

## 1 – WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Students are constantly preparing assignments for assessment. Usually these are written assignments such as essays and reports, but they can also take other forms (for example, oral presentations). In most cases (except, perhaps, for certain kinds of personal or creative writing) the student will need to carry out wide research into a specific topic so he or she can write about, or present, the topic in an intelligent and informed way. What, then, is plagiarism in this context? Plagiarism is when a student includes in an assignment or presentation any content (phrasing, idea, statistic, diagram, etc.) that the student has gleaned from his/her reading or research, **without acknowledging the source of that content** (see the next section). In its simplest form, **plagiarism “is taking someone else’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own”** (Bretag, Crossman, & Bordia, 2009, p. 71). To do this is to engage in academic dishonesty, which is why Avondale College treats plagiarism very seriously, and why students should make every effort to avoid it. **IN THIS CONTEXT PLEASE NOTE THE FINAL COMMENT ON PAGE 7.**

Instances of plagiarism are often unintentional because the student does not fully understand what may or may not be plagiarism. However, this is not an excuse for committing plagiarism and it is every student’s responsibility to become fully informed about what constitutes plagiarism. So, what are the different activities that can be classed as plagiarism? According to Bretag et al. (2009), plagiarism “includes:

- Using someone else’s ideas or words without referencing.
- Using a direct quote without referencing...[and/or without] using ‘quotation marks’.
- Copying another student’s work and submitting it as your own.
- Submitting another student’s work in whole or in part.
- Submitting work that has been written by someone else on your behalf (this includes buying an essay or paying someone else to write the assignment for you).
- Using lecture/tutorial notes without referencing (including lecture notes from another course or institution).
- Paraphrasing work by only changing a few words (you still need to give the full reference for paraphrases).
- *Colluding*, when two or more students submit identical work, either in total or in part.” (p. 71).
- To the above I would add that plagiarism also includes presenting your work in an inflated way by, for example, listing in a bibliography any item you claim to have read, but which you have not read.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of every act that can be categorised as plagiarism.

**However, if you keep in mind the principle that plagiarism is any attempt to represent someone else’s work or ideas as your own, or to represent your own work in an inflated way, then you will be in a good place to recognise plagiarism and to avoid it.**

## 2 – AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

**2.1 – BY CAREFUL NOTE-TAKING:** A key way to avoid plagiarism is to be **particularly careful when taking and making notes from your sources**, and to be **just as careful when you draw from those notes as you write your first and subsequent drafts**. By doing this you will minimise the risk of falling into plagiarism because you will be working from an accurate record of those notes and will not be relying on memory.

At the very least, careful note-taking involves:

- ...faithfully representing the meaning and intent of the original passage. This is especially important when writing a paraphrase (see next section, page 3).
- ...using inverted commas (quotation marks) for **every** direct quote you take from your source/s.
- ...keeping a detailed bibliographical record of your sources so that you can properly cite your sources. This will also facilitate your return to any of your sources if you need to check on some or other detail.

When taking and using your notes you need to keep two things in mind.

**Firstly**, it is essential that you devise a practical note-taking method that allows you to:

- ...record your notes neatly and accurately and to categorise those notes (see textbox below). The note-taking method that you adopt is up to you, but at the very least it should be one that enables you to take and organise your notes in an orderly manner. Bits and pieces of paper floating around in a carry-bag will not do.
- ...include full bibliographical details (author, date, title of book/article/journal, etc., and publishing information) for each note you take. Also include the page number(s), or other location indicator such as the URL and paragraph number for a web-page, from which you took the note.

A note-taking method that I find very practical is to use an ordinary ruled notebook (usually 128 pages) similar to the ones I had in high school. It is helpful if the notebook has a ruled left-hand margin of about 2 cm; if it lacks a margin, simply rule it in yourself. I record full bibliographical details of my sources on the first few pages, leave a blank page, and enter my notes on the following pages. If I am researching two assignments simultaneously, I might use one notebook for both assignments; however, I keep the two assignments separate by starting the first assignment at the beginning of the notebook and work forwards, and starting the second assignment at the end of the notebook and work backwards. [Note: When working on a second assignment from the back of the notebook, I often turn the book upside down so that it is as though I am working forward in the usual way.]

