falsification (and is sometimes also known as fabrication)

The purpose of academic research is to contribute to and extend the current body of knowledge on a subject, and as such integrity in research is vital. Falsification (and fabrication) removes trust in academia, which has significant negative impacts, not only on the individual, but on the academic community and on society as a whole.



As a thought experiment, imagine a loved one requiring a new drug treatment; you would want to know that the data from safety trials was reliable . Falsified clinical research might be ineffective at best, and could be harmful or even deadly . As you might therefore expect, penalties for falsification in academia can be severe.

By practicing honesty and integrity throughout your learning journey, you will develop important academic and social skills which will benefit your professional and personal life.

4 Summary of Session 2

In this session you explored when you need to reference and looked at examples where references are not necessary. You also followed Grace on her journey as she prepared an assignment. In the next session, you will consider ‘how’ you can produce your own work.

You can now go to Session 3.

Acknowledgements

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Session 3: Exploring the ‘how’ of producing your own work

Introduction

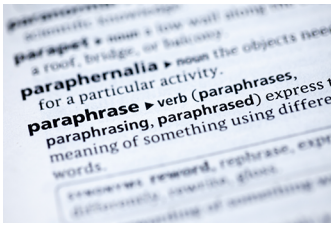
In this session you will look in more detail at some of the study skills that will help you to produce work written in your own words. This session will be broken down into six sections covering:

1. Paraphrasing
2. Using direct quotes
3. Learning together
4. How to avoid collusion
5. Study skills and time management
6. Asking for help

The final session of this course will take around 120 minutes to complete. The end-of-course quiz will then take around 30 minutes.

1 What is paraphrasing?

Put simply, paraphrasing is where you express the meaning of someone else’s work, using your own words. It is also likely that you will make changes in the order or structure of the original arguments. When you paraphrase, you are presenting the information in a way that demonstrates your own synthesis of the material, without changing the meaning of the original piece.



Does paraphrased material need to be referenced?

Answer

Yes. Thinking back to the section in Session 1 on audit trails, once you have paraphrased material, you will still need to remember to include a reference to the original source. Although you have changed the wording, the basic concept and idea is that of the original author, who should be given appropriate recognition.

What paraphrasing is not

Paraphrasing is not about using a thesaurus or specialist dictionary to replace every fifth word with a synonym. Simply changing a few words will too closely follow the original arguments. Weakly paraphrased material is likely to be ‘disjointed’ and have poor overall ‘flow’. Some words may lose their original meaning if swapped for another, rendering the whole piece ‘clunky’ and potentially inaccurate.

Poor paraphrasing is a common problem and it is where you can accidentally fall into the plagiarism trap – despite such changes, your work is still likely to too closely resemble the original source.

1.1 Tips on how to paraphrase

Paraphrasing well depends on a strong understanding of the source material, targeted notetaking and concise writing. When you paraphrase a piece of work, your version may be shorter than the original, focussing on the main ‘take home’ points. This is not always the case though – the aim of paraphrasing is not necessarily to condense the ideas from the original piece, rather it is to put them into your own words.

So, how do you paraphrase? Let’s take it step by step.

1. Look at your original source and read – and reread – until you understand its meaning. If you don’t understand it, you’ll find it difficult to paraphrase.
2. As you read the original, look up any terms you do not understand.

3. Once you feel you understand the material, put it to one side (minimise the window if it is an online resource; physically close the book, or turn a page over) – this helps to remove the temptation to ‘just check’ as you make your notes.
4. Start by listing the essential ideas, using key words or short phrases.
5. Using these key words/phrases, write some notes in full sentences that express your understanding of the original source. Keep in mind that you are focussing on the core arguments from the original piece, but rather than simply parroting them, you are writing them in a different way.
6. Avoid the temptation to look back at the original source at this point. Try to work based on your notes and understanding of the material.
7. Once you have finished, look back to your original source to make sure your interpretation accurately reflects the original ideas; do your notes reflect the ‘essence’ of the piece? If yes, that’s great. Now remember to include a reference to the original source. If you feel that your writing has accidentally changed the meaning, you’ll need to go back to step 1.



