

C2.1 – Avoiding Plagiarism

Bailey, S. (2022). *Academic writing for university students*. Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003010210>

Plagiarism is a concern for both teachers and students, but it can be avoided by clearly understanding the issues involved. In the English-speaking academic world it is essential for students to use a wide range of sources in their written work, and to acknowledge these sources following academic conventions – otherwise there is a risk of plagiarism. This unit introduces the techniques needed to do this. Further practice is provided in Units 1.7 References and Quotations and 1.8 Summarising and Paraphrasing.

1 Acknowledging sources

If you borrow from or refer to the work of another person, you must show that you have done this by providing the correct acknowledgement.

- Read this paragraph from an article called 'The morale effects of pay inequality' by Emily Breza, Supreet Kaur and Yogita Shamdasani (2018).

We find evidence that relative pay enters workers' utility function, with the potential for sizable negative impacts on labor supply and group cohesion. However, our findings indicate that pay inequality in itself is not necessarily problematic – at least not if it is clearly justified in the workers' eyes.

There are two ways to use this idea in your work and acknowledge the source:

1. Summary and citation

Breza et al. (2018) found that pay inequality could have a negative effect on employees, unless it could be justified in their terms.

2. Quotation and citation

According to Breza et al.: 'relative pay enters workers' utility function, with the potential for sizable negative impacts on labor supply and group cohesion. However, our findings indicate that pay inequality in itself is not necessarily problematic' (Breza et al., 2018:623).

These in-text **citations** are linked to a list of **references** at the end of the main text which includes the following details:

Author(s)	Date	Title	Journal title	Details
Breza, E., Kaur, S., Shamdasani, Y.	2018	The morale effects of pay inequality	<i>The Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>	Volume 133, Issue 2, May 2018, pp. 611–663

The citation makes it clear to readers that you have read Breza, Kaur and Shamdasani and borrowed this idea from them. This reference also gives readers the necessary information to find the source if they want to study the original article.

NB: There are various styles of referencing in the academic world, and different subjects tend to use different styles. The example here uses Harvard, but more details are given in Unit 1.7 References and Quotations.

2 What is plagiarism?

Essentially plagiarism means taking ideas or words from a source (e.g. a book or journal article) without giving credit (acknowledgement) to the author. It is seen as a kind of theft, and is considered to be an academic crime. In academic work, ideas and texts are thought of as private property belonging to the person who first thought or wrote them. Therefore it is important for all students to understand the meaning of plagiarism and learn how to prevent it in their work.

This situation may appear confusing, since students are expected:

<i>to show that they have read the relevant sources on a subject (by giving citations)</i>	but	<i>to explain these ideas in their own words, and come to their own conclusions.</i>
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Understanding this requirement and being able to follow the rules is vital to achieving success in the academic community. Reasons why students must avoid plagiarism include:

- copying the work of others will not help them develop their own understanding
- plagiarism is easily detected by teachers and computer software, such as Turnitin*
- it shows a lack of respect for classmates who have worked independently
- plagiarism may lead to failing a course or even having to leave college

* This software can also be used by students who want to check that their written work does not contain plagiarism before they submit it for marking. See: <https://www.turnitin.com/regions/uk>

3 Basic plagiarism

- Study the following sentence on early feminist movements:

What is more remarkable, however, is the way the breakdown of royal government in 1640, the prolonged political crisis between King and parliament of 1640–42, the Civil Wars of 1642–48, and the emergence of many extremist independent sects and of a genuinely radical political party, stimulated the women of London and elsewhere to unprecedented political activity.

(Source: Stone, L. (1979). *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*. Harmondsworth: Penguin)

- Working with a partner, decide if the following, written by a student, is plagiarised from the previous extract:

A series of events: the 1640 collapse of royal government, the lengthy political crisis between parliament and the King, the 1642–48 Civil Wars, followed by the appearance of extreme sects and a genuinely radical party, caused women in London to become politically active for the first time.