When entering the bibliographical details of my sources in the notebook, I identify each source alphabetically (A, B, C, etc.). For example, in my note-taking for this plagiarism guide, my first three sources are recorded as follows:

- (A) Bretag, T., Crossman, J., & Bordia, S. (2009). *Communication skills*. North Ryde, Australia: McGraw-Hill Australia.
- (B) Neville, C. (2007). *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*. Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill Education.
- (C) Germov, J. (2000). *Get great marks for your essays* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Each note that I take from a particular source is identified by using A, B, C, etc. according to the alphabetical denotation of the specific source. For example, my first note for this exercise was taken from page 71 of Bretag et al., and I entered the note as follows:

A71: plagiarism “is taking someone else’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own.”  
[Note the use of inverted commas to indicate a direct quote.]

#### CATEGORISING YOUR NOTES

When you take notes it is more efficient to do so in a way that “keeps all related material together” (Germov, 2000, p. 71) as this allows you to easily locate particular notes when it is time to write up your material. A good way to categorise your note-taking is to use sub-headings to identify the main topics you intend to cover in your assignment, and then to classify your notes according to your sub-headings. For example, in planning this guide, and after some preliminary reading about plagiarism, I identified the following topics:

- The nature of plagiarism.
- How to avoid plagiarism.
- Note-taking as a means of avoiding plagiarism.
- Effective paraphrasing.
- Examples of “referencing in action” (Neville, 2007, chap. 10).

I then used these topics as the sub-headings for my note-taking, allocating a couple of pages in my notebook for each sub-heading.

**Secondly**, once you have taken notes and made connections between them (this is sometimes referred to as ‘making notes’ which is “an advanced process that involves reviewing, synthesising, [and] connecting [the] ideas” (Neville, 2007, p. 23) that are drawn from your notes) you will be ready to write your first draft. This is when **you need to be very careful about how you use the notes** because any carelessness might result in some form of plagiarism, even if the plagiarism is unintended. In particular, you will ensure that:

- ...you give due acknowledgement (by inserting an in-text citation in the appropriate place) for **every item or detail or content that you have taken from your sources**, and that
- ...any paraphrase you write is a faithful representation of the original content from which the paraphrase has been drawn (see the next paragraph), and that
- ...you use quotation marks (inverted commas) to indicate **every instance where you have included a direct quote from a source**, even if that quote is only a few words, and
- ...that you **transcribe direct quotes accurately and faithfully**.

**2. 2 – AVOIDING PLAGIARISM BY EFFECTIVE PARAPHRASING:** There are three ways that content from your sources can be written into your assignment: firstly, as a paraphrase (this is the most common way); secondly, as a direct quote; and thirdly, as a paraphrase that also includes a direct quote.

Before we focus directly on the matter of paraphrasing, I must remind you again that every time you include in your assignment any item or detail or content that comes from your sources, and whether you paraphrase that content or not, **you must acknowledge it with an appropriately placed in-text citation**. In addition to this, you must **also place any direct quote within inverted commas**.

One of the biggest concerns students have when dealing with written content that has been drawn from their sources is how to paraphrase that content, and to do so in a way that eliminates the risk of plagiarism. An appropriately written paraphrase helps to minimise plagiarism because it **rephrases the original content in the student’s own words** thereby reducing the chance that any of the original phrasing will slip through unattributed or unacknowledged. Effective paraphrasing is paraphrasing that:

- ...faithfully represents the meaning and intent of the original, and does not add to that meaning;
- ...uses the student’s own wording and phrasing. Bretag et al. (2009, p. 74) tell us that “[t]o paraphrase means to read and understand a piece of source material and then rewrite it in your own way.” Clearly, then, the key to writing a good paraphrase is to have a sound understanding of the original material in the first place. Such understanding is directly linked to the strength of your vocabulary, and so it makes sense to develop as wide a vocabulary as you can. You can do this by wide reading, by consulting a dictionary to learn the meaning of unfamiliar words, and by using these new words in your own writing and speaking so they can become embedded in your vocabulary.