Remember, paraphrased material still needs to be referenced. A common mistake when making your notes/writing an assignment is to ‘deal with references at the end’. However, references should not be something you ‘bolt on’ at the end – they are an integral part of your work. It is very easy to forget/accidentally miss a reference if you only think about acknowledging your sources once you’ve finished writing your work. It can be very difficult to remember and find all your original sources if you are adding them at a later date. Make life easier for yourself – include your references as you write.

2 Using direct quotes

As explained in the previous sessions of this course, direct quotes are where you use exactly the same words as the original author. If you feel that you need to directly quote any of the original source material to support your arguments, you must ensure that you put quotation marks around the entire directly quoted phrase, so that your words can be differentiated from the words of the original author.

For example, to include the opening sentence of this section in another resource, you would use quotation marks, as shown in the next sentence.

> “As explained in the previous sessions of this course, direct quotes are where you use exactly the same words as the original author.”
>
> (OpenLearn, 2021).

As shown in the example above, you must remember to reference the direct quote, so keep a note of all the source and author details. If you do use direct quotes, keep them short and succinct. Ideally, you will rarely make use of direct quotes; quotes do not offer any of your interpretation or understanding of the material. It can be useful to ask yourself whether the quote you are thinking about using really does ‘add’ to your arguments or if you are just avoiding using your own words. Be honest with yourself.



If you do decide a quote is essential, as soon as you copy/paste (or retype it, word for word), add appropriate quotation marks and an in-text reference immediately. That way you won’t accidentally forget to identify the material as not being your own words.

Activity 1

Allow approximately 20 minutes.

The following extract is from ‘E117 Introduction to sport and fitness’, an introductory Open University module. For context, this extract was part of a section exploring physical activity.

Read the extract and then try to paraphrase it. Once done, click on the reveal button for discussion.

> “In the UK, the number of steps taken by the average adult each day is between 3000 and 4000 (NHS, 2014). This is far lower than the commonly cited target of 10,000 steps. The guidance for 10,000 steps per day originated from Japanese walking clubs and a business slogan in the 1970s. It is not underpinned by any rigorous research, so it is important that we question why 10,000 steps is now seen as the standard target. Could the recent expansion

> of wearable technology have had an influence, perhaps? Is it simply a more easily remembered figure than 3000 or 4000, which is the average number of steps taken by adults each day? This is not to say, however, that 3000–4000 steps is sufficient. 10,000 steps appears to be a reasonable target for daily activity for apparently healthy adults, but is potentially too high for those with chronic diseases and older adults and too low for children?"
>
> (The Open University, 2020)

Discussion

For me, the key words/phrases were the target of 10,000 steps, the point that most people do not achieve them, and that the target was not derived from scientific studies.

Here was my attempt at paraphrasing. You'll see it is significantly shorter, but retains the same meaning overall:

> The average adult in the UK achieves around one third of the daily target of 10,000 steps per day, according to NHS sources cited in (The Open University, 2020). However, this target is open to question; it may not be appropriate for all age groups, nor those with chronic disease. Furthermore, it was not derived from scientific studies, rather it derives from a Japanese business slogan in the 1970s.

Reference: The Open University (2020) '9.6.1 10,000: the magic number or a convenient guess?', *E117 Introduction to sport and fitness* [Online]. Available at: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=1636732&section=1.6.1 (Accessed 16 August 2021) [Link only available to registered E117 students].

Can you identify the 'who', 'what', 'when' and 'where' elements of the reference given in the discussion above?

