



Plagiarism: What is it?

Overview

Plagiarism! It's a word that strikes fear into many students and a lot of energy is spent trying to avoid it. But let's demystify this a bit so that when you work on a writing assignment, you can spend your time and energy on what you should be doing rather than on what you shouldn't be doing.

First, a definition: plagiarism is the act of using someone else's words or ideas without attributing the source. Words AND ideas are, according to this view, things to be "owned"; they are intellectual property. And, as with other things that are owned, there are proper and improper ways to use those things. To properly take someone's physical property, requires that we ask permission. To properly take someone's intellectual property requires that we provide attribution. And we use conventions to provide this attribution that we call citation. To avoid plagiarism is to use an appropriate citation convention to provide all the necessary attribution in your written work, to tell your reader what words and ideas in your paper came from another source.

Of course there is plagiarism that happens intentionally – when, for a variety of reasons, we knowingly submit written work belonging to someone else and claim it as our own. Examples of intentional plagiarism include: copying and pasting from online sources, purchasing an essay, or putting your name on a paper that someone else wrote. These are instances of calculated wrong-doing and there is absolutely no tolerance for that kind of behavior. Avoiding that kind of plagiarism is simple: don't do it. We appreciate the pressure that many students feel when faced with deadlines on assignments, but there is support here at Ryerson to help you cope with that. Taking what seems like the easy way out by intentionally plagiarizing work is not the way to go and will make matter much worse for you.

Most plagiarism happens un-intentionally when we fail to use citation conventions appropriately in our written work.

Avoiding this kind of plagiarism is more difficult and requires five things:

- Plan out your assignment, leave time for a first and second draft. Use the [Ryerson Assignment calculator](http://apps.library.ryerson.ca/assignment-calculator/) (<http://apps.library.ryerson.ca/assignment-calculator/>) to help you get started.

- Put ideas into your own words. Learn to paraphrase - don't use the same sentence structure, same order of ideas or same words. Using 3 or more words from a source requires a citation.
- Be aware of the purpose of citation and be diligent at all times about the requirement to cite your sources.
- Learn the conventions of the citation style required by your professor – is it APA, MLA, Chicago?
- Double check with others that you have done things correctly before submitting your work – talk to your professor and book a Writing Support appointment

How We Can Help

We can be a very valuable resource for you as you think about and learn citation conventions. We will help you to better plan your writing assignments and cope with the associated stress that sometimes leads to poor decision making. We will help you to learn the various citation styles you are likely to encounter.

In addition to our one-on-one support, we have a number of workshops and writing groups that will help you to learn, not only the citation conventions, but how to use and integrate research material more effectively in your writing. We also have many style guides here at the Writing Centre that you can refer to and we can help you to discover useful online resources for APA, MLA and other citation styles.

Finally, and perhaps most noteworthy, are our workshops and presentations, both in person and online, on the topic of avoiding plagiarism. We offer these as a core service of the Student Learning Support as well as collaborating with other campus partners – faculty, the Library, etc. Take advantage of these early on in your time here and get acquainted with the issues of plagiarism before it ever becomes a problem.

Resources

- Visit www.ryerson.ca/sls for a repository of [Online Resources](#) and [workshops](#)
- Use the [RU Search Essay Tutorial](#) (<http://library.ryerson.ca/guides/rusearch/>) – an online tutorial providing step-by-step on how to develop, organize, research and write your essay.
- Use the [Ryerson Assignment Calculator](#) (<https://goo.gl/gtVezn>)
- Ryerson's [Office of Academic Integrity website](#) is full of useful resources related to our code of academic conduct (Policy 60) <http://www.ryerson.ca/academicintegrity/>