Academic Integrity: Avoiding Plagiarism[1]

Intellectual Honesty

Integrity, honesty, and trust are essential to a university's mission to pursue knowledge. The value of scholarship depends upon high standards of academic conduct which is why scholars—including students—must carefully acknowledge the work of others in their research. The reputation of the university community and the credits and degrees it awards rests on the integrity of its members: professors, professionals, staff, and students. Most students do not intentionally cheat, but sometimes they are not sure how to avoid plagiarism, or are too careless. The university owes it to honest and careful students to pursue and correct those who are not.

Students registered in Concordia University College course are considered to be responsible scholars. As such, you are expected to adhere rigorously to principles of intellectual integrity. Intellectual integrity is a valuable skill learned by successful students. It is important that you practice and strive to conform to the high standards of academic honesty so you avoid even unintentional errors in judgment; for example, being negligent about citing works, incorrectly documenting sources, or paraphrasing a source too closely or without acknowledgment.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is presenting another's work as if it was your own and it is intellectual dishonesty. Avoiding plagiarism is as simple as knowing three very simple rules. Whenever you submit your work for credit at any university, you should:

1. Clearly indicate direct quotations, that is, the words borrowed from another source. The academic conventions for this are very simple: enclose short quotations (4 lines or less) in "quotation marks," but set off a longer quotation (5 lines or more) as an indented block of text. Plagiarism can arise when someone paraphrases an original source too closely: it is dishonest and considered plagiarism to copy most of a passage and only change a few words or phrases.

2. Cite the source of direct quotations, paraphrases, summaries, and other information borrowed from other sources. There are various styles for formatting citations, but they all indicate to the reader exactly where to find the information cited, right down to a page. Making up citations is dishonest and an academic offence.

---

[1] This skills module was written by Dr. Marc Cels of Athabasca University. It has been adapted to fit the content of this course.

3. Attach a bibliography of works cited. There are various documentation styles, but each requires writers to provide precise publication information of sources in order for readers to locate the material. Falsifying a bibliography is an academic offence.

Common Questions about Plagiarism

Failing to follow these three rules—through negligence, carelessness, or as part of a deliberate attempt to deceive is considered and academic offence. Likewise, paying someone to write one's essay, or re-using a friend's essay is obviously an offence. There are, however, other forms of intellectual dishonesty that are not so well known.

What work should be cited and what work doesn't require citations are commonly asked questions by students. Students, like scholars, may build upon their previous research; however, reusing their own work submitted in another course is considered a form of plagiarism. If you wish to reuse even a portion of your previous academic work there must be enough new material for your instructor to justify giving credit for the new submission. Speak to your instructor first.

What about "common knowledge": does it require a citation? Common knowledge does not need to be cited. According to Joanne Buckley of McMaster University, "Common knowledge is information that readers should know and could easily confirm in many general sources."[2] This might include famous names and dates and events. Buckley acknowledges that it can be difficult to determine what constitutes common knowledge. Information that appears in several sources (at least three) without citations may be common knowledge. However, you should check those facts in a reliable reference and cite it. Interpretations or controversial information should also be cited, as should information that is an important part of the argument that supports your thesis.

Does information posted on the Internet have to be cited? Yes. Internet information, like any other source, must be cited accurately. The *Chicago Manual of Style* shows how.

How much help can you get writing an essay? According to Kate Turabian, "Most instructors encourage students to get general criticism and minor editing, but not detailed rewriting or substantive suggestions."[3] It is quite acceptable for an editor to discuss problems with the organization of your essay or suggest how to better present your argument. It is not acceptable for an editor to rewrite sections of your paper. When in doubt, speak to your instructor.

Students are encouraged to consult the complete definition of plagiarism and penalties in the *Concordia University College Calendar*, Student Academic Misconduct Policy.

---

[2] Joanne Buckley, *Checkmate: A Writing Reference for Canadians* (Scarborough, ON: Thompson/Nelson, 2003), 353-354.

[3] Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 80.

Detecting Plagiarism

Concordia professors are professional readers experienced with evaluating a student's work. They can detect the difference between the language of an expert scholar and a student. As they read each essay, instructors evaluate the use of sources, query sloppy documentation, and uncover deliberate attempts to deceive. Some instructors also consult databases, paper-mills, search- engines, or anti-plagiarism software. This vigilance ensures that honest and careful students get fair credit and those who are not are corrected.

Mastering the Techniques for Giving Fair Credit

Keep these tips in mind while researching and writing your essays:

1. The source of quotations, even a phrase or a few words, must always be clearly indicated. You must cite borrowed words, enclose them with quotation marks, or place them in a block quote. To do less is plagiarism.

2. Save different drafts of your document and notes, back up your files, and retain them until the course is finished. If there is a suspicion of misconduct it may be helpful for you to produce evidence of your work.

3. Keep your assignments in a safe place. Do not leave hard copies in public places (even recycling bins), on public computer terminals, or accessible through peer-to-peer networks. This leaves your work vulnerable to theft and the possibility of you being accused of plagiarizing from, or colluding with, the thief.

4. Sloppy note-taking is a common cause of inadvertent plagiarism. As you take notes, record information about sources and carefully distinguish between direct quotations and paraphrases. Avoid cutting and pasting blocks of online material into your essay. (See Benjamin's guide, chapter 4).

5. Budget your time wisely—when students are under pressure they are more likely to cut corners. If you are running out of time, discuss your options with your tutor who may have a solution you have not considered.

6. Buying an essay from a "paper mill" is a serious offence and very risky. Paper mills often sell their papers to universities and anti-plagiarism databases. Likewise, borrowing or buying all or parts of a paper written by another student can result in trouble for both parties.

References and Other Resources

Buckley, Joanne. *Checkmate: A Writing Reference for Canadians*. Scarborough, ON: Thompson/Nelson, 2003.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th ed. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.

Online Academic Integrity Tutorials

Acadia University: a fun, 10-minute animated tutorial:
http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/

Brock University: a short, interactive animated tutorial:
http://www.brocku.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/academic-integrity-tutorial

York University: a comprehensive, 30-40 minute tutorial on academic tutorial with case-studies and a self-test:
http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/index.html