Department of Electrical Engineering

Course Title: Technical Report Writing

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Student Detail

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Q : Defining Plagiarism?

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the act of plagiarism as; "to steal and pass off ideas or words of another as one's own". Simply put, plagiarism is the process of taking other people's words and/or ideas and pretending that they are your own. An alternative definition of plagiarism is forwarded by the Collins Dictionary which explains that plagiarism is the practice of using someone else's work and pretending that it is your own. Plagiarism can also be defined as the act of deliberately trying to deceive your academic tutor by submitting content which is not your own work.

Has Plagiarism Been Getting Worse in Recent Years?

In recent years, chiefly due to the popularity of over the internet assignment purchases, plagiarism has gotten worse. There has been a spike in plagiarism across much of the academic institutions based in the UK, indeed in the last 3 years alone, 50,000 students have been caught plagiarising. This figure does not allow for those students who have plagiarised and not been caught thus illustrating the scale of the problem.

Why does it matter?

Plagiarism is a serious problem. If you as a student are caught plagiarizing it can have serious consequences for you future academic and work career. Aside from the disciplinary perspective, plagiarism also harms the extent to which you as a student can learn whilst in years of academic study. When you cheat through plagiarism you are ultimately cheating yourself as you have spoiled the chance to learn and develop your knowledge on a specific subject. This learning and development skillset could stand you in good stead for later life so from all perspectives, plagiarism is something which should be avoided at all costs.

Copy Words or Ideas from Someone Else's Work, Without Giving Credit

Often in the process of completing academic work, a student will come across an idea or line of work within the existing literature which answers their essay or research question almost exactly. Students often use such sources verbatim without giving due credit to the original author of the ideas and work. To avoid falling into this particular trap, students should consider revising how to reference academic content effectively, which is another service in which Viper software provides.

Copying Sentence Structure, But Changing Words Around, Without Giving Credit

It is also not enough to simply reword what another academic author has said without reworking the structure of their critical arguments and structure. This is still considered plagiarism in the world of academia because the student is therefore still guilty of copying the structure of the authors arguments which is a key element of their delivery of ideas. Moreover, how a sentence is structured is vital to the point in which the author is trying to put across or the analytical comment in which they are trying to advance therefore it is important for the student to showcase that they can restructure the sentence accordingly to put forward their own original idea or interpretation.

Who Cares if I Plagiarize?

You Should. There are also a variety of other stakeholders to consider when you cheat as a student such as your academic institution and future employers.

There are two core, fundamental reasons why students should not plagiarize academic content:

1. Plagiarism is stealing: Stealing other people's work ideas, critical arguments and sentence structure. Morally, it is a similar act to stealing a car or anything else. The concept remains the same. As a student, if somebody else stole your ideas, how would you feel?
2. Plagiarism represents information illiteracy: If you plagiarize somebody else's work, you are implying that you are incapable of expressing your own thoughts and ideas in an eloquent enough manner to attain a high-grade classification. In essence, being caught plagiarizing is an admission of illiteracy in handling information which is not an impression that you want to create as a student. It can also have several adverse effects with respect to the students ability to enter gainful employment in the future.

The after effects of being caught plagiarism are really quite profound. If caught plagiarizing the immediate outcome is that the student has proven themselves to be lazy and untrustworthy. These attributes are not only immediately detrimental to the success of their academic pursuits but could also cross over into their capacity to attain a high paying career in the future. From the perspective of a potential employer, there is little value in recruiting an employee who has already proven themselves to be lazy and dishonest before they have even completed a shift for the company. It is in no way an act of overstatement to suggest that this happens, and it very often does as academic referees are vital in obtaining gainful employment later in life.

Instead, the main aim for modern students should be to attain information literacy. Information literacy is essential in ensuring that students do not plagiarize academic content. This concept is defined as; "knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) (CLIP, 2018, p.1). An alternative definition of information literacy is the capacity for students to use source texts as a basis for developing their own ability to think critically about a subject matter. The key benefit to a student developing their capabilities in the field of information literacy is that they increase their likelihood of attaining a higher-grade classification at the end of the academic year.

Self-Plagiarizing

Although it sounds unlikely, a student can also be accused of plagiarizing their own work and they often are. The key reason why this act is considered as plagiarism is because a student cannot be awarded two grades/degrees for the same piece of work and using substantial sections of work streamed from previous submitted content. Self-plagiarizing is a key issue in the modern world of schools, colleges and

universities as curriculums are becoming larger and larger thus increasing the risk of cross over with respect to certain subjects. Therefore, there is a high level of temptation for students to simply rely on the work which they have previously completed on the same subject or topic. In many cases students are not aware that this constitutes an act of plagiarism because they are the original author of the piece however it is, and the penalty is just as severe as would be the case with any of the other methods of plagiarism listed in this section.

Why should you avoid plagiarism?

There are many reasons to avoid plagiarism. You have come to university to learn to know and speak your own mind, not merely to reproduce the opinions of others - at least not without attribution. At first it may seem very difficult to develop your own views, and you will probably find yourself paraphrasing the writings of others as you attempt to understand and assimilate their arguments. However it is important that you learn to develop your own voice. You are not necessarily expected to become an original thinker, but you are expected to be an independent one - by learning to assess critically the work of others, weigh up differing arguments and draw your own conclusions. Students who plagiarize undermine the ethos of academic scholarship while avoiding an essential part of the learning process.

You should avoid plagiarism because you aspire to produce work of the highest quality. Once you have grasped the principles of source use and citation, you should find it relatively straightforward to steer clear of plagiarism. Moreover, you will reap the additional benefits of improvements to both the lucidity and quality of your writing. It is important to appreciate that mastery of the techniques of academic writing is not merely a practical skill, but one that lends both credibility and authority to your work, and demonstrates your commitment to the principle of intellectual honesty in scholarship.