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Developing good academic practice

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Intellectual property

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Introduction

This free course, *Developing good academic practice*, is designed to help you develop good academic practice in your studies, and when producing assignments and completing assessments.

It's important for you to understand the rules of the academic world right from the beginning of your studies.

We're not asking you to develop good academic practice for the sake of it. These guidelines will help you with your writing – a key graduate skill.

This course will also help you avoid being accused of plagiarism, but that in itself is not the complete objective; we want you to develop good academic writing skills.

We will explain what we mean by academic practice, and then unpick some of the ideas in more detail, such as writing in your own words, the difference between collaboration and collusion, what's common knowledge in your area of study, and how to reference other people's ideas and writing. We will also examine some of the reasons why some students have been accused of plagiarism.

Just to reassure you, we stress that everybody can develop good writing skills. If you are new to the academic world, your university or higher learning institution will do its best to help you to develop your skills, and will focus on the development of good academic practice rather than penalising poor practice. However, once you become an experienced student you will be expected to follow the rules and plagiarism will be punished when it's detected. However, these cases are rare and usually arise from deliberate cheating.

The time spent studying the topics covered in the course early in your studies is a valuable investment that will help you throughout your studies and elsewhere.

The course is designed to be dipped in and out of. Perhaps you'd like a refresher on a specific area? Perhaps you'd like to work through the whole course from beginning to end – it's entirely up to you. But before you begin, take the quiz below to get a sense of how much of the concept 'good academic practice' you understand, and where you could improve. If you think you already understand what this phrase means, and the skills it involves, you'll be able to take the quiz now and identify the areas you need to brush up. Once you've studied these areas you can then retake the quiz to confirm that you now understand them.

If you're new to university study we recommend that after you take the quiz, you work through the course section by section, and take the quiz at the end of each section, and then retake the quiz at the end of resource to see how far you've come.

Introductory level: good academic practices quiz

Advanced level: good academic practices quiz

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge of good academic practice and how to build it into your studies
- understand how to avoid inappropriate or bad academic practice
- show knowledge of techniques on how to avoid plagiarism.

1 What is good academic practice?

Good academic practice is about making sure that anyone who reads your work can easily identify your thoughts and ideas on a subject, and can distinguish these from the thoughts and ideas of others.

'Academic integrity' is an all-encompassing term. Universities can use it to define the good academic practice that enables every individual to demonstrate how much and what they have learned within their subject or programme of study, and that they are able to put this into practice. It also allows tutors and other students to fairly assess the extent of learning progression made by each individual, and encourages everyone to respect and acknowledge the work of others.

'Plagiarism', however, is considered to be inappropriate practice. This is another wide-ranging term: it can cover everything from poor study skills and a lack of understanding of what is expected at your level of study, to straightforward fraud in the form of intentional cheating. This resource will help you gain a deeper understanding and an appreciation of how to develop your good academic practices, which in turn will help you to avoid plagiarism.

1.1 Good academic practice

For most students studying at undergraduate level or on a taught postgraduate programme, your assignments will be the main work reviewed by others. When you produce answers to assignments, it is important that the person reviewing it:

- knows that the words on the page originated with you, the author;
- can easily distinguish your own thoughts and the ideas you use to emphasise your viewpoint or illustrate a specific point.

In other words, the assignment should be a true reflection of your understanding of the subject and it should demonstrate your academic skills and abilities.

Writing in your own words and applying good academic practice is not simply about showing others the depth of your understanding and current skills. It is also about helping you to make sense of what you are studying; in other words, 'internalising' what you are reading and learning by putting it into context and into practice.

Developing your academic writing skills will also:

- allow you to develop confidence in using ideas and examples, and in making the course and the topics it covers 'your own';
- help you to recall the materials when you revise at the end of the course;
- put you in a much stronger position when preparing for the end-of-course examination;
- enable you to apply what you have learned in this and other courses, as well as in your working life.

In summary, academic integrity and writing in your own words are central components of effective learning development and will help make things more intelligible and pertinent to you.

1.2 Demonstrating your academic abilities

So why is it important to always demonstrate a true reflection of your academic abilities to your tutor and others?

One argument is that this allows your university to grade your work and level of academic development in an appropriate and fair manner. There will be a range of students within any course or programme whose academic abilities vary significantly from the 'average' and the degree classification system must be able to measure and recognise each student's abilities. Thus, 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.

How would you feel about other students who seemed to be doing better than you and were getting better grades, but who cheated by copying their answers from elsewhere or by submitting work that they hadn't produced?

There is a very strong argument that says that by ensuring your assignments are a true reflection of your understanding, you can get an accurate idea of how well you are progressing with your studies. The grades you achieve can also help you to assess your strengths and weaknesses, and allow you to focus your attention on areas that need more development to ensure progress.

More importantly, by submitting work that you have produced fairly and in accordance with good academic practices, your tutor can give you accurate feedback and help with your specific learning needs and abilities; this form of individual and personalised support is the best form of teaching anyone could want!

1.3 Reproducing someone else's words

Academia is all about using the work, thoughts and ideas of others to create new meaning and understanding. However, it is vital that you demonstrate your academic integrity and acknowledge the use of other people's work in a fair and transparent manner, allowing others to see what your own thoughts and ideas are.

As such, it is often advantageous to quote someone else's words or to make reference to their work in your assignments, to provide evidence of a breadth of reading and/or provide some support to what you are saying.

To ensure you acknowledge other people's work fairly and in accordance with expected practices, you may find the section on referencing a helpful one to review.

1.4 Inappropriate academic practice

Poor to inappropriate academic practice takes many forms. It can range from the consequence of not understanding what is required at this level of study, or not having the confidence in your own abilities, to out-and-out intentional fraud.

For example, poor academic practice could be the result of the following scenarios.

- A student finds they do not have sufficient time to answer an assignment properly and decides to 'borrow' (i.e. copy) some words or sections from a book, website or colleague. This is plagiarism.
- A student lacking confidence in their English skills believes that whatever they write will never be as good as the material in their course book or from other sources. They decide it is better to copy it out than try to write an answer in their own words. This is plagiarism.
- A student gets a friend or family member to answer an assignment question for them because they have expertise in this area and so will get better marks than if the student tries to do it themselves. This is still plagiarism, but it is also intentional fraud.
- A student comes across the 'right answer' to part of their assignment on a website, and cuts and pastes this into their assignment. This is intentional plagiarism.
- A student doesn't quite understand what they have to do to answer one of their assignment questions but has found the relevant section in their course book. They copy out the section but change a few of the connecting words, change the order of a couple of sentences and add in another couple of examples to make it their own work. This is plagiarism.