What does the text above lack?

4 Degrees of plagiarism

Although plagiarism essentially means copying somebody else's work, in some situations it can be difficult to decide if plagiarism is involved.

- Working with a partner, consider the following academic situations and decide if they are plagiarism or not.

	Situation	Plagiarism?
1	Copying a paragraph, but changing a few words, and not giving a citation.	Yes
2	Cutting and pasting a short article from a website, with no citation.	

	Situation	Plagiarism?
3	Taking two paragraphs from a classmate's essay, without citation.	
4	Taking a graph from a textbook, giving the source.	
5	Taking a quotation from an article, giving a citation but not using quotation marks.	
6	Using something that you think of as general knowledge, e.g. the earth's climate is getting warmer.	
7	Using a paragraph from an essay you wrote and had marked the previous semester, without citation.	
8	Using the results of your own unpublished research, e.g. from a survey you did, without citation.	
9	Discussing an essay topic with a group of classmates and using some of their ideas in your own work.	
10	Giving a citation for some information but misspelling the author's name.	

This exercise shows that plagiarism can be accidental. For example, situation (10) above, when the author's name is misspelt, is technically plagiarism but really carelessness. In situation (9) your teacher may have told you to discuss the topic in groups, and then to write an essay on your own, in which case it would not be plagiarism. Self-plagiarism is also possible, as in situation (7). It can be difficult to decide what is general or common knowledge (situation 6), but you can always try asking colleagues.

However, it is not a good excuse to say that you didn't know the rules of plagiarism, or that you didn't have time to write in your own words. In general, anything that is not common knowledge or your own ideas and research (published or not) must be cited and referenced.

5 Avoiding plagiarism by summarising and paraphrasing

Quotations should not be overused, as they may give the impression that you are 'padding out' your work. So in order to include other writers' ideas in your work you must learn to paraphrase and summarise. This will demonstrate your understanding of a text to your teacher.

- Paraphrasing involves rewriting a text so that the language is significantly different while the content stays the same.
- Summarising means reducing the length of a text but retaining the main points.

Normally both skills are used at the same time, as can be seen in the examples (a–e) below.

- Read the following text and then compare the five paragraphs below which use ideas and information from it. Decide which are plagiarised and which are acceptable, and give your reasons in the table below.

The Z Generation

Researchers have recently been studying the behaviour of ‘Generation Z’, who are defined as young people born since 1997. This group appear to have different concerns compared with their predecessors, the so-called ‘Millenials’ or ‘Generation Y’. The youngest group (i.e. Z), who now comprise about 25% of the population of the USA, cannot imagine living without smartphones or social media.

Pew Research Center’s 2018 report, which surveyed nearly 1,000 young Americans aged between 13 and 17, finds that they are lonelier but better behaved than previous groups, and their prime concern is with mental health issues such as depression. These youngsters feel little pressure to use drugs or get drunk, but more than half mention bullying on social media as a worry. Doing well at school is the leading issue for nearly 90% of those questioned, far more important than finding a sexual partner.

However, it appears that anxiety and depression increasingly affect people of all ages, and the WHO reckons that the cost to the global economy is roughly \$1 trn annually. At the moment the US only spends 0.05% of its total health budget on psychiatric care, and increasing this total would have positive results in terms of greater happiness and productivity.

(Source: Carroll, J. (2019). *The New Consumers*. Harlow: The Turnstile Press, p. 15)

