**What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is a common problem, primarily among students. This plagiarism quick guide offers an overview of what plagiarism is, what the consequences are and how plagiarism can be avoided.

**Definition of plagiarism**

[Merriam-Webster Dictionary](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plagiarizing) defines plagiarism as follows:

“To steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own: to use (another’s production) without crediting the source”

We’ve highlighted two sections of this definition.

1. Many people think plagiarism is stealing someone else’s words, but it also means stealing someone else’s ideas. In other words, even if you [paraphrase](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) a text, the idea still needs to be cited.
2. The phrase “without crediting the source” means that it’s okay to use the words and ideas of others, but you have to cite the source to avoid committing plagiarism.

**Types of plagiarism**

Plagiarism means using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. The most common types of plagiarism are:

| **Type of plagiarism** | **Definition** | **Severity** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [**Global plagiarism**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#global) | Presenting an entire text by someone else as your own work. | Severe |
| [**Paraphrasing plagiarism**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#paraphrasing) | Rephrasing someone else’s ideas without citation. | Serious |
| [**Verbatim plagiarism**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#verbatim) | Directly copying a passage of text without citation. | Serious |
| [**Mosaic plagiarism**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#mosaic) | Combining text and ideas from different sources without citation. | Serious |
| [**Self-plagiarism**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#self-plagiarism) | Reusing passages and ideas from your own previously submitted work. | Moderate |
| [**Incorrect citation**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/#citing-incorrectly) | Failing to give all the necessary information in your source citation. | Moderate |

## 1. Global plagiarism

Global plagiarism means taking an entire work by someone else and passing it off as your own. If you get someone else to write an essay or assignment for you, or if you find a text online and submit it as your own work, you are committing plagiarism.

Because it involves deliberately and directly lying about the authorship of a work, this is one of the most serious types of plagiarism, and it can have severe [consequences](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/consequences-of-plagiarism/).

## 2. Paraphrasing plagiarism

[Paraphrasing](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) means rephrasing a piece of text in your own words. Paraphrasing without citation is the most common type of plagiarism.

Paraphrasing itself is not plagiarism so long as you properly [cite your sources](https://www.scribbr.com/category/citing-sources/). However, paraphrasing becomes plagiarism when you read a source and then rewrite its key points as if they were your own ideas.

Additionally, if you translate a piece of text from another language, you need correctly cite the original source. A translation without a source is still plagiarism, as you’re using someone else’s ideas.

### Example of paraphrasing

| **Original (Cronon, 1995)**  | **Incorrect (no citation)** |
| --- | --- |
| “Go back 250 years in American and European history, and you do not find nearly so many people wandering around remote corners of the planet looking for what today we would call ‘the wilderness experience.’ As late as the eighteenth century, the most common usage of the word ‘wilderness’ in the English language referred to landscapes that generally carried adjectives far different from the ones they attract today. To be a wilderness then was to be ‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’ – in short, a ‘waste,’ the word’s nearest synonym. Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was ‘bewilderment’ or terror.” | Before the 18th century, the word “wilderness” had very different associations than it does today. Far from being tourist attractions, wilderness areas were considered bleak, barren places that inspired fear and confusion – landscapes to be avoided rather than actively sought out. |

## 3. Verbatim plagiarism (copy & paste)

You commit verbatim plagiarism when you directly copy text from a source and paste it into your own document without attribution. If the structure and the majority of the words are the same as in the original, then it is verbatim plagiarism, even if you delete or change a couple of words here and there.

If you want to use an author’s exact words, you need to [quote](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-quote/) the original source by putting the copied text in[quotation marks](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/quotation-marks/) and including an [in-text citation](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/in-text-citation-styles/).

### Example of verbatim plagiarism



## 4. Mosaic plagiarism (patchwork plagiarism)

Mosaic plagiarism (also known as patchwork plagiarism or incremental plagiarism) means copying phrases, passages and ideas from different sources and putting them together to create a new text. This includes slightly rephrasing passages while keeping many of the same words and structure as the original.