All these scenarios are examples of plagiarism and show a lack of academic integrity. Because the *words* submitted by the student did not originate from them – they are all the words of other people – their work gives a false impression of the student's own academic ability.

Of course you can use a range of materials as helpful sources, but the words used in the assignment *need* to be your own and must reflect *your* understanding. To understand more about writing in your own words, look at the section, 'Writing in your own words'.

1.5 When does poor academic practice become a major problem?

Poor academic practice becomes a major problem when there is an intent to cheat – to try to pass off someone else's work as your own. Here's a simple definition.

> Plagiarism is using the work of other people to gain some form of benefit without formally acknowledging that the work came from someone else.

Plagiarism always involves three main 'players':

- The **plagiarist** – the person who plagiarises. Sometimes, through ignorance or negligence, a plagiarist may not realise (or may claim not to realise) that they are plagiarising. However, we expect and assume that, apart from students studying courses very early in their study career, all students will be fully aware of the plagiarism procedures and issues. We therefore consider that 'intention' is present in all plagiarism or cases of poor academic practice. It is no defence to claim ignorance if you are an experienced student.
- The **victim** – the person who is plagiarised. Sometimes the person being plagiarised is fully aware of the other person plagiarising and actively cooperates in the process by colluding, either freely or by coercion. In this case the 'victim' is deemed to be

directly involved in the plagiarism, and, depending on circumstances, may themselves be subject to a penalty.

- The **monitor** – the person who discovers and deals with the plagiarism. Plagiarism is detected and monitored at the Open University by sophisticated methods, including electronic analysis. It is always handled with strict formal procedures by an experienced monitoring team. Various factors are taken into account, including level of study, any previous plagiarism offences and the nature of any apparent collusion.

This resource provides guidance on developing academic integrity and helps you to avoid poor academic practice.

Universities cannot always distinguish between poor academic practice (accidental plagiarism) and deliberate cheating (plagiarism). The Open University takes the position that without evidence to the contrary, all plagiarism is a result of deliberate cheating. As such, it is important to develop good academic practice to avoid the accusation of plagiarism and any resulting penalty.

1.6 Summary

If you submit an assignment that contains work that is not your own and you do not indicate this to the marker (i.e. by acknowledging your sources), you are committing plagiarism.

This might occur in an assignment when you:

- use a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across;
- copy directly from a text word-for-word;
- paraphrase the words from a text very closely;
- use text downloaded from the internet;
- borrow statistics or assembled facts from another person or source;
- copy or download figures, photographs, pictures or diagrams without acknowledging your sources;
- copy from the notes or essays of a fellow student;
- copy from your own notes on a text, tutorial, video or lecture that contain direct quotations.

Plagiarism may occur inadvertently due to inexperience. So read carefully all the study advice, especially statements concerning plagiarism and how to reference your sources.

1.7 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: what is good academic practice? quiz

Advanced level: what is good academic practice? quiz

2 Writing in your own words

2.1 What do we mean by ‘writing in your own words’?

When you paraphrase another author’s writing, you rewrite their argument using your own words, phrasing and interpreting their text in your own way.

Click on the media player below to listen to David Mayle outlining his expectations of students writing in their own words.

Audio content is not available in this format.
David Mayle

2.2 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: writing in your own words quiz

Advanced level: writing in your own words quiz

3 Collaboration versus collusion

One of the most effective ways to check whether you understand what you are studying and whether you can apply this new knowledge is to work with other students and discuss your learning with them.

3.1 Good collaborative practices

In both formal and informal examples, good collaborative practices involve two or more individuals working together to help each other understand:

- what a specific concept or topic means (often by explaining it in different ways to that presented in the course materials);
- how this information can be applied to other areas of their study.

It may also involve discussing and developing general approaches on how to solve a particular problem or task, but without going into specific details or giving away the precise

method or answer. Collaboration linked to assessed work stops at the level of general discussions, with each student writing up their answer individually, in their own time and in their own words.

In summary, good collaborative learning means working collectively on a topic or task to help each other understand what is involved and/or what needs to be done. Answers to any assessed work are then completed by each student in their own words. Good collaboration *does not* involve discussing the precise answers or giving an exact approach to solving a question that will form part of some assessed work.

3.2 What is collusion?

Collusion is a type of plagiarism and so represents a form of unacceptable academic practice that should always be avoided.

Collusion refers to working too closely with one or more individuals to help solve and/or answer an assessed task or question, producing a joint answer or solution (intentionally or not) to gain an unfair advantage over other students.

Collusion may involve:

- working with one or more individuals on the precise method or approach needed to answer a task or question (either telling others or asking others for this information);
- discussing how to solve an assessed task or question in such a way that the final answer is very obvious;
- working through an assessed task or question and writing the answers together so that they are very similar in content, structure and style;
- sharing the answer to an assessed task or question (either making this available to others or receiving/taking it from others) to see what needs to be included in the final answer or approach to a task.

In each of these examples, the final work presented for assessment is no longer that of the individual because it either includes undisclosed contributions from other individuals or has enabled others to enhance their answer in an unfair manner. As such, it now represents the understanding and application of the group and not the individual.

Anyone who takes part in these or similar examples to gain an advantage in marks and in which their work becomes blurred with that of others has colluded. As such, they are at risk of losing marks or being awarded a zero grade for their assignment, because they have submitted plagiarised work as their own.

3.3 Using extracts from spoken and online discussions

In oral discussions, the words are spoken out loud and soon forgotten. Most people listen to what different members of the group will have to say in an oral discussion and generally recall the overall gist of the argument rather than noting down every specific word. This enables them to present their own interpretation of the discussion and the different arguments presented by different contributors, rather than a word-for-word transcript of everything that was said.

In contrast, in an online discussion (e.g. within a forum, a series of emails, or an instant messaging service such as Skype or MSN), every word presented is a part of the permanent written record, which is easy to review over and over again. It is also easy to cut and paste into your document, so very easy to plagiarise!

It is important to write your own notes about what you have gleaned from an online discussion, rather than simply cutting and pasting. Then, when you come to write your assignment it will be based on your own interpretation of the discussion and you will be able to demonstrate your understanding of the subject.

3.4 Collaborative group answers

Submitting a collaborative group answer is only acceptable if it is explicitly asked for as part of the assessed task or question.

In such cases, a group answer often forms part of the assessment and is linked to additional questions or tasks where each individual has to describe their contribution to the group task and/or present their own thoughts and ideas on the process or topic of discussion.

Even when you are required to submit a collective group answer, it is important to clearly indicate where the group's work starts and finishes, and what your individual thoughts, ideas and answers are.

