

## Transcript of Plagiarism Lesson: The numbers correspond to the slide numbers.

1. **Title:** Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism. Welcome to this Voicethread lesson on plagiarism. My name is Simon Stan, and I am a senior tutor at The Write Place, the writing help centre at King's. I am happy to share with this resource that I created for The Write Place, along with Vidya Natarajan. This transcript has the slide numbers on it, so please follow along. There is also a handout available on the Write Place's Resources page.
2. **In all likelihood, at some point, you have asked yourself: "Am I Plagiarizing?"** The fear of committing plagiarism sometimes prevents good writers from finishing their assignments. By understanding what plagiarism is, by being aware that definitions of "plagiarism" vary, and by developing certain research and writing skills, you will avoid both committing this academic offence and worrying excessively about it.
3. The term plagiarism (from a Latin word that means 'to kidnap') "is the presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own," according to *The Little, Brown Handbook*.<sup>1</sup> The use of other people's words without acknowledgement was not always considered an offence; it is likely that it became a problem once people began to make money from publishing their ideas, and lost money if other people "stole" those ideas or the words they were expressed in. In some parts of the world, even today, the idea that people can "own" words is viewed as odd, but in North American universities, it is considered important to respect the intellectual property of others. You must, therefore, always apply the skills described below to avoid plagiarism.
4. You may have been in the embarrassing situation of having a teacher accuse you of plagiarism. You probably thought: But I Didn't Mean to Plagiarize! After all, one's intentions make a difference to whether or not something is seen as an offence. It is helpful to be aware that your professors too usually distinguish between what they see as unintentional plagiarism and intentional plagiarism.

Most of us recognize when people commit **intentional plagiarism**. Buying an essay on the internet, copying a whole passage from a source without citing it, or submitting someone else's assignment as your own are considered serious and deliberate **academic offences**.<sup>2</sup> Such offences damage the university's reputation as an institution that gives out credentials to qualified persons and can result in severe consequences.

If you keep poor notes and have trouble paraphrasing or summarizing arguments, you may commit **unintentional plagiarism**.<sup>3</sup> You may accidentally forget to cite a source. You may forget to put quotation marks around a sentence you have copied from an author. You may forget that a passage you have put into your notebook was actually copied directly from a source—you may think you had written it. You may find it difficult to think of a different way of rewording an idea you want to borrow from an author; so your paraphrase may sound too similar to the original.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Ramsey Fowler, Jane E. Aaron, and Murray McArthur, *The Little, Brown Handbook* (Toronto: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), 555-6.

<sup>2</sup> Fowler, 555-6.

<sup>3</sup> Fowler, 556.

5. The writing scholar Rebecca Moore Howard refers to inadequate paraphrase as “**patchwriting**,” and notes that it is very common among beginner writers. And did you know that submitting the same essay (even if it is your own work) for two different courses is also an offence? Copying and pasting a passage from your essay for *Course A* into your assignment for *Course B* can result in an accusation of **self-plagiarism**.

International students adjusting to westernized universities will need to adapt to new citation standards which may vary from their native culture’s academic practice.

6. If ever you do feel tempted to copy a whole passage from a source without citation, perhaps thinking to yourself, “They’ll never know I copied this”, you should know how inevitable it is that a professor will find out you plagiarized. In most courses, your assignments, essays, and lab reports are reviewed by **plagiarism detection software** such as turnitin.com. Significant similarity between your work, past student work and published papers already in the database will be flagged, alerting your professor to your academic dishonesty. Even without plagiarism detection programs, your professors can almost always tell, by noticing a shift in tone and language, that particular uncited passages have been copied from another source. It is better to write something in your own words, even if it sounds less than perfect, than to borrow other people’s words without acknowledgement. And ultimately, the point is not about not being caught. If you plagiarize, are you doing the learning you came to university to do? Focus on developing skills and genuinely mastering the content of your courses, not just on grades; you will find yourself avoiding the dangerous shortcuts.
7. So if you are wondering, “What happens if I get caught plagiarizing?”<sup>4</sup> you should know about the consequences of plagiarism. King’s University College, like most institutions in North America, cares deeply about academic integrity, and takes scholastic offences seriously. You must have read through the information about scholastic offences in your course outlines’ Course Policies section. As Western’s statement on academic offences notes, plagiarism challenges the integrity of the university’s academic standards, and as such, academic dishonesty undermines the evaluation process and integrity of University degrees.<sup>5</sup> While instances of unintentional and minimal plagiarism might be forgiven or dealt with by education, intentional plagiarism is usually considered a serious scholastic offence that merits punishment.

If a student at King’s is suspected of plagiarism, depending on the severity of the plagiarism offence, penalties can range from a reprimand, to a failed assignment or course grade, to academic suspension or even expulsion. Repeated offences are taken into consideration when determining penalties.<sup>6</sup> There may be longstanding repercussions associated with plagiarism if the offence is intentional and serious. A scholastic offence, such as plagiarism, may be recorded on a

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<sup>4</sup> The information from this section comes from King’s “Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students.” You can read the document here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> For King’s “Statement on Academic Offences,” please refer to <https://pryan2.kingsfaculty.ca/course-sites/kuc-academic-policies-and-information/>

<sup>6</sup> For further information, please see the “Penalties” section within the “Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students” document.

student's internal, electronic record, according to the Calendar. Note that a student may request that the scholastic offence be removed upon successful program completion. The relevant Department Chair and Dean will consult whether to grant such a request. However, severe offences, such as suspension and expulsion, cannot be rescinded from an academic record.

Who determines the plagiarism offence? To quote the section on Scholastic Offences in Western's *Academic Handbook*, "In most cases, evidence of a possible scholastic offence in a course will have been discovered by, or brought to the attention of, the course instructor. In these situations the instructor will meet with the student if practicable and appropriate. In all other cases the allegation will be reviewed by the appropriate University official." University officials include the relevant Department Chair or Dean of Faculty.

