

English Department Statement on Plagiarism

1. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism means representing any idea, expression of an idea, or work of another as if it were your own, on essays, exams, or other assignments. Plagiarism includes:

- a) using someone else's word-for-word published statements as if they were your own
- b) closely imitating someone else's published statements without attribution
- c) copying someone else's ideas without acknowledgement (including data and images)
- d) passing off as your own the unpublished words or ideas of another person, including other students' essays, material written by friends or family, and writing purchased from term paper mills
- e) submitting an essay written for another course without the current instructor's permission

(Keep in mind that different contexts demand different kinds of relationships to your sources. This statement applies primarily to the sorts of critical essays you are expected to write in English classes.)

2. Why is plagiarism wrong?

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic standards and the rules of every university, including Queens College. Academic learning -- discussion, research, and writing -- would fall into chaos without a clear, traceable record of how an idea is born, develops, gains ground or disappears over time. As a student, you are participating in this discourse about ideas and must learn and observe its conventions. Plagiarism is wrong because it destroys genuine communication in an academic community: it erases knowledge of the sources on which we all depend.

Plagiarism is dishonest, since you steal the language and ideas of the person who honestly worked hard to produce this text. It also violates the integrity of the relationship between you and your classmates, teachers, and other members of the academic community. The person who plagiarizes has undermined his own education and betrayed the trust of the reader. Think of how you would feel if someone copied your work and claimed he had written it. Ignorance is not an acceptable excuse; you are responsible for learning the rules.

Sometimes students resort to plagiarism because of feelings of desperation caused by leaving the assignment to the last minute. However, that is no excuse. Although we understand the pressures on students, it is better to turn in a paper late (or not at all) rather than risk expulsion. Start your paper early and discuss any difficulties you encounter with your professor.

3. How can you be sure you're not plagiarizing?

a) Summary:

To acknowledge the achievements of others, and to use other writers' ideas and words to help spark your own work, is a legitimate and necessary part of participating in intellectual life. Students who borrow and acknowledge sources show both an admirable sophistication in handling secondary materials and an equally admirable integrity. As you research your topic, make sure to jot down the author, title, and page number of the works you read so that you can acknowledge that source. Put quotation marks around anything you copy word for word. Put the reference at the end of the

sentence or paragraph that contains the ideas or words you borrowed, whether you are paraphrasing or quoting directly. It is better to add unnecessary references than to risk being punished for plagiarism.

b) Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Can't I avoid problems by just listing every source in the bibliography?** No, you need to integrate your acknowledgements into what you're saying. Give the reference as soon as you've mentioned the idea you are using – don't wait until the end of the paragraph. That may mean naming authors ("X says" and "Y responds to X") and then going on to make your own comment, or listing the authors in a footnote or parenthetical notation.
- **If I put the ideas into my own words, do I still have to clog up my pages with all those names and numbers?** Yes, you do. In academic papers, you need to keep mentioning authors and pages and dates to show how your ideas are related to those of the experts. It's sensible to use your own words to save space and to help connect ideas smoothly. But whether you quote a passage directly in quotation marks, paraphrase it closely in your own words, or just summarize it rapidly, you need to identify the source then and there.
- **But I didn't know anything about the subject until I started this paper. So do I have to give a reference for every point I make?** You're safer to over-reference than to skimp. But you can cut down the clutter by recognizing that some ideas are common knowledge. For instance, you don't need a source to say that Dickens was a novelist. That's a well-known fact. If someone could legitimately argue the point, however, then you need the source; once you start arguing that Dickens was the first novelist to depict certain social issues, you need to tell us where you learned this idea.
- **How can I tell what's my own idea and what has come from something I read?** Take careful notes, summarizing the ideas in the text as well as putting quotation marks around specific words you want to quote.
- **So what exactly do I have to document?** Direct quotations, paraphrases, summaries, specific facts used as evidence for your argument, and ideas proposed by particular individuals. In short: if you found it in your reading, document it.
- **Can't I just take it off the WWW?** No, material written by someone else still belongs to that person, no matter what format it's in. Whether you read it on a screen or on a piece of paper, if you use it, you must give the reference.

4. Departmental policy:

A student who has plagiarized will automatically fail the paper and possibly fail the class. The student will also be listed on a departmental record that will be maintained for the duration of the student's enrollment at the College and reported to the Dean of Students, who may decide to take further action. A student who plagiarizes a second time will automatically fail the course. Plagiarists may be subject to further penalties to be determined by the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee or the Dean of Students, including notation on the student's permanent record, suspension, or dismissal from the College.

This material has been adapted from the University of Toronto Writing Support Web site; The Spring 1999 Handbook of Grades, Degree Requirements, and General Scholastic Standards; The Composition Handbook; and the policies of English department faculty.