If you are required to complete an assessed activity or question on your own but have found discussions with one or more individuals helpful in understanding how to complete this task (without obtaining the final or near-final answer), it may be acceptable to cite the group contributions or those from another individual as part of your final answer. In such cases, always check with your tutor first.

For example:

> 'As part of a study group discussion (4 June 2008), the group collectively agreed that …'

In this type of scenario, as well as in the citation in your answer, you must include a reference at the end of your work. This should include a distinguishing name for the group, a note that this was a 'personal communication' (e.g. not written down anywhere), what the discussion was on and the date.

For example:

> S250 Northwest study group (2008) Discussions on the human genome, 4 June 2008 (pers. comm.).

> 'During an online discussion, Mark Jones (S250 general forum, 4 June 2008) described …'

For this type of online citation you should give the author's name, the forum name and the date of the message (where the month is stated as a word, not a number). If you refer to more than one message posted by the same author on the same day, use 'a', 'b', 'c', etc. after the year to distinguish between each posting. You then need to include a full reference at the end of your work, including the author's name, the title of the message, the name of the forum and the full date.

For example:

> Jones, M. (2008) 'Understanding genomics – does this help?', S250 general forum, 4 June 2008.

Click on the media player below to listen to a student who has been plagiarised.

Audio content is not available in this format.
A student who has been plagiarised

3.5 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: collaboration versus collusion quiz

Advanced level: collaboration versus collusion quiz

4 Common knowledge

'Common knowledge' refers to any piece of information that:

- is widely known within a specific discipline;
- may frequently be found in different academic sources, unreferenced;
- may be attributed to a number of different authors.

This brief definition should help you realise that common knowledge can be subject-specific: concepts and information that are widely known in environmental science, for example, may not be widely known in art history, and vice versa.

Common knowledge also depends on the level of study. 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.

It should be evident that, in general, there is no need to provide a reference for a piece of factual information that is deemed to be common knowledge. However, deciding whether something is 'common knowledge' is a matter of academic judgement!

For example, the dates of the Second World War, the chemical symbol for water, pi to two decimal places or the current prime minister of the UK are all common knowledge in the UK. This is 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, encyclopedia, 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. You need to consider who you are writing for when you are deciding whether something is 'common knowledge' or not. If you are not sure whether something is or is not common knowledge, the best approach is to include a reference to the source where you found the information.

4.1 General examples

Are the following general examples common knowledge?

Example 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.

Example 2

When walking along the road , you should keep to the pavement .

Answer

This is common knowledge in the UK, and also Rule 1 for pedestrians in the Highway Code. So you would reference it if you wanted to prove to somebody that this was in the Highway Code; otherwise, you would not.

Example 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.

4.2 Subject-specific examples

Here are some subject-specific examples of common knowledge:

- 4.2.1 Arts
- 4.2.2 Health and Social Care
- 4.2.3 Maths, Computing and Technology
- 4.2.4 Science

- 4.2.5 Social Sciences

Feel free to focus only the subject areas you are interested in studying, or are studying.

4.2.1 Arts

You have been advised that there is no need to provide a reference for a piece of factual information that is deemed to be common knowledge. However, deciding whether something is 'common knowledge' is not always straightforward. Indeed, it can touch on one of the most exciting aspects of academic study.

As an Arts student you will develop your ability to make judgements about statements that claim to be factual. If a piece of information like a date or a place is not in dispute you don't need to provide a reference. But if scholars are arguing about such matters and discovering further information, or if popular opinion (common knowledge) is contrary to the latest research, you do need to provide a reference to show that you are aware of complexity as well as to avoid plagiarism.

Here are two examples. Would you describe this information as common knowledge?

Example 4

Henry VIII of England ruled from 1509 – 1547: Yes/ No

Answer

Y es

Even if you didn't know the dates of Henry VIII you would probably have no difficulty in finding them. This can, therefore, be regarded as common knowledge.

N o

There is a difference between what you know or don't know and what can be regarded as common knowledge. You may have to look up the dates of Henry VIII but there is no dissent about his dates and it is very easy to find them.

Example 5

Modern scholarship places the dates of Jesus of Nazareth at 4BCE – 29CE: Yes/ No

Answer

Yes

Think about how most people would answer the question, 'In which year was Jesus born?' Many would know that our calendar system is based on CE 'the common era', BCE 'before the common era'. Far fewer people would know that modern scholars disagree with the traditional dating and some would probably resist or question this development.

No

This information may be common knowledge among scholars but it is not common knowledge among non-specialists and, therefore, needs a reference.

Sometimes you may think that a particular idea is common knowledge but find, when you start to study Arts subjects more deeply, that what you had taken for granted is not as obvious as you had thought. When this happens you need to provide a reference.

Click on the media player below to listen to historian Professor Clive Emsley explaining what is regarded as 'common knowledge' within Arts.

Audio content is not available in this format.
Professor Clive Emsley

4.2.2 Health and Social Care

If you're writing your assessment, in whatever form, you are expected to make clear where the information you have used came from. This is usually done through a **reference**: that is, citing the place where you found that information. Otherwise, the reader can reasonably be expected to believe that you generated the information or evidence yourself. This is why universities put so much emphasis on accurate referencing and warn you about the dangers of **plagiarism**.

The only exception to this rule is if you are saying something so well known that people could reasonably be expected to know it and to know straight away that you have not discovered it yourself. Here are some examples:

- The National Health Service was established in 1948.
- Obesity is a medical term describing a condition in which a person's body mass index (BMI) exceeds the recommended level for someone of their height and weight.
- Social workers work with a range of clients.
- Disability is used as a general term to describe a physical or sensory impairment or a learning disability.

This is what is meant by **common knowledge**. Common knowledge in Health and Social Care is something that is so well known that it's obvious to you and your readers.

Once you begin to dig more deeply into issues, however, you quickly get beyond common knowledge. Take the example of disability. Disability is not a neutral term and there are fierce debates about how far disability is socially constructed or a matter for the individual. For example, someone with a physical condition – such as one requiring them to use a wheelchair – could be seen as disabled either by their condition or by a society that caters mainly for its able-bodied citizens. Someone with an invisible condition like diabetes may or may not see themselves as disabled. Now, the moment you start entering into a debate such as this you must use references to make clear that you are not the originator of these ideas.

Consider obesity as well. There is currently a lot of concern about obesity and about the growing numbers of children and adults in the UK, the rest of Europe and the USA who are very overweight and diagnosed as obese in medical terms through use of the body mass index. However, there are once again debates about what all this really means. 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; i.e. labels them as blameworthy and turns them into patients. 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 repeat such statements or questions you need to use references to acknowledge the writers and researchers who generated these ideas.

