

About Plagiarism: A Guide for College of Arts and Letters Students¹

What is plagiarism?

The ODU *Catalog* defines plagiarism as follows: “A student will have committed plagiarism if he or she reproduces someone else’s work without acknowledging its source; or if a source is cited which the student has not cited or used. Examples of plagiarism include: submitting a research paper obtained from a commercial research service, the Internet, or from another student as if it were original work; making simple changes to borrowed materials while leaving the organization, content, or phraseology intact; or copying material from a source, supplying proper documentation, but leaving out quotation marks. Plagiarism also occurs in a group project if one or more of the members of the group does none of the group’s work and participates in none of the group’s activities, but attempts to take credit for the work of the group.”

Hints for Avoiding Plagiarism:

* *More than three words copied in sequence is plagiarism.* This is ordinarily a good yardstick to use when wondering whether or not quotes are appropriate; they are, if you are copying more than three words in sequence that are not part of a common phrase (e.g. “up-to-date”).

* *One source is not “common knowledge.”* Common knowledge does not require citation. But something is not common knowledge if you have found just one source for the information.

* *When in doubt, cite!* If you have any doubt about whether or not to cite a source, err on the side of making the attribution.

* *If your co-author sounds surprisingly eloquent, make sure the contribution is his/her own.* We often work in groups and co-author papers and projects. You should ask the question of your co-author if you doubt the work is his/her own. In group work, you are responsible for the project/paper in its entirety.

* *Look away.* When you are writing, do not have open books or papers in front of you as you type. Read your sources, and then put what you have read into your own words.

* *Writing is hard work.* Paraphrasing is relatively easy, writing is hard. Learning to be a good writer is part of what your college education is about. Staring at an empty screen does become less daunting over time!

* *Just because it’s on the Internet, doesn’t mean it’s yours.* The Internet is a fantastic resource and search engines are terrific research tools. But what you find on the Internet was written by someone. You must cite Internet web sites, and if you use a quote, use appropriate quotation procedures.

* *Paraphrasing is more than changing a verb tense or reordering a list.* Essentially, paraphrasing is used to summarize another author’s text. A paraphrased passage must be cited.

* *Use a Style Guide.* Purchase a style guide and refer to it. Your instructor may suggest one that is specific to an academic discipline. You may also ask a reference librarian for recommendations.

The High Cost of Plagiarism

Plagiarism can ruin your reputation and cost you your professional career, along with the respect of your peers and family. Plagiarism at Old Dominion University is an act of academic dishonesty that has serious consequences. Note that plagiarism is specifically covered in the ODU Honor Pledge. Refer to your course syllabus and the Student *Handbook* and the Office of Student Affairs for details about sanctions and penalties for this behavior.

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¹ This information is adapted from a guide developed by Old Dominion University’s College of Business and Public Administration.