Answer

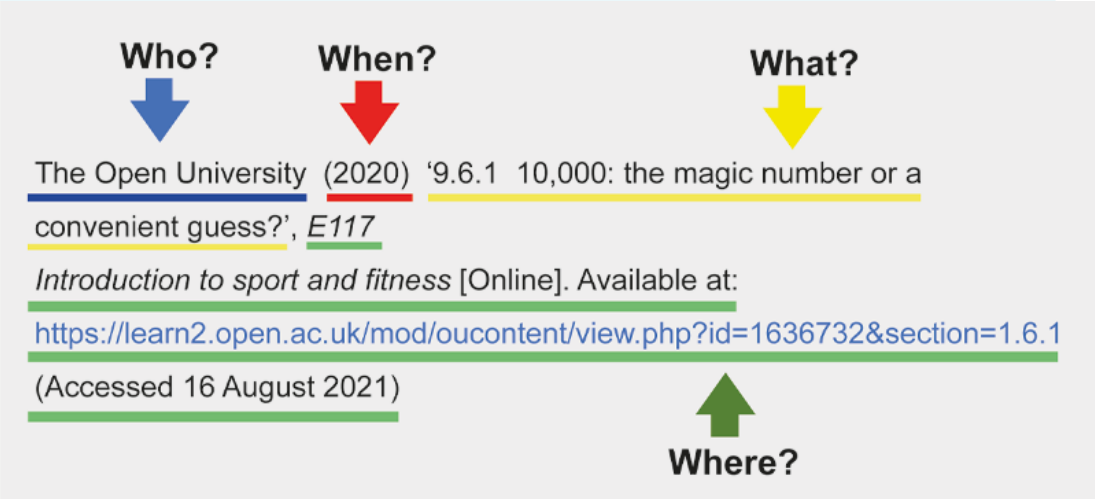


Figure 1 A full reference providing an academic audit trail

3 Learning together

When students get together, whether face-to-face or online, the conversation often includes sharing understanding and experiences about learning. Indeed, one of the most effective ways of applying your new knowledge is to start to have these discussions with other students; sharing your thoughts and ideas with other people can be fun!



In addition to helping individuals become successful independent learners, higher educational institutions want to support peer-to-peer learning. Appropriate group work can help members of the group discover alternative points of view and facilitate a deeper understanding of the task or topic at hand. Furthermore, effective collaboration is a key employability skill. As such, some courses ask students to work together in a range of tasks that are either non-assessed study tasks or activities that are part of the course’s formal assessment.

Participating and working on such tasks, in an open and honest manner, helps you to feel part of a ‘learning community’ and can help you to build links with other students, whether in your tutor group, course or the wider university.

However, it is important that all individuals are aware of the limits associated with a collaborative task; that is, to understand when collaboration steps over the boundary into collusion.

3.1 Working with other students in a connected world

Many people use information technology to interact with a wide range of people. Interaction might be via emails, web conferencing platforms and/or via a variety of social media platforms.

For example, perhaps you have shared photos from a recent celebration with other family members online or have chatted online to fellow students about your shared interests in crochet, politics, photography or art-house movies.

Although not everyone uses social media, such interactions are, for many people, a normal part of everyday life. It is quick and easy to respond to a friend’s request for help with ‘the recipe that you used last week’ or ‘I don’t understand how to….’

Educational institutions may also have a variety of channels for similar interactions – as well as for more formal, study related tasks. For example, at The Open University there are a variety of online forums available, including those operating at the level of individual tutor groups, those open to everyone currently studying a particular module and those open to anyone following a particular qualification pathway. Talking about the subject matter, taking part in module/course tasks and activities and supporting one another helps everyone develop their academic identity and voice.

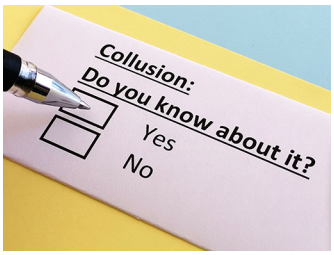
The problem – as Grace found in the interactive in Session 2, Activity 3 – is that the boundary between collaboration and collusion can become difficult to recognise. As you’ve seen, it can seem appropriate to help a fellow student who is perhaps struggling to understand something. However, you need to take care to provide *general* help, rather than *specific* help relating to an assignment.

It is not, for example, appropriate to share your ideas on how you intend to plan and structure your essay, nor to indicate the content you intend to include. It would also not be appropriate to share old assignments with someone else, even if your intention is just so that they can ‘get an idea’ about the topic. Such behaviour may result in work that is heavily influenced by someone else’s thoughts and which does not represent the true understanding of the individual.

In these examples, you should also recognise that if someone copies any work you have shared, they are likely to be found to have plagiarised. However, by making your work available to others, you will also have demonstrated poor academic conduct (indeed, ‘enabling plagiarism’ may well carry penalties within your institution).

4 How to avoid collusion

The previous sections have helped you to explore the difference between collaboration and collusion. The next activity will help to consolidate your thoughts.