So, when you are investigating those differing perspectives you need to start referencing. The more you investigate an issue, the more likely it is that you will realise that what you thought was common knowledge is beginning to be questionable.

This brings you into the territory of **academic judgement**, when you go beyond common knowledge and recognise that not everybody will agree with what you are saying, or that what you are saying is drawn from the judgement and research of other people. As we have noted already, when you use the judgements or the conclusions of other people you have to start referencing otherwise you get into the realm of plagiarism. You need to say who the individual is, not just: 'some researchers say this', or 'some psychologists say that'. You need to identify who these writers are. If you found their ideas in a textbook or in the course materials you need to reference those works and make clear that you found the writers' ideas in there. Otherwise things are left unclear. Tutors who are marking your work don't know who you are talking about or may not be sure that you really know where the information came from. So when you get beyond common knowledge you must reference.

Listed below are some statements. Are they common knowledge?

Statement 1

Obesity was first classified as a disease in 1985: Yes/No

Answer

Yes

It is a fact that is in the public domain and does not need a reference to support it. There are debates about whether the medical profession was right to classify obesity as a disease but no debates about the fact that it was done.

No

There aren't any arguments for using a reference. This is a clear cut case of common knowledge.

Statement 2

Body M ass Index (BMI) is an accepted measure f or calculating obesity: Yes/ No

Answer

Yes

You might argue that BMI is a medical measure that is widely used and accepted by doctors. However, there are fierce debates about the measure itself so referencing is advised.

No

Use a reference. BMI may be widely used but it is the subject of ongoing debate. For example, critics claim that it does not distinguish between fat and muscle and is therefore an inaccurate measure of obesity. Interpretations of the data vary considerably in assessing what constitutes a 'dangerous' BMI.

Statement 3

Sir Douglas Black's Report on Inequalities in Health was published in 1980 but ve ry few copies were printed: Yes/ No

Answer

Yes

This is a fact that is not contested and has been known since the date of publication.

No

There aren't any arguments for using a reference. This is a clear cut case of common knowledge.

Statement 4

Sir Douglas Black's Report on Inequalities in Health (1980) was one of the most significant reviews of healt h in the twentieth century: Yes/ No

Answer

Yes

This is probably common knowledge. It is well known and accepted by anyone with an interest in studying health, though it is unlikely to be known by the general public. Even if people disagree about the report itself they would agree that it had a considerable impact. Besides, it is only saying 'one of the most significant reviews' so you don't have to prove that it is the most important.

No

It could be argued that the political right did not see the report as significant because it did not agree with any of the report's recommendations, even banishing the term 'inequalities' and replacing it with 'variations'. However, doing that indicates the power of the report and how significant it was in shaping policy in the twentieth century. This statement just about counts as common knowledge but might be worth referencing.

Statement 5

Sir Douglas Black's Report on Inequalities in Health (1980) was the most important review of health inequalitie s in the twentieth century: Yes/ No

Answer

Yes

The Black Report found there were steep social class gradients in health in the UK, with the lowest socio-economic groups having much worse life expectancy and health than the highest socio-economic groups. The majority of researchers would probably agree with the statement because of the influence the report has had in shaping policy since its publication, firstly in trying to dismiss Black's findings and then in trying to

reverse the social class gradients. But only the majority so a reference is clearly needed.

No

Some researchers would vehemently disagree and claim that social class gradients in health are artefacts of the way social class and health are measured. In any case, this is an area of debate and will probably become so again with the publication of the Marmot Report (2010) on health inequalities. So the statement definitely doesn't count as common knowledge and needs a full reference.

Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., Grady, M. and Geddes, I. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review –A Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010*, London, The Marmot Review, University College London; also available online at www.ucl.ac.uk/marmotreview (Accessed 21 May 2010).

4.2.3 Maths, Computing and Technology

In a *pure mathematics* examination question a *first-year* student is asked to state and prove Pythagoras's Theorem.

Level 1

The student should have previously memorised the theorem and its proof and could repeat this verbatim as the answer to the question without needing to reference Pythagoras's original statement or the course text's version of the statement. The theorem is essentially considered to be 'common knowledge' at this level, in this context and within this subject.

In a *mathematical physics* examination question a *third-year* student is asked to state and prove Pythagoras's Theorem in 2D space and then to extend it: firstly, to 3D space; secondly, to *n*-dimensional space and, finally, to non-Euclidean geometries.

Level 3

In this case, the student should state the theorem and proof verbatim but should reference the source of the particular version of the theorem and should reference the work of other researchers who have extended the original theorem.

However, a discussion of Euclidean and non-Euclidean spaces should also be included with descriptions and explanations presented in the student's own words. Here, the theorem forms part of a wider context within a more difficult subject area and at a more advanced level, and so only certain aspects of its statement and use would be considered to be common knowledge.

In a mathematical philosophy examination question a postgraduate student is asked to analyse and discuss various forms of Pythagoras's Theorem and the latter's influence on our general concept of physical space.

Postgraduate

Here the student should state and reference the sources of several different forms of the theorem, and, additionally, should provide a detailed critical analysis with extensive references to a wide range of sources that discuss the topic.

In this very broad context, within a conceptually sophisticated subject at a very advanced level, there is likely to be very little common knowledge involved. Full referencing should accompany the discussion and analysis, including references to ostensibly 'obvious facts', however 'simple' these might appear to be at first sight.

4.2.3.1 Good academic practices in mathematics

How to find help with your studies

We hope that our teaching materials will make perfect sense the first time round, but the nature of mathematics is that concepts are quite hard, so most of what follows is about what to do when you find it hard.

Firstly, you should realise that almost everyone struggles with mathematics at some point. If mathematical problems could all be solved without a struggle the subject would not have the fascination and reward that it does.

Secondly, identify the nature of your problem. Is it:

- a specific piece of course text where you cannot see where the next line comes from;
- a general feeling of not understanding;
- an assignment question that you don't know how to begin?

Struggling with mathematics is part of the learning process. Doing a course in mathematics is not just about producing assignment answers or even passing the exam or end-of-course assessment. It is about engaging and wrestling with the ideas and techniques in the course. You are likely to make mistakes, misunderstand some things and quite possibly feel stupid. Of course, you need to correct your mistakes and sort out your misunderstandings, but do not feel too stupid! Making mistakes can be a useful part of learning. You may find it helpful to refer to the book *Success with Mathematics* by Heather Cooke.

Do you have a general feeling of not understanding?

This is harder to cope with but still very common in mathematics.