This type of plagiarism requires a little more effort and is more insidious than just copying and pasting from a source, but [plagiarism checkers like Turnitin](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism-checker/) can still easily detect it.

### Example of patchwork plagiarismPatchwork plagiarism detected by Turnitin

## 5. Citing incorrectly

The key to [avoiding plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/) is citing your sources. You need to correctly format your citations according to the rules of the [citation style](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-styles/) you are following.

If you don’t include all the necessary information or you put it in the wrong place, you could be committing plagiarism. Most styles require [in-text citations](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/in-text-citation-styles/) plus a reference list or bibliography at the end of your paper, where you give full details of every source you cited.

**Example of a correct citation (**[**APA Style**](https://www.scribbr.com/category/apa-style/)**)**

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) concluded that attitude can best be described as a learned manner of reacting positively or negatively regarding a certain behavior.

## 6. Plagiarizing your own work (self-plagiarism)

[Self-plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/self-plagiarism/) means reusing work that you’ve previously submitted. Even though it’s your own work, it’s considered dishonest to present a paper or a piece of data as brand new when you’ve already gotten credit for the work.

There are a couple of different versions of self-plagiarism. The more serious is to turn in a paper you already submitted for a grade to another class. Unless you have explicit permission to do so, this is always considered self-plagiarism.

Self-plagiarism can also occur when you use ideas, phrases or data from your previous assignments. As with [paraphrasing](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/), reworking old ideas and passages is not inherently plagiarism, but you should cite your previous work to make the origins clear.

Your institution might have specific policies on self-plagiarism (for example, about whether it’s acceptable to incorporate parts of previous papers into your [thesis or dissertation](https://www.scribbr.com/category/dissertation/)). Consult with your instructors if you’re unsure.

**How to avoid plagiarism**

[Plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/category/plagiarism/) means using someone else’s words or ideas without properly crediting the original author. Sometimes plagiarism involves deliberately stealing someone’s work, but often it happens accidentally, through carelessness or forgetfulness.

When you write an academic paper, you build upon the work of others and use various sources for information and evidence. To avoid plagiarism, you need to correctly incorporate these sources into your text.

Follow these four steps to ensure your paper is free from plagiarism:

1. Keep track of the **sources** you consult in your research.
2. **Paraphrase or quote** from your sources (and add your own ideas).
3. Credit the original author in an in-text**citation** and reference list.
4. Use a **plagiarism checker** before you submit.

## Plagiarism can have [serious consequences](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/consequences-of-plagiarism/), so make sure to follow these steps for every paper you write.

## Step 1: Keep track of your sources

While you’re doing research and taking notes for your paper, make sure to record the source of each piece of information. One way that students commit plagiarism is by simply forgetting where an idea came from and unintentionally presenting it as their own.

You can easily avoid this pitfall by keeping your notes organized and compiling a list of citations as you go. Keep track of every source you consult – that includes not only books and journal articles, but also things like[websites](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/cite-a-website/), magazine articles, and [videos](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/youtube-videos/).

Then you can easily go back and check where you found a phrase, fact, or idea that you want to use in your paper.

## Step 2: Quote and paraphrase

While writing your paper, if you want to share an idea or a piece of information from a source, you must either [paraphrase](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) or [quote](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-quote/) the original text.

### Quoting

Quoting means copying a piece of text word-for-word. The copied text must be introduced in your own words, enclosed in [quotation marks](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/quotation-marks/), and correctly attributed to the original author:

According to Cronon, the concept of wilderness is a cultural invention: “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation – indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (1995, p. 69).

### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means using your own words to explain something from a source. It allows you to give only the most important information from a passage.

**For example:**

[**Paraphrased text**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/): Before the 18th century, the word “wilderness” had very different associations than it does today. Far from being tourist attractions, wilderness areas were considered bleak, barren places that inspired fear and confusion – landscapes to be avoided rather than actively sought out (Cronon, 1995, p. 70).