Activity 2

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

List some things you can do to avoid collusion.

Answer

Here are some points you might have considered.

To avoid collusion:

- only share ideas, thoughts and opinions at a *general* level
- do make yourself aware of the 'rules' for any piece of assessed work that requires group work
- be clear about your own role and the role of other students in group work
- keep a careful record of who has done what in any group task
- write your own notes about what *you* have understood from any discussion
- keep your own work secure and in your possession (for example, password protect files on any shared electronic device)
- contact your tutor if you are having trouble with a specific question on an assignment. They will be able to offer appropriate advice and guidance.

List some things you should not do, if you want to avoid collusion.

Answer

Here are some points you might have considered.

You should not:

- complete individual assessed work while working closely with another student. The only time this would be appropriate would be if directed to by your tutor/ instructions in your course/module (for example, this can be a requirement for some creative writing modules)
- rely on rules from previous courses/modules or educational institutions. Always check what the rules and regulations are on your particular course/module, alongside institutional policies and guides
- re-write, edit or record another person's work and present it as your own

- give someone feedback on a draft assignment. Again, for some courses/ modules, peer feedback (and reflection on that feedback) may be part of the tuition and assessment strategy – but this will be explicitly stated by your course/module. When in doubt – ask your tutor
- take notes from another person’s work. Study notes should reflect what *you* think is important/interesting about the material. Your notes should reflect your understanding of the key points
- give a copy of your assignment (in whole or in part, whether in draft format, final or marked) to anyone under any circumstances. Again, any exceptions to this will be explicitly stated in the guidance associated with your course/ module. When in doubt – ask your tutor
- take a copy of another person’s work
- submit a copy of your assignment (in whole or in part, whether in draft format, final or marked) to any websites (e.g. your own blog or any ‘homework help’ or ‘essay’ sites)
- copy and paste answers to/from social network sites.

5 Study skills and time management

Learning how to summarise material in your own words and developing your academic voice can seem challenging.

Alongside developing this skill, you will be getting to grips with the subject-specific content of your course or module. Of course, you may have other demands on your time too, such as caring responsibilities, paid or unpaid employment, as well as trying to ensure you have some ‘downtime’ to relax and look after yourself.

When people are under time pressures, they are often unable to perform to their best abilities and may adopt poor study strategies. For example, they might copy a sentence of text directly from source material with the intention of summarising and re-writing in their own words at a later date, but then forget and submit work that is not all in their own words. Even though this is ‘unintentional’ this is still considered plagiarism.

Please don’t panic. In this section you’ll explore some study planning approaches to help you make the best of the time you have available.



Remember – different people work in different ways, and a study approach which suits one person perfectly, may not be appropriate for someone else. You might also find that as you progress through your study, you use different approaches depending on the task at hand, your current situation, other demands on your time and your experience of ‘what works for you’.

5.1 Where does time go?

The first step towards improving your time management skills is to understand how you are currently using your time.



Activity 3

Allow approximately 30 minutes.

Reflecting on your current workload is important when considering how you will plan your time. In this activity, you will complete a timetable. Try to be honest and realistic – the list of activities in the sample provided is just to provide you with some suggestions. For example, you may be a keen runner, and try to fit in a run every day, or perhaps you take a child to after-school/weekend activities. It’s most useful to complete the timetable in ‘real time’ over a week, rather than estimate the time you spent on each activity. It may be quite enlightening to see where your time is going.

Study time calculator

Please note, this study time calculator is only available when accessing the online version of the course

Once you have completed your calculator you should be in a position to see how you are using your time – and how much time you realistically have available to study.

Once you have completed this activity, you will be ready to reflect on your study plans, so you can use that time effectively.

5.2 Being SMART

Now that you’ve worked out how much time you have available for study, you need to decide how to use that time. Sometimes you can approach study with good, but rather vague, intentions. The SMART strategy is a way to think about tasks and to clarify your goals – and keeps *you* in control.

Explore the interactive below to find out more about this approach.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Figure 2 SMART goals

Studying can seem overwhelming at times and the SMART approach offers a way to begin to tackle tasks. You may find that it helps you to be more organised and focused.