If this happens early in the course, ask yourself whether you have taken a course before you are ready for it. Your tutor should be able to help you determine this.

Have you rushed through some material without giving it time to sink in? A good way of dealing with this is to work though some relevant problems or exercises. Write out your solutions properly – looking at the provided solution for guidance as needed. Even if this means that you are essentially copying the provided solution, it will help, particularly if you check the results and definitions used.

Try to attend tutorials. You can also make use of course forums if they are available – just knowing that others are feeling the same way can help.

If you are able to do most of the exercises but still feel you are struggling there is no real need to worry. It is likely that, as you progress through the course, ideas and techniques that seemed unfamiliar and hard at first will become clearer and fit into place. Mathematics, particularly more advanced mathematics, requires something that is often called 'absorption time'.

Is it an assignment question that you don't know how to begin?

Assignment questions are nearly always based closely on the course text. Indeed, most questions will clearly state which part of the course is being covered in their preamble. Many questions closely follow an exercise or example in the text, so a first step is to look for such an exercise or example and try to understand that. If you can find such an exercise or example you can discuss this with other students or with your tutor. If you cannot identify such an exercise or example you can try:

- contacting your tutor;
- posting a message on a course-based forum ;
- contacting a faculty member.

If you do discuss approaches to assignment questions with fellow students – or indeed anyone – you can still submit a solution. You should write it out on your own, using the course text as the basis for your answer. In general you must complete an assignment yourself and not submit a joint effort.

External resources

Libraries have traditionally been the place to go for extra material. You should be aware that titles of mathematics books can be particularly misleading – even a book entitled *Elements of Number Theory* may be a graduate text. You should also be aware that, although most mathematical notation and definitions are international, it is possible that the book you have found is using some notation differently from the course text. If you happen upon an exercise or example that is essentially the same as an assignment question you should behave as suggested above. Namely, if you do read it, do not copy the solution, but go away and write it out for yourself, using the course text as the basis for your answer.

Nowadays the internet provides an extremely rich source of mathematical material and you can browse this in much the same way as a library book. Do be alert to the origin of the material as it may not have been through the refereeing and editing process of a text. You should treat any worked examples and exercises that closely match an assignment question in the way described above.

In general, remember that you need to practise constructing your own answers to prepare you for the exam or for future courses.

Frequently asked questions

Question 1

Why do we need 'Frequently Asked Questions' for mathematics, statistics and mathematically-based sciences and technologies?

Answer

Because there are some specific issues that are not appropriate for the generic document.

Question 2

What is plagiarism in mathematics, statistics and mathematically-based sciences and technologies?

Answer
It is the same as in other academic areas: if you deliberately submit an assignment that contains work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker (by formally acknowledging your sources), you are committing 'plagiarism'.

Question 3

Am I allowed to work on an assignment with other students?

Answer
Yes. However, submissions must be written up individually, away from the group.

Question 4

Am I allowed to copy from the course material when an assignment question is much the same as an exercise?

Answer
It is to be expected that the layout and your mathematical workings will be similar in format to those in the course material. Indeed, these will provide a guide as to how much detail you should give in your solutions.

Question 5

How do I refer to definitions, theorems and formal mathematical statements?

Answer
If the definition, theorem or formal mathematical statement is in the course material, simply say whereabouts in the course material or handbook it occurs. If it has a name, such as 'Lagrange's Theorem', use the name. For example 'in Unit 4 Theorem 2.3 on p26' or 'HB p32 Lagrange's Theorem'.

If a definition or theorem comes from elsewhere quote it exactly and give details of the book, article or web page (give date accessed). Do not try to write definitions, theorems or formal mathematical statements in your own words. The wording is necessarily very precise and usually is best left unaltered.

Question 6

Can I post an assignment question on an 'ask a question' website, even if I don't copy the answer but just use it to help me?

Answer
No. This may be a breach of copyright. If you are struggling with an assignment question then try:

- contacting your tutor;
- contacting a faculty member who provides additional tutorial help for your course and whose contact details are given in the course information.

Question 7

I use books and the internet to supplement my studies. Is it acceptable to copy an answer to an assignment question from a source such as a book or the internet if I give a reference?

Answer

No. You may not be awarded any marks for an answer that is not your own. If you have read through such an answer, you should write your own answer away from the source consulting only the course material.

Question 8

Can I use a calculator or computer to help with calculations?

Answer

You can use a calculator to do numerical calculations. Any calculation that cannot be done on a calculator should be done by hand, unless the instructions for your course or the assignment question say that you can use a computer. This is part of your learning, and there will be marks allocated for working. However, it is a good idea to use a computer to check your answer, where possible.

Question 9

Can I use a calculator or computer to sketch graphs?

Answer

You should not use a graphics calculator or mathematical software to sketch a graph, unless the instructions for your course or the assignment question say you can. In some courses it is not even acceptable to use graphics software such as the drawing facilities in Microsoft Word – you need to check the instructions for your course. However, it is a good idea to use a graphics calculator or computer to check your answer where possible.

4.2.4 Science

Although the following examples have been subdivided into broad disciplines of study, you may find it useful to work through all of them, to develop your awareness of what type of information can be defined as common knowledge within science, and what typically needs to be accompanied by a reference.

As in all cases, if you are uncertain whether something within your specific subject area and at your current level of study represents common knowledge or should be referenced, the best option is to include a reference just in case. As you progress with your studies within a particular course, subject area and levels of study, your familiarity of what does and does not represent common knowledge will develop.

A useful basic rule to refer back to is that if the information you want to use can be linked back to a specific person, single group of researchers or specific reference source, and that information is not commonly quoted in textbooks and other literature associated with your study area, then it probably is not common knowledge and should be referenced.

Click on the media player below to listen to Stephen Serjeant, Senior Lecturer in Science, explaining what is regarded as 'common knowledge' within Science.

Audio content is not available in this format.
Stephen Serjeant, Senior Lecturer in Science

4.2.4.1 Health Sciences

Example 1

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is caused by the body not producing any insulin, whereas Type 2 diabetes is caused by the body not producing enough insulin to ensure blood sugar levels are controlled effectively.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

This is an example of common knowledge. It is something you may already know or could easily find stated in a wide range of source materials and academic dictionaries, without being accompanied by a reference.

Example 2

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of this condition and is commonly linked to obesity. In 2007, 2.5 million people had been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes across the UK (equal to 3.66% of the population), with this estimated to increase 160% to ~4% by 2025.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

This statement starts off with a general statement about the link between obesity and Type 2 diabetes, which is common knowledge and does not need to be referenced. In contrast, the second sentence contains some very specific information, the exact details of which are unlikely to be widely known and need to be shown to have come from a reputable source. As such this sentence should be accompanied by a reference.