* [**Original text**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/) : “Go back 250 years in American and European history, and you do not find nearly so many people wandering around remote corners of the planet looking for what today we would call ‘the wilderness experience.’ As late as the eighteenth century, the most common usage of the word ‘wilderness’ in the English language referred to landscapes that generally carried adjectives far different from the ones they attract today. To be a wilderness then was to be ‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’ – in short, a ‘waste,’ the word’s nearest synonym. Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was ‘bewilderment’ or terror” (Cronon, 1995, p. 70).
* [**Plagiarized text**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/)

What today we would call the wilderness experience was not always so popular. As late as the eighteenth century, ‘wilderness’ in English most commonly referred to landscapes that carried far different adjectives than today, such as deserted, desolate, and barren. “Waste” was the word’s nearest synonym. It had negative connotations rather than positive ones, and was associated with emotions like bewilderment and terror (Cronon, 1995, p. 70).

In the paraphrased example, the author’s main point has been rephrased and condensed; the order of information and the sentence structure have been changed.

In the plagiarized example, even though the text is not identical, many of the same phrases have been used, and the information is presented in the same order with the same structure. Even with a citation, this passage would very likely be flagged as plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing, you need to make sure that your text isn’t too similar to the original.

### Paraphrasing vs. quoting

In general, paraphrasing is better than quoting, especially for longer passages. It shows that you have fully understood the meaning of the original text, and ensures that your own voice is dominant in your paper.

Quotes are appropriate when:

* You are using an exact definition introduced by the original author
* It is impossible for you to rephrase the original text without losing its meaning
* You want to maintain the authority and style of the author’s words

## Step 3: Cite the original source

Every time you quote or paraphrase, you must include an [in-text citation](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/in-text-citation-styles/) (or [footnote citation](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/what-are-footnotes-and-endnotes/)) that identifies the original author. It often also includes the publication year and a page number.

Each in-text citation must correspond to a full reference in the [reference list](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-style/apa-reference-page/) or [bibliography](https://www.scribbr.com/chicago-style/bibliography/) at the end of your paper. This details exactly where the information came from, allowing your readers to locate the source for themselves.

There are many different [citation styles](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-styles/), and each one has its own rules for citing. Some of the most common include [APA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/apa-style/), [MLA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/mla/) and [Chicago Style](https://www.scribbr.com/yst_prominent_words/chicago-style/). The most important thing is to apply one style consistently throughout the text.

|  |
| --- |
| **APA citation example** |
| **In-text citation** | Recent research has shown that plagiarism is an increasingly widespread issue (Smith & Thomas, 2018, p. 34–36). |
| **Reference list entry** | Smith, T.H., & Thomas, L. (2018). New challenges in higher education. New York, NY: Free Press. |

To create correctly-formatted source citations, you can use our free citation generator.

[**APA Citation Generator**](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-citation-generator/)  [**MLA Citation Generator**](https://www.scribbr.com/mla-citation-generator/)

## Step 4: Use a plagiarism checker

Most universities use plagiarism checkers to detect plagiarism in student papers. This technology scans your document, compares it to a huge database of publications and websites, and highlights passages that are overly similar to other texts.

You can use a plagiarism checker yourself before submitting your paper. This allows you to identify any parts where you’ve forgotten a citation, left out quotation marks, or included a paraphrase that’s too close to the original text. Then you can follow the steps above to easily fix any instances of potential plagiarism.

There are differences in accuracy and safety between plagiarism checkers. We have tested and compared all the options:

1. [Best plagiarism checker](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/) comparison **(free and paid checks)**
2. [Best free plagiarism checker](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/free-plagiarism-checker-comparison/) comparison **(only free checks)**

**What are the consequences of plagiarism in college?**

If you use someone else’s words or ideas without properly crediting them, you could be [committing plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/category/plagiarism/). The exact consequences of plagiarism depend on your institution’s rules and the [type of plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/), but common consequences include:

* Grade penalties
* Failing your course
* Facing disciplinary action
* Suspension or expulsion from your university

Apart from the immediate consequences, being caught plagiarizing is likely to result in a black mark on your academic or professional record, creating problems for your future career. To [avoid plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/), it is essential to properly [cite your sources](https://www.scribbr.com/category/citing-sources/) in every piece of writing you submit.

