

What is Plagiarism?

The aim of writing an academic paper – and this also refers to any other course work¹ – is to convince fellow scholars of the validity of your own opinion or viewpoint. Your readers will assume that the argumentation is yours and they will expect you to show reasons for, sometimes proof of, the legitimacy of your case. You will, however, almost always find it necessary, and it is perfectly justified, to use the ideas of other people, especially other scholars who have researched your topic before, and you will use their ideas and sometimes their actual words in building up your own argument. Whenever you do this, you have a moral and professional responsibility to tell your reader clearly and precisely what ideas and which words you are using and where you have found them, in other words, to indicate your sources. Failure to do so is called ‘plagiarism’ and is an extremely serious offence, the consequences of which are explained below.

Plagiarism is deceitful and dishonest. It must, therefore, be absolutely clear to you what plagiarism means. In the *MLA Handbook* plagiarism is defined and explained as follows:

Plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person’s ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person’s work constitutes intellectual theft. Passing off another person’s ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud. (Gibaldi 52)

There are various types of plagiarism, from using someone else’s *exact words*, to paraphrasing or using someone else’s *ideas*. Some examples of what plagiarism is and is not are given below.

As a student new to academic studies you may find you are plagiarising without realising what you are doing. You may be accustomed to using material taken from various sources, for example, books in the library or material downloaded from the internet and no one has informed you that you are duty bound to show your reader exactly where you have taken this material from. Plagiarised passages may involve particular words, whole sentences or particular expressions; they may include someone’s argument or line of argument; they may include another person’s theory or terminology. This also applies to oral presentations in class. It is even an offence to use your own material, for which you have already received credit, in a new paper, without stating that you are doing so.

Furthermore, as a learner of a foreign language you may even find yourself using special phrases that you have learnt almost unconsciously from a book or from the internet. This might also be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism does not include references to knowledge which would be shared by any educated English native speaker (e.g. that William the Conqueror invaded Britain in 1066, or well-known proverbs or famous quotations). If you are not sure about what constitutes plagiarism in such cases, please ask your teachers. Ultimately, the most important criterion is honesty: do not present material which is not your own as if it were.

¹ The following information about plagiarism applies to ***all course work***, e.g. academic papers, thesis, presentations, course assignments, reports, surveys, etc.

To avoid plagiarising, you should keep detailed notes of anything you read when preparing your paper and make sure that when you use this material you acknowledge it, firstly, in your own text, and, secondly, in your Works Cited (literature) or References (linguistics) at the end of your paper (see MLA Handbook/APA for details). Every paper handed in for assessment must include the following declaration signed by the student:

Declaration

I hereby state that I have read the section on plagiarism on the Department's website and I confirm that I have complied with the requirements.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Consequences of Plagiarism

1. All cases of plagiarism are reported to the Head of Department.
2. The Head of Department makes a decision in consultation with the instructor. In all cases the paper, assignment or course work will have to be revised. Depending on the severity of the case, there are additional options:
 - Grade deduction.
 - The course work is failed, i.e. the student has to write a new paper.
 - The student has to redo the course.
 - The student is given the mark 1, which is reserved for cases of deception (RSL Art. 25).
3. Unless it is a very minor case of plagiarism (e.g. a paper in which all sources but one are acknowledged and which is otherwise very carefully written), the student will have to talk to the Head of Department, who may want to involve the Dean. All but very minor infringements on the plagiarism rules will result in a formal warning.
4. The name of the student will be entered in the Department's student records for strictly internal use only. All instructors will be informed about this so that the offender can be closely monitored.
5. If plagiarism is committed in a final thesis or if a student is caught plagiarising a second time, he or she may be excluded from the study programme (RSL Art 25.2).

Examples

Note: all correct examples follow the bibliographical style used in literary studies; linguistics uses a different bibliographical style, the author-date style, e.g. (Shklovsky, 1988, p. 20) rather than (Shklovsky 20) for student version 1 below. Consult the *APA* for information on citing in linguistics.

Original Passage (by Victor Shklovsky, a member of the Russian Formalist school of literary theory, who seeks to define the nature and purpose of art):

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

Student Version 1:

Early twentieth-century critics sought to define the nature and purpose of art. For the Russian Formalists, art enables us to “recover the sensation of life;” it refreshes our experience of the world and “exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (Shklovsky 20).

Comment: Correct. The student uses his or her own words in order to paraphrase Shklovsky’s argument, puts the original words in quotation marks, and indicates the source. He or she uses Shklovsky’s opinion for the development of his or her own thesis.

Student Version 2:

Shklovsky argues that “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. [...] The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (20).

Comment: Correct. The quotation marks acknowledge the words of the original writer and the information in bracket tells us the source of the quote. (The complete reference must be given in the works cited section).

Student Version 3:

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make the stone *stony*. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar.’

Comment: Obvious plagiarism. Word-for-word repetition without acknowledgment.

Student Version 4:

Art enables us to regain the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things more vividly, to make the stone *stony* again for us.

Comment: Still plagiarism. A few words have been changed or omitted, but the student is not using his or her own language.

Student Version 5:

Art makes the world unfamiliar and thus refreshes our perception and experience of it.

Comment: Still plagiarism. The student uses his or her own words but fails to indicate the source of the idea. Adding (Shklovsky 20) before the full stop would make this a perfectly correct example.

Student Version 6:

Art helps us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony (Shklovsky 20).

Comment: Still plagiarism. Merely indicating from where you have taken the idea alone is not enough. The language is the original author's, and only quotation marks around the quoted passage (plus the reference in brackets) would be correct.

Works Cited

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Shklovsky, Victor. "Art as Technique." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. New York: Longman, 1988. 15-30. Print.