- a) A recent study by Pew Research Center of the concerns of teenage Americans shows that this generation is surprisingly different from older groups. Instead of using drugs and alcohol, these youngsters are mainly worried about academic success and bullying on social media. Mental health is an important issue for them, but this appears to be something that increasingly affects young and old, globally.
- b) Academics have recently been studying the behaviour of ‘Generation Z’: young people born since 1997, who now comprise about 25% of the population of the USA. A 2018 report, which surveyed nearly 1,000 young Americans, finds that they are lonelier but better behaved than previous groups, and their main concern is with mental health issues like depression. These youngsters feel little pressure to use drugs or get drunk, but more than half mention bullying on social media as a worry. Doing well in college is the leading issue for most of those questioned, far more important than finding a sexual partner (Carroll, 2019: 15).
- c) Generation Z is the name given to people born since 1997, who have grown up with smartphones and social media. A report by Pew Research Center in 2018 identifies this cohort as mainly concerned with success at school and abuse on social media sites. They seem less interested in sex, drink or drugs, but more concerned with mental health, although apparently this is a growing concern for people all over the world (Carroll, 2019: 15).
- d) Recent research on American youngsters (age 13–17) reveals that their dominant concerns are with school grades and mental health issues, such as depression. According to Carroll: ‘These youngsters feel little pressure to use drugs or get drunk, but more than half mention bullying on social media as a worry’ (Carroll, 2019: 15).

- e) The main issues for young Americans appear to be doing well academically, bullying on social media sites and dealing with mental health problems. This has been revealed by research carried out by Pew Research Centre, published in 2018. This contrasts markedly with the behaviour of older groups, who were more likely to be concerned with alcohol or drug taking, or finding a partner (Carol, 2019: 15).

	Plagiarised or acceptable?	Reason
a		
b		
c		
d		
e		

6 Avoiding plagiarism by developing good study habits

Few students deliberately try to cheat by plagiarising, but some develop poor study habits which result in the risk of plagiarism.

- Working with a partner, add to the list of positive habits.
 - Plan your work carefully so you don't have to write essays at the last minute.
 - Take care to make notes in your own words, not copying from the source.
 - Keep a full record of all the sources you use (e.g. author, date, title, page numbers, place of publication, publisher).
 - Remember that charts, graphs and tables also need citation.
 - Oral presentations should include references to your sources and should make it clear when you are quoting.

7 Practice A

- Read this text on the link between Olympic success and national prosperity.

Wealth is an important advantage in pursuing Olympic medals. Clearly, a large population also has benefits, since this is more likely to include people with sporting abilities. But countries must

be able to mobilise their human resources: in the London Olympics in 2012 India, with its huge population, only won six medals, while New Zealand (with just 4 million) won 13. When many people are affected by poverty and illness it is not easy to be ordinarily healthy, let alone be an Olympic athlete. In fact richer countries have both healthier populations and can also spend more on encouraging sport. China won only 58 medals in 2000, when its GDP per person was under \$4,000. But at the 2012 London Olympics, when its GDP figure had risen to \$16,000, China won a total of 88. Governments are also finding that there are benefits in focusing efforts on a limited number of sports in which there is less competition: this was the tactic that led to British success in the cycling events in 2016.

(Source: Kaufman, S. (2017). *Gold, Silver, Bronze*. New York: Avery Newbold, p. 3)

- Add a citation to the summary and quotation below.

(Summary)

Kaufman argues that wealth (expressed as GDP per head) rather than size of population is the key to national success in the Olympics.

(Quotation)

Large populations alone do not guarantee good national results at the Olympics. Countries must also be wealthy enough to have healthy citizens and be able to provide resources for training. As Kaufman points out: 'When many people are affected by poverty and illness it is not easy to be ordinarily healthy, let alone be an Olympic athlete'.

8 Practice B

- Revise the contents of this unit by matching the words on the left with the definitions on the right.
 - a. Source Full publication details of a text or other source
 - b. Citation The origin of ideas or information
 - c. To summarise To reduce the length of a text while keeping the main points
 - d. Quotation Short in-text note giving the author's name and publication date
 - e. Reference Using different words or word order to restate a text
 - f. Paraphrase Using the exact words of the original text in your work

9 Research

Look on your college or university website to find out the policy on plagiarism. It may raise some issues that you want to discuss with colleagues or your teachers.

If you can't find anything for your particular institution, try one of these sites:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>
<http://www.uefap.com/writing/plagiar/plagfram.htm>