

Avoiding Plagiarism

This presentation is on *Avoiding Plagiarism* in your academic writing. It has been designed by the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre and is targeted at undergraduate students currently studying at the University of Toronto Mississauga.

The purpose of this video is to outline some of the main aspects of plagiarism and what you should... and should not... do when writing an academic paper. Let's start with the obvious; you should not buy your paper from an online source or an essay mill. You shouldn't have a friend write it for you, or copy parts of your friend's assignment. Did you also know that you can't resubmit an assignment for one class that you previously submitted to another? That's known as self-plagiarism and you still can't do it.

The University of Toronto takes Academic Integrity very seriously, in fact there's a code of behavior on Academic Matters which everyone should read. Plagiarism is one part of academic integrity, and it's something that you, as a student, should take seriously too. It's important to remember that the rules you had in high school may not apply. The rules you have in your home country (if it isn't Canada) may not apply. The rules aren't that difficult once you know them, but you have to actually know them in the first place.

So, you might be asking, why should I care? Well, first of all, you should care, because if you are caught plagiarizing, bad things can happen. Let's talk about the bad stuff first, before we work on how you can avoid it. At UTM, if you are suspected of an academic offense, which includes plagiarism, you first have to meet with your instructor. If the assessment is worth less than 10%, you've then got to meet with your Departmental Chair, and you could get a mark of zero or get referred to the Dean for sanctions. If

the assessment is worth more than 10%, that means you have to meet with the Dean or the Dean's Designate. Again, there are hearings, sanctions and penalties that can be applied. Wouldn't you rather be spending your time elsewhere, rather than dealing with an academic offense?

A common statement heard frequently by instructors, professors and administrators is...But I didn't know I was committing an academic offense. But the bottom line is, you are accountable. As a student at UTM you are expected to know the rules, so pleading ignorance just isn't acceptable. So let's talk about the more positive stuff – how you can avoid plagiarism in your academic writing.

Referencing and Citing

A piece of academic writing needs to be your own thoughts, but when you get to the university level, your professors are going to expect more from you than just your own opinions. They are going to expect you to read and then to incorporate that reading into your own writing to help you to formulate and support your arguments. This means you are going to have to reference other people's work.

Why should I reference?

One of the main reasons why you should reference is that it actually shows your instructor that you have done the reading. Those who read should get credit for it. You want to show your instructor that you have actually read a wide range of sources and that you have been able to integrate those points effectively into your own argument. This is in addition to the fact that you should reference because sometimes the opinions you are giving aren't your own. And if you are using someone else's opinions, you should give them credit.

Right, so I should just reference everything I read right? No.

So, then when should I reference?

You should only include sources that you have actually read and that are relevant to your assignment topic. But that's a whole other story on how to write an academic paper. In order to avoid plagiarism, you should reference if you use someone else's idea in your assignment. You do not need to reference if what you are saying is common knowledge.

OK, so how do I know what's an opinion and what's common knowledge?

Common knowledge is a fact, so for example if you said, the capital of Canada is Ottawa, or that the *Mona Lisa* was painted by Leonardo da Vinci, or that World War I began in 1914 or that smoking is harmful...you wouldn't need to provide a reference. It's easily verified or taken for granted. You need to start referencing when you move away from these generic ideas to ones that identify the authors' position in some way. So if it's someone else's idea, you need a reference.

OK, so where do I start? How do I reference?

The first thing you should do is determine what referencing style your department uses. Many instructors will tell you in your course syllabus, but if you are unsure, ask your TA or your professor. Different referencing styles mean different formatting rules, so make sure to read up on the one that is applicable to you. If you are unsure, there are some really good guides available on the internet, Purdue OWL is excellent for APA, MLA and Chicago. But each referencing style has its own website with specific guidelines. Some are easier to make sense of than others.

In addition, there are different ways to incorporate other people's ideas into your own work. Typically, you're either using direct quotes or you are paraphrasing. If you are using direct quotes, you need quotation marks. You also need to know where the quote has come from – like the page number. Keeping good notes is important. For example, let's say you are reading a textbook and you come across a passage that you think is really important. You then copy down this passage into your notebook. Three weeks later, you are reading through your notes trying to write your assignment. You come across the passage and now you incorporate that into your assignment...but you don't reference it. That's plagiarism. Careful note taking would have ensured that you maintained your academic integrity.

In addition, think about the formatting of longer quotes. Some referencing styles want longer quotes to be separate from the other text and indented further from the margin. Check which rules apply to the referencing style you are using in order to ensure success.

Paraphrasing means to read someone else's work and then to highlight the main points in your own words. If you paraphrase, you still need to provide a reference. If you are highlighting a specific passage you will need the author, year of publication and the page number. If you are just generally discussing the work, usually just the author and the year will do. Again, check the guidelines of your referencing style to make sure you get it right. With paraphrasing, it is not ok to just change a few words and then say it is your own. You still need a reference. Always.

OK, so what should appear in my reference list or footnotes?

In your reference list or your footnotes, you should record the works cited in your paper. The general rule is, if the author appears in your paper, you should reference them in your bibliography, reference list or footnotes. If the author does not appear in your paper, but you have just done some additional reading, the reference does not need to appear. This is assuming that you have correctly cited the ideas in your paper to the appropriate authors.

Where can I go for help if I need it?

Have you talked to your Liaison Librarian? Every department at UTM has a Liaison specifically working on courses within that department. Your Liaison Librarian is going to have great tips on referencing specific to your department. The library website also has further tips on how to correctly cite your sources.

In addition, the RGASC offers workshops on Academic Integrity. Check our website for details.

We also offer one-on-one appointments on topics such as note taking and study skills. Having the right skill set can put you on the path to success. So the advice here is....stay away from conversations with the Dean about Plagiarism or Academic Integrity. Be accountable for your actions. Read the code of behavior on Academic Matters and know the rules.

Here are the final credits. Thanks for watching.