In this case, this information was extracted from www.diabetes.org.uk/Documents/Reports/Silent_assassin_press_report.pdf (last accessed on 30 Oct 2008). The correct way to show this statement in an answer would therefore be:

> Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of this condition and is commonly linked to obesity. In 2007, 2.5 million people had been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes across the UK (equal to 3.66% of the population), with this estimated to increase 160% to ~4% by 2025 (Smallwood, 2008).

At the end of the piece of work, depending upon the style of referencing you were using, you would give the full reference as:

Smallwood, D. (2008) 'Diabetes: beware the silent assassin', London, Diabetes UK; also available online at www.diabetes.org.uk/Documents/Reports/Silent_assassin_press_report.pdf (Accessed 30 October 2008).

4.2.4.2 Molecular Science

Example 1

Analytical tests on samples of Greco-Roman cosmetic powders have revealed that the pink coloration can primarily be attributed to various compounds originally extracted from madder plants.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

This statement relates to a specialised subject and area of study (not everyone is involved in analysing the chemical composition of archaeological cosmetics) and is unlikely to be widely known, even within the chemistry community. In addition, there is the implication that this information has been obtained from a specific source (e.g. the specific study on these samples), and as such, it should be accompanied by a reference.

The correct way to show this statement in an answer would therefore be:

> Analytical tests on samples of Greco-Roman cosmetic powders have revealed that the pink coloration can primarily be attributed to various compounds originally extracted from madder plants[(1)].

With the full reference listed at the end of the work, e.g.

> [(1)]Van Elslande, E., Guérineau, V., Thirioux, V., Richard, G., Richardin, P., Laprévote, O., Hussler, G. and Walter, P. (2008)'Analysis of ancient Greco-Roman cosmetic materials using laser desorption ionization and electrospray ionization mass spectrometry',*Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry*,vol. 390, no. 7, pp. 1873–79.

Example 2

Lewis structures are used to represent the bonding relationships between atoms within any covalently bonded molecule, and indicate how lone pairs of electrons are shared in accordance with the octet rule.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

This statement contains a number of scientific terms that are likely to be unfamiliar to anyone who has not studied chemistry. In contrast, this method of depicting molecular structures is commonly used at all levels within chemistry, would be found unreferenced in any academic textbook or source material, and so represents common knowledge within this discipline. As such it does not need to be referenced.

4.2.4.3 Geosciences (Earth and Environmental Science)

Example 1

The island of Réunion located in the southwest Indian Ocean is an intra-oceanic plate shield volcano consisting of two coalesced volcanoes – Piton des Neiges (dormant) and Piton de la Fournaise (still active). The island is characterised by ultramafic to mafic alkaline eruptive sequences, typical of 'hot spot' volcanic sequences.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

The information cited in this statement could be obtained from a number of different sources, with the second sentence linking commonly known information (within the discipline of Earth Sciences) about hot spot volcanoes to this specific example of the island of Réunion. As such, this statement can be viewed as common knowledge and does not require a reference.

If the statement went on to describe the range of rock types found across the island (e.g. picrites and oceanites, overlain by more evolved hawaiites, mugearites and benmoreites, which in turn are overlain by more evolved trachytes), then this level of detail should be backed up by an appropriate reference (e.g. Upton, B.G.J. and Wadsworth, W.J. (1972) 'Aspects of magmatic evolution of Reunion Island', *Phil. Trans. R. Soc*. London, 271, pp. 105–130).

Example 2

Darcy's law is a measure of the rate of flow of a fluid through a porous substance. It states that the flow velocity (v measured in m s^{-1}) through a porous substrate is proportional to the difference in height in metres (Δh) divided by the distance (Δl) down a slope between two points, multiplied by the hydraulic conductivity of the soil (K), which is a constant, i.e.

$$v = K\frac{\Delta h}{\Delta l}$$

As the flow velocity (v) is proportional to the hydraulic gradient (Δh/Δl), an increase in the gradient will result in a predictable and fixed rate increase in the flow velocity.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

Although the topic of this statement is relatively complex, for any student studying Level 2 (or higher) Environmental Science, Darcy's law and its usage would represent common knowledge, and could be found in any number of relevant academic textbooks or reference sources. As such, stating this law or what it is commonly used for would not require a reference within an Environmental Science answer.

If, however, you cited a specific example of the use of Darcy's law using data that you did not collect yourself, then this should be accompanied by a reference to indicate the source of this specific information.

4.2.4.4 Physical Science

Example 1

Newton's third law of motion states that when an object exerts a force on another object, the second object will exert a force of the same magnitude in the opposite direction on the first object. This is commonly simplified as: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

Newton's laws of motions are commonly known and used throughout science at all levels of studies, and can be found described in a very large range of academic reference sources and textbooks. As such there is no need to include a reference for this type of widely known and widely used information.

Example 2

The radio galaxy Cygnus A has been found to contain a central dust lane and clear 'opening cone morphology', both of which have been attributed to star formation commencing <1 Ga ago, with this timing determined from the colours emitted by these regions.

Is this common knowledge or does it need to be referenced?

Answer

This statement is based on specific research work carried out by a group ofManchester astronomers, published in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*. Although the statement has been rewritten from the original, and summarises some of the key outcomes of this work, acknowledgement needs to be made to the original source, to verify where this detailed information was obtained from.

The correct way to show this statement in an answer would therefore be:

> The radio galaxy Cygnus A has been found to contain a central dust lane and clear 'opening cone morphology', both of which have been attributed to star formation commencing <1 Ga ago, with this timing determined from the colours emitted by these regions (Jackson et al., 2002).

With the full reference listed at the end of the work, e.g.

> Jackson, N., Tadhunter, C. and Sparks, W.B. (2002) 'Cynus A: stars, dust and cones', *Monthly Noticesof the Royal Astronomical Society*, vol. 301, no. 1, pp. 131–141.

4.2.5 Social Sciences

The notion of 'common knowledge' draws us into difficult territory, because it involves a judgement on what is, and what is not, widely known and acknowledged. Some bits of information are considered sufficiently clear and well established to be viewed as common knowledge, and therefore do not require a reference. You will have already

noted a few examples of widely known facts and other information in earlier pages linked to this website. Below are two more examples where it is difficult to disagree with what is being said:

- Global development has been uneven in its economic impact on different parts of the world.
- Britain has undergone some major economic and social changes since the Second World War.

In both cases the evidence is almost overwhelming in supporting these general statements. Indeed it is partly because the statements are so general that they are difficult to debate. It is reasonable to assume that both are sufficiently well known that they can be regarded as common knowledge and do not require referencing.

