

Frequently Asked Questions About Plagiarism

This guide by Academic Research addresses common questions about plagiarism—what it is, how to avoid it, and what to do if you're accused. Understanding plagiarism and citation practices is essential for maintaining academic integrity.

When is it Considered Plagiarism?

Intentional plagiarism includes:

- Purchasing, stealing, or borrowing papers
- Copying online content (e.g., blogs or articles) without proper citation
- Hiring someone else to complete your work
- Using large portions of text from a source without quotation marks or attribution
- Reusing your own work for another assignment without permission (self-plagiarism)

Unintentional plagiarism can occur when:

- Citation rules are misunderstood or improperly applied
- A paraphrase closely resembles the original wording without being recognized
- A source is misattributed in larger projects involving multiple references

What Could Happen if I Plagiarize?

While some instructors may use accidental plagiarism as a teaching moment, others must report it immediately per department policy. Academic and professional consequences can include:

- Failing the assignment or course
- Disciplinary reports to the Dean of Students
- Notations on your academic transcript
- Dismissal from a program or university
- Legal consequences and termination in the workplace

To avoid plagiarism, always practice responsible citation and communicate openly with instructors if you're struggling to meet a deadline.

When Should I Cite a Source to Avoid Plagiarism?

You should credit the original source when:

- Quoting or paraphrasing text from books, articles, websites, or other media
- Referencing ideas shared in interviews or conversations
- Using diagrams, images, charts, or other visual content
- Sharing any form of reused digital media (e.g., video, audio, or graphics)

You do NOT need to cite:

- Your own experiences, ideas, results, or original creations

- Common knowledge or widely accepted facts (e.g., 'the sky is blue')
- Content that is generally accepted within your academic field (e.g., 'writing is a process' in composition studies)

What If I'm Accused of Plagiarism but Didn't Plagiarize?

It's important to keep copies of your work at all stages to protect your authorship. Follow these steps to help verify your work and avoid confusion:

- Save your drafts using numbered versions (e.g., draft01.doc, draft02.doc)
- Back up files in multiple secure locations: hard drives, USBs, cloud storage
- Email copies to yourself or a trusted person for record-keeping
- Use password protection on your devices and files
- Always log out or lock shared computers during breaks
- On platforms like Google Drive or Dropbox, avoid overwriting the original document—create separate versions