## Consequences of plagiarism for students

Plagiarism in colleges can be deliberate or accidental, but it almost always has serious consequences. You can usually find the details of your institution’s plagiarism policy in its code of academic conduct.

### Accidental plagiarism

If you unintentionally plagiarize, and you have no previous infractions, then most colleges will lower your grade or fail you for the course. You might also be required to attend a workshop on plagiarism and how to prevent it. Some universities might place you on disciplinary probation.

### Deliberate plagiarism

If you intentionally commit plagiarism (for example, by copying and pasting text or [paraphrasing](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) another author’s ideas without citing the source), you will probably fail the assignment or the course, be subject to disciplinary action, and potentially be suspended.

If your college finds that you have directly plagiarized (i.e. by submitting a paper that is wholly or mostly someone else’s work and passing it off as your own), you could be expelled from your program and university.

Plagiarism of this type is likely to appear on your permanent record and have long-term consequences for your career. Some universities will even revoke your degree long after you’ve graduated if they discover that you plagiarized in your thesis or dissertation.

## Consequences of plagiarism for researchers

In academia and other research-based professions, plagiarism has serious personal and professional consequences. An accusation of plagiarism can severely damage your reputation; it could result in the loss of research funding and even your position.

Plagiarizing has both short- and long-term consequences for your research career. In one example, Chinese researchers [attempted to publish a plagiarized article](https://synapse.koreamed.org/DOIx.php?id=10.3346/jkms.2017.32.2.183) in the Journal of Korean Medical Science. When they were caught, the researchers were banned from submitting to the journal for five years.

If you’re an academic or researcher who has committed plagiarism, you will have trouble finding another position. Additionally, you will have difficulties finding journals that will publish your work or investors who are willing to fund your research.

## Legal consequences of plagiarism

As well as reputational and career damage, plagiarizers can face legal consequences, whether they are students or working professionals.

### Copyright infringement

The most serious legal issue is copyright infringement. If you publish plagiarized material, the author of the original text might have legal grounds to sue you. If the author wins, you will have to pay monetary restitutions, in addition to any legal fees you may incur during the process.

##  Tips for avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is sometimes deliberate, but it’s often committed unintentionally by students or professionals who are unaware of how to properly credit their sources. [Avoiding plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/prevent-plagiarism/) involves paying careful attention to where you find information and how you present it in your own texts.

1. **Keep track of your sources**: every time you note down a quotation or idea, make sure to also note the full details of the source where you found it.
2. **Quote properly**: If you use someone else’s words – even if it’s just a short phrase – clearly mark the quotation by using [quotation marks](https://www.scribbr.com/language-rules/quotation-marks/) or [block quote formatting](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/block-quote/), and make sure you have quoted the exact words of the author.
3. **Cite your sources**: Every time you [quote](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-quote/) or [paraphrase](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) a source, include a citation to credit the original author and show the reader where you found the information. There are many different [citation styles](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-styles/) with different rules, but the most important thing is to cite clearly and consistently. [Citation machines](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-citation-generator/) can help you with this.
4. **Use a**[**plagiarism checker**](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism-checker/): Even if you’re confident that you haven’t plagiarized, an automated plagiarism checker can identify mistakes like missing citations and paraphrased passages that are too similar to the original text.

# What is self-plagiarism and how can you avoid it?

[Plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/category/plagiarism/) generally involves using other people’s words or ideas without proper [citation](https://www.scribbr.com/category/citing-sources/), but you can also plagiarize yourself.

Self-plagiarism means reusing work that you have already published or submitted for a class. It can involve re-submitting an entire paper, copying or [paraphrasing](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/how-to-paraphrase/) passages from your previous work, or recycling old data.