In your coursework in the Social Sciences and elsewhere you will often want to use statements, ideas and information that are less widely known and acknowledged. For example, you might want to make use of a particular line of argument about the role of big businesses in present day globalisation, and draw supporting evidence from a particular map, table or graph. Perhaps you want to make use of information from non-course sources to support or challenge an idea in a course about the impact of television on British society. In such cases you will need to make clear to your tutor where the information comes from, by acknowledging your source(s). If you are in any doubt about whether or not to reference, you should err on the side of caution.

A key principle for those working in the Social Sciences is that knowledge is socially constructed. What we mean by this is that knowledge is created, and argued about, by us as human beings. Ideas, and their supporting evidence, are constantly being analysed and debated, in an attempt to develop a clearer understanding. Work in the Social Sciences does not stand still, and relatively few ideas assume the status of ‘common knowledge’.

Even so, you will find that the various fields of study (disciplines) – in the case of Open University Social Sciences this comprises Economics, Geography, Politics, Psychology, Social Policy and Sociology – have each accumulated a vocabulary of reasonably well-established ideas. Some of these ideas may be considered as sufficiently accepted by academics working in that field not to require referencing, but they won’t necessarily be well established to you as a student.

For example, ideas like ‘the geographical imagination’, ‘uneven development’ or ‘international division of labour’ are well established within Geography, but, if you used these ideas as a student, you would need to show first that you understood what they meant. That would involve you tracking down (and referencing) the course sources where these ideas were introduced and explained. It should be clear then that what might be viewed as ‘common knowledge’ will not only vary between fields of study, it could also depend on your level of subject area experience.

4.3 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: common knowledge quiz

Advanced level: common knowledge quiz

5 Referencing

Before we explain a bit more about referencing here are some definitions to get you started.

A **citation** is the 'indicator' you put in the text to alert the reader to the fact you are talking about somebody else's work or using somebody else's words. The 'indicator' often takes the form of a number, either in brackets or as a superscript, or it can state the surname of the author with the year of publication, e.g. (Brown, 2009).

A **reference** is a detailed description of the source you have cited. References are often at the bottom of a page or collected together at the end of an article as a reference list.

A **bibliography** is a list of the materials, such as books and journal articles, that you have used. In some disciplines it may include only the items you have used as general reading to provide background information but not necessarily cited because individual ideas or text are not reproduced. In other disciplines it may include both the information you have used for background reading and your reference list.

5.1 Why should you cite references?

When producing an assignment, any other assessed piece of work or something that is going to be viewed and/or used by others, it is important to include complete and accurate references because:

- your references show you have read around the subject;
- your academic argument will be stronger if it's supported by evidence from other people's research;
- others will be able to find and use the same sources that informed your work, which in turn allows them to check the validity and authenticity of your work, as well as develop and enhance their own understanding of the subject.

If you use other people's work to construct your answers and do not include appropriate references, then you will be passing off other people's work as your own, and so be guilty of plagiarism.

As you progress through your academic career, it is important to develop your study skills and understand when, where and what you need to reference. It is equally important to develop an understanding of what you *don't* need to reference (e.g. your own thoughts and ideas, and anything that constitutes common knowledge).

The various styles in which you should present references are briefly described below, but which system you use and the exact form of the reference depends upon the advice given by your university or college. You should check your course material for specific details about which form of referencing to use.

5.2 Alphabetic al referencing

One suggested convention for citing references is alphabetical; e.g. the Harvard referencing style. The name of the author appears in brackets in the text, together with the year of publication; for example (Smith, 1986). Where there are only two authors, both

names should be given in the text; if there are more than two authors only the first name should appear followed by ‘et al.’(short for ‘et alia’, meaning ‘and others’).

Books should be referenced as follows:

> Name(s) of author(s), initials of author(s), year of publication (in brackets), book title (in italic), edition number (if appropriate), serial editor (if appropriate), publisher, place of publication, chapter number (if appropriate), page number.

References to articles in journals should be written as follows:

> Name(s) of author(s), initials of author(s), year of publication (in brackets), title of the article (in quotation marks), abbreviated journal name (in italic), volume and part number (in bold), page number of the first page in the article.

When two or more references are cited to a work by one author or a group of authors for the same year, they should be identified by including ‘a’, ‘b’, etc. after the date; for example (Smith, 1986a). If several references to different pages of the same article occur, the appropriate page number may be given; for example (Smith, 1986, p. 39).

The reference list in this convention should be placed at the end of your assignment under the heading ‘References’. It should consist of an alphabetical listing by authors’ names and be in date order for each author or group of identical authors (see the examples below). Notice that, in order to allow listing by surname, initials appear *after* the author’s surname. Note also that the publication year (in brackets) immediately follows the author name(s).

> References
>
> Amincharge, I., Thoughtofit, I., Didthework, I. and Cobley, U.T. (2002) ‘Predicting the completely obvious’, *Somethingacology,* **135:1**, pp. 151–3.
>
> Author, A.N. (2009) ‘My Fascinating Research’ in Booker, J. (ed.) *Interesting Topics*, Publisher, London, ch. 2, pp. 21–30.
>
> Booker, J. (ed.) (2009) *Interesting Topics*, Publisher, London.
>
> Einstein, A. and Newton, I. (1993) ‘Complex equations that nobody else understands’, *Proc. Perplexed Soc.,* **18:2**, pp. 247–51.
>
> Scientist, I.B. (1991) ‘Some research that was funded’, *J. Fairyland Sci.,* **251**, pp. 1586–91.
>
> Smith, T. (1986a) ‘My research this year’, *J. Fairyland Sci.,* **251:4**, pp. 1570–85.
>
> Smith, T. (1986b) *My Memoirs*, Publisher, London.

Remember to check your *course material* for guidance specific to your course.

5.3 Numerical referencing

Another convention for citing references in your main text is to use either numbers in square brackets or superscripts, where the numbering starts at the beginning of the report and increases sequentially throughout. These would appear as reference [1] or

reference[1]. Each number must refer uniquely to a given source, detailed in a list collected together at the end of the review, under the heading 'References'.

The following example shows a book, a journal article and a website collected together in the same numerical reference list.

References

1 A.N. Importantscientist, *My Favourite Topic*, 2002, Rich and Richer, USA, ch. 11, p. 349.

2 The Society of Biophysicochemical Geologists. *Work I couldn't get published until now* [online]. Available from: http://www.BPCGS.ac.uk/publications/lessreliable.html (Accessed 1 April 2009).

