

## Being an information literate researcher: tips for avoiding plagiarism

### General points

- » Postgraduate research students in the UK are expected to understand the concept of plagiarism and their own responsibilities in avoiding it.
- » Be aware that as an author you can also become a victim of plagiarism.
- » Acknowledge all assistance provided during the preparation of your dissertation or thesis.
- » Many publishers (e.g. Emerald) will not accept papers for publication from authors (or co-authors) who have been found guilty of plagiarism in the past.
- » Recently, several prominent researchers have lost their jobs because of plagiarism offences which took place in their past, when they were postgraduate researchers.
- » Encourage your peers to adopt a responsible attitude towards plagiarism.
- » Don't believe people who tell you "you won't get caught" - it's not true and certainly not worth the risk!

### Finding out about plagiarism

- » Ask for advice from your supervisor and from library staff at your institution.
- » Look at the JISC-iPAS website for detailed advice, links to quizzes and examples of good practice.
- » Check out acceptable and unacceptable examples of borrowing or paraphrasing texts.
- » Check out your institution or professional association's guidelines for citing sources.

### Gathering information

- » Try to develop structured note taking, e.g. in tabular form, recording the source, quotations (marked as such), paraphrasing (marked as such) plus your own thoughts and ideas.
- » Keep careful track of references during the reading and note-taking stage. Note page numbers. Download references to bibliographical management software like EndNote. Alternatively, use 20 cm X 12 cm record cards. Be consistent and accurate. Don't rush it!
- » Keep copies of the articles you use whenever possible so you can refer back to them for cross checking.
- » When interviewing, if you are note-taking, differentiate between what the interviewee says and what you perceive.
- » When interviewing, if recording, ensure the transcript is marked clearly in a way that differentiates between what your interviewee said and your own comments. It is best to do this as soon as possible after the interview.

*For details of more tip sheets in this series see [www.jiscpas.ac.uk](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk)*

## Managing your research

- » Engage in careful time management. Structure your time and the research steps you will take.
- » Keep a research log or diary as you progress with details, e.g. of search terms used, sources retrieved.
- » As you progress, be sure to maintain different versions of your work. Retaining earlier drafts/versions helps you check the originality of your work and is proof of your developing thoughts.
- » Take care when proof-reading. Cross check notes and sources to ensure you have cited sources adequately and accurately.
- » Information in electronic form is much easier to store and organise for later review than printed material.
- » Take care when co-authoring or collaborating with others, especially when trading text. If you co-author is found guilty of plagiarism, you will be too.

## Writing up

- » Use the style guide provided by your institution in a consistent fashion.
- » Give credit where it is due whatever the format, for example written, transcribed from interview, diagrammatic representation, data from a data archive, ideas or electronically available media.
- » Differentiate between common knowledge which you are free to use and original ideas which are the intellectual property of others. [Generally speaking, you can regard something as common knowledge if you find the same information undocumented in at least five credible sources.] But, when in doubt, cite.
- » Develop a method of differentiating, in your notes, between other people's words; other people's ideas; and your own insights. Use, e.g., highlighter pens to clearly differentiate, or 'comments' boxes if you are using a word processor.
- » Take care when paraphrasing or summarising, e.g. try paraphrasing the text without recourse to the original, relying only on your memory and notes.
- » Use quotation marks when using exact phrases from the original text or around unique words or phrases that you wish to retain from the original.
- » Overuse of quotes can weaken your credibility and impede your own writing style. Try to achieve a balance.
- » Take care when cutting and pasting from electronic sources. Ensure you assign details of sources at the cutting and pasting stage.
- » Beware of technology-assisted plagiarism. If you use virtual communities of practice or discussion lists to exchange ideas and information, ensure you give credit to originators of ideas.

Text supplied by Pat Gannon-Leary and Moira Bent, co-authors of *Providing effective library services for research* (Facet Publishing, 2007).