Bretag et al., quoting Hamp-Lyons and Courter (1984, p. 3), say that “when paraphrasing you need to:

- change the grammatical structure;
  - rearrange the sequence of information;
  - use different words (except for specific terms);
  - use your own style; and
  - provide a reference to the original source” (p. 74).
- To the above I would add, as I said earlier, “that any paraphrase you write [must be] a faithful representation of the original content from which the paraphrase has been drawn.”

### 3 – CITING YOUR SOURCES CORRECTLY

Whenever you include in your paper any specific material you have drawn from a source (book, journal, audio-visual matter, the internet, lecture, et cetera), and which is not general knowledge (see the textbox on p. 4), you **MUST INCLUDE** an in-text citation to identify the source of the material.

**WHAT IS GENERAL KNOWLEDGE?**

General knowledge is knowledge that any well-read person is expected to know, or it is discipline-specific knowledge that an experienced student of that discipline would be familiar with. For example, a well-read person would know that the Second World War began in September 1939 and ended in August 1945. And an experienced education student would know that scaffolding is an instructional technique whereby teachers gradually withdraw close support during a typical teaching-learning exchange in order to encourage pupils towards self-sufficiency. **If you are unsure whether a particular detail is general knowledge or not, or is a detail a student of the discipline should know or not, then cite it in the usual way. It is better to be safe than sorry.**

Since most sources have an author and a date of publication, the default format for in-text citations in the APA style is the *author-date citation system* [e.g. (Neville, 2007, p. 23)]. Give the author's last name only. Do NOT include initials or titles such as Dr, Mr, or Mrs. Occasionally no author (or date) is listed for a source. In such cases, the format of the in-text citation will vary according to what details about the source are available. If you are uncertain about the proper format of any particular in-text citation, drop in and see a tutor or consult a website such as the Purdue Owl website. In my opinion it is one of the best websites for reference-related issues. It is comprehensive and easy to navigate, and the URL is: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

When you use information from a source, you should generally write it out in your own words. As we noted above, this is known as a *paraphrase*. However, there will be times when you will use the exact words that your source uses. This is a *direct quote*. Whenever you include a direct quote in your paper, **you must enclose that quote in inverted commas** (“...”). Always include the page number for direct quotes if the page number is given—for example: (Germov, 2000, p. 62). However, it is a good idea to include page numbers for all references (if available). If the information you are quoting or paraphrasing runs over two or more pages in your source, then write this as follows: (Germov, 2000, pp. 67-68).

Finally, every in-text citation in your paper **must be linked to its comprehensive reference entry in the reference list** at the end of your paper. The principal exceptions to this are citations from the Bible or Koran, and of personal communications (letters, messages, e-mails, lectures, and the like). The end-of-paper reference list gives complete bibliographical details for each source, such as the name of the author, the date of publication, the title of the book or article (and, if applicable, the name of the journal or newspaper or magazine, etc.), and publishing details.

**4 – SOME EXAMPLES OF REFERENCING**

On the next page are two readings (a journal article by O.F. Watts and a newspaper article by R. Marks) from which I quoted in a recent essay about the literacy levels of first-year university students. On the following page (page 6) I have written the actual essay paragraph in which I quote Watts and Marks.

To help you identify my in-text citations and the original material to which these citations refer (that is, the source for the particular in-text citation), I have colour-coded them—yellow, green, blue, pink, and grey. For example, the yellow-highlighted sentence in Watts' article on page 5 is the original source for my yellow-highlighted citation in the paragraph on page 6.