3 A. Scientist and A.N. Otherscientist, 'Really interesting science: honestly', *J. Irrep. Res.*, 2002, **15**, p. 374.

5.4 Quoting

Quoting other people's words in your writing is often very useful as it can provide authority to a particular argument you are developing and it can also show that you have read widely around the subject. If you are using someone else's words you need to make it clear to the reader where your words stop and start again and where the words you are quoting come from. Usually this is achieved by putting the words you are quoting in inverted commas and then giving a citation to a particular reference.

For example, if you are quoting something of less than one sentence, you would normally include it within your text:

> Taylor (2009) argues that 'Plagiarism is an academic crime that should elicit an academic penalty'.
>
> *or*
>
> It has been suggested that 'Plagiarism is an academic crime that should elicit an academic penalty' (Taylor, 2009).

If the quotation is more than one sentence it is usually displayed as a separate paragraph that is indented to show the text is a quotation. For example:

> **'Plagiarism** is the act of claiming to be the author of material that someone else actually wrote. Students have plagiarised book reports, term papers, essays, projects, and graduate-degree theses. Teachers—including college professors—have plagiarised journal articles, course materials, and textbooks. Researchers have plagiarised reports, articles, and book chapters. Although academic **plagiarism** is not new, what is new since the latter years of the 20th century is the ease with which writings on virtually any topic can be misappropriated with little risk of detection. The principal instrument responsible for the recent rapid rise in academic **plagiarism** has been the Internet, which John Barrie, a developer of software for detecting Web **plagiarism**,

> called “a 1.5 billion-page searchable, cut-and-pasteable encyclopedia.”’ [*our bold emphasis*]
>
> (Thomas, 2002)

In some examples you may come across, the quotation marks are not used because the fact that the paragraph is indented shows that the text is a quotation. To be safe, it is best to include the quotation marks. If you are unsure, check your course material. The quotation is always associated with a citation, in this case after the quote, but in other cases it could be introduced by the citation as in:

Thomas (2002) describes plagiarism as:

> ‘**Plagiarism** is the act of claiming to be the author of material that someone else actually wrote. Students have plagiarized book reports, term papers, essays, projects, and graduate-degree theses. Teachers—including college professors—have plagiarised journal articles, course materials, and textbooks. Researchers have plagiarised reports, articles, and book chapters. Although academic **plagiarism** is not new, what is new since the latter years of the 20th century is the ease with which writings on virtually any topic can be misappropriated with little risk of detection. The principal instrument responsible for the recent rapid rise in academic **plagiarism** has been the Internet, which John Barrie, a developer of software for detecting Web **plagiarism**, called “a 1.5 billion-page searchable, cut-and-pasteable encyclopedia.”’ [*our bold emphasis*]

Sometimes you may want to omit some text from the quote, in which case you would replace any missing text with three dots enclosed by square brackets […], as in:

Thomas (2002) describes plagiarism as:

> ‘**Plagiarism** is the act of claiming to be the author of material that someone else actually wrote. Students have plagiarised book reports […]. Teachers—including college professors—have plagiarised journal articles […]. Researchers have plagiarised reports […]. The principal instrument responsible for the recent rapid rise in academic **plagiarism** has been the Internet, which John Barrie, a developer of software for detecting Web **plagiarism**, called “a 1.5 billion-page searchable, cut-and-pasteable encyclopedia.”’ [*our bold emphasis*]

Anything quoted in text must be included in a reference list:

Thomas, R.M. (2002) *New Frontiers in Cheating*, Encyclopaedia Brittanica Online. Available from http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9389369 (Accessed 24 April 2009).

5.5 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: referencing quiz

Advanced level: referencing quiz

6 Why do students plagiarise?

Some students end up plagiarising for a wide variety of reasons – sometimes intentionally, but more often unintentionally. Irrespective of whether they meant to plagiarise or not, it is still a form of inappropriate academic practice and will therefore incur some level of penalty.

Early in your student career it is worth investing time in:

- developing good note-taking skills;
- practising writing in your own words;
- learning how to reference properly;
- developing time management skills;
- improving your academic literacy skills;
- working effectively with others;
- acknowledging collaborative contributions.

Once you have done this it's unlikely you will plagiarise, intentionally or unintentionally.

Some of the more common reasons and 'traps' that cause students to plagiarise include:

- poor study skills; e.g. not having the relevant skills and knowledge to study effectively at this level;
- not understanding what is required by the assignment; e.g. misinterpreting the task or not recognising what they have to do to complete it; poor time management skills, e.g. not leaving enough time to complete assignments, resulting in copying material from other sources to get work in on time;
- lacking in confidence in their language skills; e.g. feeling that they do not have the skills to allow them to express the ideas in a form that is as good as the source, resulting in their cutting and pasting words and sections from other sources into their assignment;
- poor note-taking skills; e.g. mixing up their own thoughts and ideas with those taken from others, or cutting and pasting information from other sources and forgetting where these came from but using them almost word-for-word in their own work without acknowledging the original source.

Many students who plagiarise as a result of these and other reasons may not realise what they have done or the severity of their actions until either their tutor points it out to them or they lose marks as a result of inappropriate academic practices.

Less commonly, some students set out to deliberately deceive their tutor (and themselves) by obtaining work from other people or sources, and knowingly submit this as their own work. This is a clear case of cheating and constitutes fraud.

6.1 Common problems

If you feel you don't have the language skills to be able to express your ideas clearly and therefore rely on using other people's words, you are plagiarising these materials. When your plagiarism has been discovered, it will be penalised.

It is, therefore, important to develop your language skills. Although this will slow down your present study, it is a good investment for the future – you only need to do this once in your academic career and so it's worth doing early on.

If you feel you don't have the time to read the course materials or write the assignment yourself and rely on reproducing other people's words, you are plagiarising these materials.

You may have an exemplary record of study and only need to plagiarise at one specific difficult time, but nevertheless this is still inexcusable – it's cheating. At these difficult periods it is much better to think about how you can manage your time better.

Some students will take notes from a text, or notes of a tutorial or video and end up copying the words that were written or said. When these are reproduced in an assignment they become plagiarism.

6.2 Quiz

You can check your understanding about this topic by answering some questions about academic integrity. Use the links below to access a quiz with questions appropriate for your level of study.

Introductory level: why do students plagiarise? quiz

Advanced level: why do students plagiarise? quiz

7 Test your understanding of good academic practices

This is your opportunity to retake the quiz you completed at the beginning of this course. Use it to assess how much you've learned and how much your understanding of academic integrity has improved.

Introductory level: good academic practices quiz

Advanced level: good academic practices quiz

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Educational Practice. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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