5.3 Being reflective

Thinking about what works for you – and what doesn’t – can help you to make the most of the time you have available for study. It can help you to become an independent learner, able to critically engage with your learning tasks.

Reflection is part of everyday life – “*why was my training run so slow today*?”, “*why did my cake not turn out as expected*”, “*I completed this task much faster than usual, how did I manage that*?”. As you reflect on such matters, you will become aware of your strengths and weaknesses. You can learn from mistakes (and avoid them in future) and maximise your successes (so that you can repeat them).

Being a reflective learner works in a similar way but is a more formal, deliberate process. You are consciously focussing on your learning with a view to improving it – making your learning efficient and effective. This more formal approach, outlined in the interactive figure below, can seem a little unnatural at times and, like many good habits, can take time to establish. Learning does not happen in a void, you will bring your own experiences, understanding and assumptions into the process. Active reflection helps *you* to make sense of *your* learning.

Reflective learning is also not a ‘one off’ process and so by keeping a record you will be able to look back on past events. This record might take a variety of forms: a list of bullet points, flowing prose, a handwritten journal, an online blog, a document on your computer, a voice-recording on your phone; whatever approach works for you. Some people find it useful to reflect daily, others reflect only on critical activities or timepoints, for example, reflecting on how you attacked the first assignment on a module, or how you prepared for an exam.

The interactive figure below outlines the steps in the cyclic process using clickable buttons.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Figure 3 Reflective learning

Dye, V. (2011) ‘Reflection, Reflection, Reflection. I’m thinking all the time, why do I need a theory or model of reflection?’, in McGregor, D. and Cartwright, L. (ed.) Developing Reflective Practice: A guide for beginning teachers. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education (pp. 217-234).

5.4 Making the best of the time you have

It is important to understand how your module or course works, for example how many hours of study do you need each week? Does that include tutorial time? How many assessments are there? Are there key activities that need to be completed at specific times? Make sure you find out the level of commitment required for your module or course, whether at The Open University or elsewhere. Formal courses often publish study planners, to help you to progress through in a stepwise manner, whether weekly or on a term-by-term basis.



As you plan your study time, remember:

- Don’t rule out small amounts of time! A study session doesn’t need to be long; you can test how much you remember from your most recent readings as you wait for the kettle to boil or as you sit on a bus. Keep a notebook or scrap-paper handy for unexpected study time. Over the course of a week, all these little ‘extras’ add up.
- Look ahead – know what you intend to study and when. Breaking a big task into smaller tasks is likely to be more manageable. Look through Section 5.2 on ‘being SMART’.
- Be flexible – sometimes even the best plans need to be amended. Look through Section 5.3 ‘Being reflective’.
- Take regular breaks – it may seem counter-intuitive, but you will need time to process your studies. Taking time to ‘step away’ will help to make your active study time

effective and efficient. Be aware of your own attention span; some people can work longer than others before getting distracted. Try to plan your study breaks around how *you* work best.

6 Asking for help

Writing in a formal, academic style rarely comes naturally. Like other skills, learning to write in your own words and developing your own academic voice takes time and practice. Think back to a skill you already have – whether karate, baking or playing an instrument – you are likely to have needed help on your journey from being a beginner to being proficient.

Use the following interactive figure to explore potential sources of help for writing in your own words.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Figure 4 Potential sources of help

7 End-of-course quiz

You have now almost completed the course *All my own work: exploring academic integrity*. It is now time to take the end-of-course quiz which will enable you to earn a digital badge. Remember, if you’re not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on the link. Return here when you have finished.

End-of-course quiz

8 Summary of Session 3

In this session you looked at some of the study skills that can help you to produce work written in your own words. This session covered:

- Paraphrasing
- Using direct quotes
- Learning together
- How to avoid collusion
- Study skills and time management
- Asking for help

This free course provided an introduction to academic integrity, exploring what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Rather than focussing on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of referencing styles, the course has asked you to think about what is meant by ‘good academic conduct’ and has explained why good academic practice is so important. Along the way, you have worked through a series of exercises designed to help you to develop an understanding of appropriate academic practice. You have also explored some common pitfalls and difficulties and considered some approaches to avoid them.

Overall, the course has aimed to help you build confidence in producing your own work for academic purposes.

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