In working through this section, I would like you to do three things:

- **First**, read each of the two articles on page 5 to get an idea of their context.
- **Second**, read my essay paragraph on the next page to get an idea of its context.
- **Finally**, compare each set of coloured sections (yellow with yellow, green with green, blue with blue, pink with pink, and grey with grey) and note how I have cited the original material that I read in the articles by Watts and Marks. In particular, you should note that when I quote the actual wording of Watts or Marks that I place those words within inverted commas (“...”). Such quotes are known as direct quotes and should **always** appear within inverted commas (which are also known as quotation marks). The only exception to this is the block quote, an example of which appears in the final citation of my essay paragraph on the next page; it is coloured grey.

Recent reports into teacher education have indicated the need to increase the language competency of teachers. **The Beazley Report (1984) in Western Australia recommended that the literacy standards of teachers be improved.** The problem faced by tertiary lecturers in helping students overcome their difficulties with language is well illustrated in the many examples of poor syntax, grammatical and spelling errors, and inappropriate punctuation, that occur in the essays of their students. When the lecturer draws attention to these errors he is confronted by the almost total ignorance of the students. The correction of such common errors as those of noun/verb and noun/pronoun agreement does not proceed very far if the students do not know what a noun is.

What is so disturbing about the examples given is that they were taken from several classes of final year students less than three months from their appointment to their own classes. How can the community expect a raising of standards of literacy if the teachers who will be teaching the English curriculum cannot themselves manipulate the language? **The problem then becomes circular. If the teachers graduate from their tertiary institutions with a paucity of language skills then they cannot be held responsible when the products of their teaching return equally deficient.** Teacher education courses have notoriously low failure rates in most universities. Teacher educators have long held the belief that the qualities that go to constitute a good teacher should not be measured on scales that prevail in other areas of the university. The affective qualities might outweigh the cognitive, but is society willing to continue to accept that being a “good” teacher is sufficient to excuse being a poor spelling teacher or even a teacher who cannot spell? If teachers are to assist their pupils to develop language competencies, then they need to have those competencies themselves.

From: **Watts, O.F. (1991). Who is teaching our children to spell? The literacy crisis in teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 16(1), p. 24.**

Anybody who has taught undergraduate university humanities courses during the past decade knows the depth of Australia’s literary deficit.

For years, tutors and lecturers who grade written work by first-year students, have been shaking their heads at students’ inability to write.

I don’t mean an inability to build and sustain complex arguments through 5000-word essays, or an inability to critically analyse discursive constructs in order to identify dominant ideological frames.

**What I mean is that a majority of 18-year-olds who enrol in most first-year humanities subjects are unable to reliably construct a simple sentence.** Many genuinely struggle to make themselves understood in written form.

**In reality, a substantial number of 18-year-olds beginning university degrees are functionally illiterate.** In a knowledge economy which relies increasingly on technical know-how and information exchange, people who don’t have the ability to express themselves in written form are at an immense disadvantage.

After 12 years of structured education, widespread functional adult illiteracy suggests a major failing in school education. What are students doing at school if they’re not being taught how to structure sentences and paragraphs in such a way that they can be understood? And how are they winning places at universities?

The problem is deepening. As a society we undervalue teaching to the point that we allow it to be the default profession for university students who underperform in their respective degrees. And the scores a year-12 student needs to get into a teaching degree are not high. So then we consign the next generation of children to be taught by twenty-somethings whose own literacy skills are mediocre at best.

From: **Marks, R. (2012, December 13). Time to declare war on illiteracy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [www.smh.com/au/national/education/time-to-declare-war-on-illiteracy-20121213-2bbp1.html](http://www.smh.com/au/national/education/time-to-declare-war-on-illiteracy-20121213-2bbp1.html)**

Below is the paragraph from my essay.