Self-plagiarism misleads your readers by presenting old work as completely new and original. If you want to include any text, ideas, or data that already appeared in a previous paper, you should always inform the reader of this by citing your own work.

## Examples of self-plagiarism

Common forms of self-plagiarism by students include:

* Handing in a paper you’ve already submitted in another class.
* Pasting sections or paragraphs from previously submitted work into a new paper.
* Reusing data or ideas from your bachelor’s thesis and building on them in your master’s thesis without citing the original work.

Common forms of self-plagiarism by academics include:

* Using a dataset from a previous study (published or not) without making the reader aware of this.
* Submitting a manuscript for publication containing data, conclusions or passages that have already been published (without citing your previous publication).
* Publishing multiple similar papers about the same study in different journals.

## How to avoid self-plagiarism

If you’re unsure whether something counts as self-plagiarism, first check the plagiarism policy of your university or the journal you’re submitting to. If there is no explicit policy on self-plagiarism, follow these guidelines.

### For students

* **Do not reuse your old assignments.** You might be assigned a topic that you’ve already written a paper on. Never submit the same paper again, even in a completely different course. If you want to cover some of the same ideas in your new paper, then…
* **Talk to your instructor.** Your professor can tell you whether it’s acceptable to reuse or rework parts of old assignments. This is sometimes the case, for example, if you want to build on a previous paper in your [thesis or dissertation](https://www.scribbr.com/category/dissertation/).

### For academics

* **Do not reuse previously published work.**Publishing a paper that reuses part of an already-published text could constitute a copyright infringement and misleads readers. Make sure every part of your paper is original and written from scratch.
* **If you use old data or ideas, always inform the reader.** You might want to build on research you’ve published elsewhere. As long as you use the material in a new and original way, and you [properly cite](https://www.scribbr.com/category/citing-sources/) the publication where it originally appeared, this is generally acceptable.

## Consequences of self-plagiarism

### For students

Self-plagiarism is not as serious as some other [types of plagiarism](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/types-of-plagiarism/), but your university will probably have a specific policy on self-plagiarism.

**At most universities, violation of the plagiarism policy results in an automatic zero and possible suspension or expulsion.**

University departments will often allow some reuse of work under certain conditions, but make sure you fully understand the policy to avoid these consequences. If your university allows you to reuse your old work, be sure to check with your professors and get permission before doing so.

### For academics

The two biggest [consequences](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/consequences-of-plagiarism/) for an academic or researcher who self-plagiarizes are:

* Delayed or rejected publication
* Copyright infringement

If your article is too similar to one of your previously published works, the journal is likely to reject it. Most journals will list their plagiarism guidelines along with their submission requirements, so make sure to check the specific policy.

Even if the journal allows resubmission of previously published work, you also have to check whether the original publisher owns the copyright of your paper. If you publish large chunks of the same material elsewhere (even with citation), you might be infringing copyright, which could have legal consequences.

**The best plagiarism checkers of 2019**

| **Top 10 plagiarism checkers of 2019** |
| --- |
| **Plagiarism checker** |  **Plagiarism detected** | **Overall score** |
| **50% plagiarised text** |  **100% plagiarised text** |
| [1. Scribbr (in partnershipwith Turnitin)](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#scribbr) | **44%** | **75%** |  |
| [2. Ephorus](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#ephorus) | **23%** | **61%** |  |
| [3. Quetext](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#quetext) | **29%** | **53%** |  |
| [4. Compilatio](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#compilatio) | **28%** | **51%** |  |
| [5. BibMe](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#bibme) | **19%** | **57%** |  |
| [6. Plagscan](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#plagscan) | **17%** | **58%** |  |
| [7. Plagramme](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#plagramme) | **16%** | **61%** |  |
| [8. Grammarly](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#grammarly) | **0%** | **24%** |  |
| [9. Smallseotools](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#smallseotools) | **5%** | **28%** |  |
| [10. SE Reports](https://www.scribbr.com/plagiarism/best-plagiarism-checker/#searchenginereports) | **4%** | **34%** |  |