

PLAGIARISM: ITS DETECTION AND OBSTACLES IN COUNTERING IT

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ABSTRACT

With the technology, making deep inroads into every form and stage of academics, reliance on the internet as a tool for learning is ever increasing. With this, is increasing the practice of “literary theft” or “plagiarism” which means the practice of passing someone else’s work or idea as one’s own without giving due credit to its writer. Plagiarism may take many forms such as direct plagiarism, self plagiarism, mosaic plagiarism and accidental plagiarism. It needs to be avoided through proper citation and giving credit to the author. There are some hurdles in countering plagiarism such as; paraphrasing is hard to detect, sometimes restating a previous work is unavoidable and similarity index of a text is significantly increased because of presence of standard phrases which are unavoidable in a dissertation/thesis. Present paper attempts to develop an insight into the plagiarism and hurdles in countering it. It is believed that knowledge of “what plagiarism is” and “how to avoid it” along with following the practices essential to harness the writing skills of students and may prove helpful in countering plagiarism.

KEYWORDS: Plagiarism, Countering plagiarism, literary theft

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the illegitimate use of another person’s words and/or ideas without giving appropriate credit to the original source. It is a sort of “literary theft”. If one uses others’ ideas or words, these must put in quotation marks and the reference of the source must also be given. One also has to give references when using others’ ideas, even if those ideas have been changed into one’s own words. Wikipedia defines plagiarism as

“The “wrongful appropriation” and “stealing and publication” of another author’s “language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions” and the representation of them as one’s own original work”.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines plagiarizing as

- Stealing and passing off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own.
- Using (another’s production) without crediting the source.
- Committing literary theft.
- Presenting as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

Types of Plagiarism

Tackling plagiarism is not an easy task in front of academicians and institutions. Plagiarism takes different forms, but all are serious violations of academic honesty. Developing an understanding of and recognizing the various forms of plagiarism, is quite crucial to prevent it. The most common types of plagiarism are discussed below:

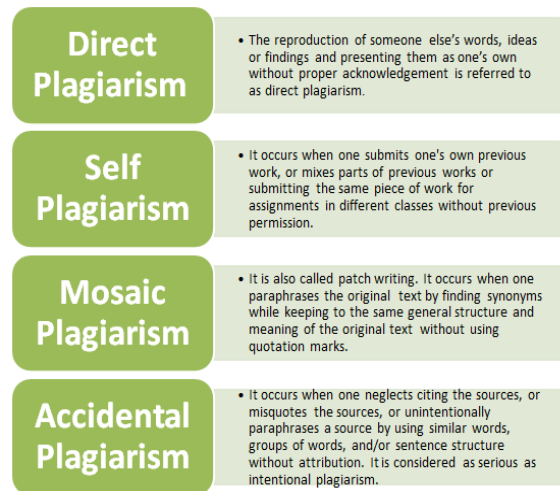


Figure 1

How to avoid plagiarism?

Harvard Guide to Using Sources gives following guidelines for conducting research responsibly and avoid plagiarism:

- Keep track of your sources; print, electronic sources
- Keep the sources in correct context
- Plan ahead
- Don't cut and paste: File and label your sources
- Keep your own writing and your sources separate
- Keep your notes and your draft separate
- Paraphrase carefully in your notes; acknowledge your sources explicitly when paraphrasing
- Avoid reading a classmate's paper for inspiration.
- Don't save your citations for later
- Quote your sources properly
- Keep a source trail

Other than these principles suggested by Harvard University, writers should keep following points in mind in order to avoid committing plagiarism:

- **Practice Writing:** Practicing to find suitable words and structures and place them in proper order in order to improve writing skills and counter plagiarism.
- **Citing the copied, adapted, or paraphrased Material:** If there is a need to copy and use another's exact words, quotation marks must be used. Citing the source is a must if the exact words are copied or a chart is adapted or a sentence is paraphrased.
- **Avoid making minor changes in others' work:** Avoid making cosmetic changes in others' work and passing it as one's own.
- **Citing commonly available sources.** One need not cite common knowledge, but the fact must actually be commonly known. If inputs are taken from common sources like a dictionary, encyclopaedia, newspaper, etc., citation must be given.
- **Avoid paraphrasing:** Paraphrasing or changing sentence construction or word choice without citing the source is the prime type of internet plagiarism. One of the most common guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism on the internet is to avoid paraphrasing.
- **Using reference management software's:** Another way to avoid committing plagiarism is installing reference-management software like Mendeley, Reference-manager, etc. These software's help in generating, numbering and sequencing the references in the document being created.

Plagiarism Detection

Plagiarism detection is the process of finding out the similarity index or the extent of copied or plagiarized material in a document in a piece of writing. It can be either be conducted manually or may also be software-assisted. Detection of plagiarism manually, requires considerable effort and photographic memory. Manual detection of plagiarism is impractical where too many documents need to be compared, or original documents are not readily available for comparison. But software-assisted detection facilitates plagiarism detection greatly because huge collection of documents in soft copy makes successful detection much more feasible.

Clues to Detect Plagiarism

A teacher can track plagiarism through careful observation of the students' assignment/dissertation/thesis. Following clues can help detect plagiarism in any piece of writing:

- Sudden change in tense, diction or font
- Too old citations or outdated information
- Missed references or incorrect/inconsistent system of references
- Unsuitable quotations
- Sudden jump from one idea to another
- Online plagiarism detection software report

A teacher can discourage students from committing plagiarism by taking care of following points while selecting a topic for assignment/dissertation/thesis:

- Avoid assigning very common/frequent topics.
- Educate students what plagiarism and its punishment is and how it can be avoided.
- Clarify the distinction between acceptable collaboration and plagiarism.
- Give a demonstration on how to create original assignments.
- Harness the writing skills of students by constant motivation and organizing repeated practice sessions.
- Ask the students to send soft copies of their assignments/dissertation/thesis on email e-mail so that it can be submitted to a plagiarism search engine. This will discourage students from indulging in plagiarism.

Hurdles in Countering Plagiarism

Plagiarism is, undoubtedly, an unethical and illegal practice and if proved, may attract harsh punishment. But there are still some ambiguities in this regard and some issues remain unsolved, such as,

- **Paraphrasing is hard to detect:** Most of the plagiarism testing software in educational institutions give “similarity index” of a text only. It does not check paraphrased material due to differences in the language. Therefore, it is hard to check plagiarism done through paraphrasing.
- **Restating the Previous work unavoidable:** Sometimes, the previous work needs to be restated in order to explain the background for a new contribution in the second work. Sometimes, parts of previous work are required to be repeated in order to deal with new evidence or arguments. Therefore, it should not be termed as plagiarism.
- **Standard phrases increases “similarity index”:** In dissertations and theses, some standard phrases are used in stating null hypotheses, objectives, research design, methodology, tool description, etc. Review of related literature also takes already existing studies which significantly increase similarity index of dissertation or thesis in spite of giving references. This makes the line between plagiarism and collaboration thin, and thus, is a challenge in countering plagiarism.

By addressing these issues and creating awareness among students about “what plagiarism is” and “how to avoid it” along with following the practices essential to harness the writing skills of students and may prove helpful in countering plagiarism.

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