---

Concern about the literacy levels of some Australian teachers is not new. For example, in 1984 the Western Australian Beazley Report “recommended that the literacy standards of teachers be improved” (Watts, 1991, p. 24). Watts went on to say that the “problem ... becomes circular” because when graduate teachers have poor language skills “they cannot be held responsible when the products of their teaching return equally deficient” (p. 24). More recently, Dr Russell Marks (2012) of La Trobe University flagged the inability of many 18-year-olds in first-year humanities subjects “to reliably construct a simple sentence” (para. 4). He goes on to say that a significant number of these students are practically illiterate (para. 5). Dr Marks also commented on the circular nature of the problem, saying that

[t]he problem is deepening.... And the scores a year-12 student needs to get into a teaching degree are not high. So then we consign the next generation of children to be taught by twenty-somethings whose own literacy skills are mediocre at best. (2012, para. 6)

---

**Please note the following:**

1. Whenever a citation includes a string of two or more words that are taken directly from the original source, those words are enclosed within inverted commas. The first three citations (yellow, green, blue) are examples of this. [Please note that the two-word term “Beazley Report” is a direct quote from the original source, but that it is not placed in inverted commas in my paragraph above. This is because the term is one that is generally known by persons who are familiar with the field of education, and therefore it does not need to be placed in inverted commas. This is also the case with most proper nouns, such as Western Australia, London’s Tower Bridge, Martin Luther King, and similar terms which an educated person would be expected to know.]
2. When a citation has been paraphrased (that is, it is written in the essay-writer’s own words, rather than the actual words of the source), then it does not appear within inverted commas. The fourth citation (pink) is an example of this, and therefore none of the words are within inverted commas. Also note how I have introduced this in-text citation by writing “He goes on to say....” Clearly, the term ‘he’ refers to Russell Marks.
3. The final in-text citation (grey) is known as a block quotation. A block quotation is any direct quotation (that is, it uses the actual words from the original source) that is 40 words or longer. In this particular example, the quotation contains 42 words. Note that this quote has NOT been placed in inverted commas. Also note that the whole quote has been left-indented by the same amount (1.27cm) as the first line of the paragraph.
4. Finally, note that I have inserted an ellipsis (...) in the second in-text citation (green) and also in the final in-text citation (grey). If you carefully check these two in-text citations against the original sources on page 5, you will see why I have inserted the ellipsis on each occasion. [If you cannot see why, then please come and see me, or contact me by e-mail.]

## Reference List

- Bretag, T., Crossman, J., & Bordia, S. (2009). *Communication skills*. North Ryde, Australia: McGraw-Hill Australia.
- Germov, J. (2000). *Get great marks for your essays* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Marks, R. (2012, December 13). Time to declare war on illiteracy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from [www.smh.com/au/national/education/time-to-declare-war-on-illiteracy-20121213-2bbp1.html](http://www.smh.com/au/national/education/time-to-declare-war-on-illiteracy-20121213-2bbp1.html)
- Neville, C. (2007). *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*. Maidenhead, England: McGraw- Hill Education.
- Watts, O.F. (1991). Who is teaching our children to spell? The literacy crisis in teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 16(1), p. 24.

---

**Please note the following:**

1. The Reference List is always arranged alphabetically.
  2. The second and subsequent lines in each entry are indented.
  3. The titles of books, magazines/newspapers, and journals are always italicised.
  4. The titles of books and articles are written in what is called sentence-style. That is, the first word in the title and all proper nouns always begin with an upper-case letter. All other words begin with a lower-case letter.
  5. The use of correct punctuation is critical. Make sure that you know exactly how to punctuate each element.
  6. The dates for newspapers and magazines usually include year, month, day.
- 

## FINAL COMMENT

Please note that this document ("Plagiarism and how to avoid it") is a supplementary source about plagiarism and is not to be seen as the final word on plagiarism. If you are in any doubt about any aspect of plagiarism, you should consult Avondale's Academic Integrity Policy which is the authoritative document on various aspects of academic integrity, including the need to avoid all forms of plagiarism.

A copy of this policy is on the Library website. Go to the Library home page where you will see the heading 'Academic Integrity', below which is the sub-heading 'Plagiarism'. Open this plagiarism link which takes you to a page which includes a short paragraph on the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of our lives, but specifically in our academic pursuits. The paragraph includes a link to Avondale's Academic Integrity Policy, and also links to Copyright, Turnitin, and Plagiarism. You are urged to become familiar with the information found on these links.