

Advice on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of material appropriated from another source or from other sources with the intention of passing it off as one's own work. Plagiarism may take the form of unacknowledged quotation or substantial paraphrase. Sources of material include all printed and electronically available publications in English or other languages, or unpublished materials, including theses, written by others.

To avoid plagiarism, it is important for all students within individual subject areas to be aware of, and to follow, good practice in the use of sources and making appropriate reference. You will need to exercise judgement in determining when reference is required, and when material may be taken to be so much a part of the 'general knowledge' of your particular subject that formal citation would not be expected. The basis on which such judgements are made is likely to vary slightly between subject areas, as may also the style and format of making references, and your tutor or course organiser, where appropriate, will be in the best position to advise you on such matters; in addition, these may be covered, along with other aspects of academic writing, in your induction. By following good practice in your subject area you should develop a rigorous approach to academic referencing, and avoid inadvertent plagiarism. Cases of apparently deliberate plagiarism are taken extremely seriously, and where examiners suspect that this has occurred, they bring the matter to the attention of the Proctors.

In their Essential Information for Students, the University's Proctors and Assessor draw attention to two extremely important disciplinary regulations for all students.

"No candidate shall present for an examination as his or her own work any part or the substance of any part of another person's work.

In any written work (whether thesis, dissertation, essay, coursework, or written examinations) passages quoted or closely paraphrased from another person's work must be identified as quotations or paraphrases, and the source of the quoted or paraphrased material must be clearly acknowledged.

The University employs a series of sophisticated software applications to detect plagiarism in submitted examination work, both in terms of copying and collusion. It regularly monitors on-line essay banks, essay-writing services, and other potential sources of material. It reserves the right to check samples of submitted essays for plagiarism. Although the University strongly encourages the use of electronic resources by students in their academic work, any attempt to draw on third-party material without proper attribution may well attract severe disciplinary sanctions. "

(The Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum, Section 9.5

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/pam/index.shtml>)

Cases of plagiarism range from the culpably fraudulent to the carelessly inadvertent. Honesty is all you need to avoid the first, the cultivation of academic good practice will ensure that you do not fall foul of the second. You must avoid:

- The submission of other people's work as your own. You should not use professional essay writing agencies nor submit any work which has been written in full or in part by any other person. It is also forbidden to submit work which you have already submitted (partially or in full) for another degree course or examination.
- The verbatim quotation of other people's work without clear indication and due acknowledgement (i.e. quotation marks or indentation, together with a full citation.) Inadvertency in this may be avoided by scrupulous note-taking. Whenever taking notes always write down the full details of the source (author, title, page numbers, lecturer's name and date of lecture, URL.) Where exact words are copied or taken down quotation marks should be used; your notes should make it completely clear, in

case your memory does not, which of its words and ideas are your own and which other people's. The risk of plagiarism is increased where material is 'cut and pasted' from electronic resources. If you copy material in this way make sure it is fully referenced and does not become confused with your own work. You should be aware that there exist sophisticated systems to detect such copying.

- Close paraphrase. Linking together phrases from a source with just a few words changed here and there is not enough to avoid the charge of plagiarism.
- The reporting of ideas without acknowledging them as your own. When you write, there should be no room for doubt which are your ideas and which are other people's. Note that where an idea is unattributed it will naturally be taken as the author's own. How often you provide references must to some extent be a matter of style and judgment; to begin each sentence of a paragraph of exposition with "Davidson says that..." would be redundant, but where you are substantially indebted to a particular author it may well not be enough to cite his or her work once in a footnote at the start or the end of the essay.

The surest way to avoid suspicion of plagiarism is by careful referencing. Tutors may be more concerned to check that you understand than that your essays display scholarly references, and no examiner expects full references in a three hour exam, but it is good practice to give proper references.

- There are many ways to do this (footnotes, author and date, bibliography, etc.) In general there is no one preferred system. Tutors and style guides are a source of advice. Note that some electronic sources explicitly tell you how to make references to their articles.
- You should not reference anything that you have not actually consulted. Where your knowledge of a primary source is via a secondary one this should be made clear. (e.g. R.Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, quoted in J.Cottingham, *Descartes* (Blackwell, 1986) p.92.)
- Some ideas may be taken as part of the 'general knowledge' of a particular subject and, as such, do not call for a formal reference. You will need to exercise judgment in determining when this is the case. If in doubt, seek advice or err on the side of caution.

Some illustrations of plagiarism

Source text

'Even more important, however, and certainly more generally applicable, is the argument from queerness. This has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.' (J.L.Mackie, *Ethics, Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977) p.38)

Examples

1. An important argument is that from queerness. It has two parts, one metaphysical and one epistemological. Metaphysically, if objective values existed, then they would be very strange entities, unlike anything else in the universe. Epistemologically, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some strange faculty of moral intuition, quite different from our ordinary awareness.

Without reference of any kind to any source, this would be taken as the author's own words and ideas; when in fact it simply copies phrases verbatim from the source with just a few words changed here and there.

2. It has been argued against objective values on the grounds of queerness. The case can be made in either metaphysical or epistemological terms. If objective values existed, they would be strange things, utterly different from anything else in the universe, and they would have to be known in an equally strange way, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else

This is a mixture of verbatim copying and close paraphrase. Two phrases have been copied from the source, but no quotation marks or reference provided. The phrase 'It has been argued' is insufficient for this purpose.

3. 'The argument from queerness' (Mackie, 1977, p.38) has been stated as follows. 'If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.'
Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else

By selective use of quotation marks and referencing this suggests that the second point here is the writer's own, when it is in fact just as heavily indebted to the source as the material explicitly acknowledged. All quoted material must be enclosed in quotation marks and adequately referenced.

Remember:

- Always make clear the *extent* of your borrowing. A text reference, such as (Mackie, 1977, p.38), can leave it unclear whether the debt you wish to acknowledge is with regard to a clause, a sentence, a few sentences or an entire paragraph that you have written.
- Try always to express the ideas and arguments you encounter *in your own words*; this is part of what it means to really *understand* them.

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