8. So we come to the million-dollar question: how do you avoid plagiarism? Let's answer that by taking a look at what does NOT need citing. First of all, you usually need not cite what is considered common knowledge. **Common Knowledge** is information known to most people. Most students and scholars of history know that the French Revolution took place between 1789 and 1799.<sup>7</sup> But what if you're unsure whether the process of photosynthesis is common knowledge? Simply cite it. In some cases, it's best to err on the side of caution. The worst-case scenario is that your work appears more substantially sourced and well-researched! **Independent Knowledge** consists of your own words and arguments and need not be cited. However, we often reach our conclusions from the helpful research of others. **Another person's independent knowledge** must always be cited, whether referred to, paraphrased or quoted.<sup>8</sup>
9. Almost everything else you borrow from a research source **MUST BE CITED**. This is how you avoid plagiarism. So you must learn to quote, summarize and paraphrase with correct citations both within the text of your essay, and at the end of your essay, through a Reference list, Bibliography, or Works Cited page<sup>9</sup> You need to master the specific citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) that you have been asked to use.
10. Here are some examples of paraphrases that may be considered plagiarized due to their striking similarity to the original idea. The original quotation comes from Jessica Mitford's *Kind and Usual Punishment*.

**Original**            The character and mentality of the keepers may be of more importance in understanding prisons than the character and mentality of the kept.

**Plagiarized**        But the character of prison officials (the keepers) is more important in understanding prisons than the character of the prisoners (the kept).

**Plagiarized**        In understanding prisons, we should know more about the character and mentality of the keepers than of the kept.

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<sup>7</sup> Fowler, 557.

<sup>8</sup> Fowler, 557-8.

<sup>9</sup> Examples shown come from *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 558-60.

The words underlined highlight the words taken directly from Mitford’s original sentence. Even beyond the stolen words (character, mentality, understanding, keepers, kept, etc.), much of the combination of words remain the same: “is more important in understanding prisons than the character.” What’s more, the student retained the sentence arrangement and failed to cite Mitford.

11. Here, on the other hand, are some examples of properly paraphrased and quoted sentences:

**Paraphrase** One critic of the penal system maintains that we may be able to learn more about prisons from the psychology of the prison officials than from that of the prisoners (Mitford 9).

**Quotation** According to one critic of the penal system, “The character and mentality of the keepers may be of more importance in understanding prisons than the character and mentality of the kept” (Mitford 9).

Both examples give credit to Mitford’s statement, citing her name and page number location. The paraphrased example was careful not to repeat key words from the original source, yet the meaning is clear. The “importance in understanding prisons” from the original sentence becomes “that we may be able to learn more about prisons,” and “keepers” and the “kept” become “the prison officials” and the “prisoners,” respectively. The quotation example elegantly integrates the original sentence into the paraphrased version and ensures that each word is accurately quoted.

12. Here is some final advice on avoiding plagiarism.

**Start your work early.** Affording yourself the necessary time to complete an assignment means you’re less likely to commit unintentional plagiarism. Completing a paper or assignment always takes longer than you anticipate. Parkinson’s Law posits that “work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.”<sup>10</sup> If you designate a week to write a rough introductory paragraph, it will take a week. But if you designate thirty minutes to write the paragraph, it will take thirty minutes. Beyond that thirty minutes you will have time enough to improve upon what you have written—what’s important is that you have written it. Alongside starting work earlier, **ensure you get enough sleep and eat healthy meals.** If you’re more alert and well rested, you’re less likely to make careless mistakes, such as neglecting to include an important word in a quoted passage.

13. **Contact your professor** to ensure your paper follows proper citation style guidelines. Your professor cares about your success and would be glad to answer any questions.

14. **Consult reputable sources.** OWL Purdue is a fantastic resource for in-text and bibliographical citation information. For useful information from writing papers to avoiding plagiarism, *The Brief Penguin Handbook* is available to peruse at The Write Place.

**Organize your sources** at the beginning of the research and essay writing process as a rudimentary references page. Consider highlighting your sources—whether in a word document or notebook—with colour themes for complimentary sources. You might even consider printing an article and highlighting relevant passages as you read along. (Cite, Penguin Handbook 256)

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<sup>10</sup> Parkinson, C. Northcote, *Parkinson's law: The Pursuit of Progress* (London: John Murray, 1957).

- 15. Collect relevant quotations** beneath your organized citations. You may have opinions that support, contend or elaborate upon the author’s quotations; simply jot down your comments beneath them and refer to them once you begin the essay writing process. Often, these spontaneous comments become valuable and persuasive talking points for your paper. Carefully designate with quotation marks and/or colour-schemes with what belongs to the author and what belongs to you. If your comments and quotations are carefully organized, you not only prevent unintentional plagiarism, but the essay writing process itself becomes uncomplicated and hopefully, enjoyable. Who knows? You might return to these sources and quotations for a future paper, and a well-organized references document could ease future writing projects.
- 16. Make checklists and partition tasks.** Making checklists and completing simple tasks encourages progress and feels downright rewarding. Here are some example checklists you might include:

  - a. Brainstorm a title which reflects keywords from thesis.
  - b. Review transitions between paragraphs.
  - c. Double-check that I follow proper APA in-text citation.
  - d. Ensure in-text citations have equivalent bibliography citation.
  - e. The word “impactful” seems too vague here; consider a more accurate substitute.
- 17. Make an appointment** with The Write Place. We are always happy to help and would love to read your paper! Whether its brainstorming ideas, feedback on argument and grammar, or a second opinion on graduate proposals, we’re delighted to help at any stage of the writing process.