

Title of Module: *Academic Integrity: Avoiding Plagiarism I*

Writer: Amy Bennett-Zendzian

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Video 1: *What Is Plagiarism?*

Understanding Plagiarism

Most people think they know what plagiarism is. However, it turns out the subject can get pretty complicated. In this module, we'll go over what plagiarism is, why people do it, and look at some examples to understand what is and is not plagiarism. We'll discuss the differences between the most common types of plagiarism, and we will also talk about the potential consequences of plagiarism at Boston University.

What Is Plagiarism?

The simple definition is that plagiarism is presenting another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. Note that both exact *words* and original *ideas* are protected. When you don't acknowledge a source, people assume that the work you're presenting is all your own, when it's really the result of somebody else's creativity and effort.

This definition of "plagiarism" sounds very criminal. But surely most people who plagiarize didn't plan to commit a crime. So why do people do it?

Why Do People Plagiarize?

The most common time for students to plagiarize is right before the deadline of an assignment. Common scenarios include not understanding the material, panicking over grades, and running out of time.

That said, it's also possible to plagiarize out of ignorance, just not knowing the rules, or mixing up someone else's work with your own due to sloppy notes. The bad news is, you are still responsible, even if you didn't know what you were doing is wrong.

Video 2: *Intentional and Unintentional Plagiarism*

Examples of Intentional Plagiarism

It's not hard to come up with examples of deliberate plagiarism, because that's what most people think of when they think about plagiarism. Of course, copying from a friend is cheating. Cutting and pasting text or images from electronic sources without documenting is a classic example of plagiarism. Remember, though, that both words and ideas are protected. You may know that you can't take exact *words* from Wikipedia, Sparknotes, Cliffsnotes, a journal article, someone's blog, or a classmate. But you may be surprised to learn that you also can't take *ideas* from those sources, even if you think, "Oh, I could have thought of that myself." But you didn't think of it yourself, so you can't use it unless you give credit.

"Examples of Intentional Plagiarism"

Beware of websites like CourseHero that promise to help you with your schoolwork for money. Buying work from the internet, any form of hiring someone to do your work for you, is also plagiarizing, of course. Aside from the fact that it's wrong, using sites like this is also risky. One instructor tells his students about the time a student turned in an essay bought from a website and was caught because the instructor was the original author. Remember: if a website is willing to help *you* cheat, it's also willing to cheat *you*!

Examples of Unintentional Plagiarism

This is where it gets confusing. The most obvious examples of unintentional plagiarism are a lack of understanding of correct citation and careless mistakes documenting sources. Another form of plagiarism is "patch writing," when your paper patches together other people's words and ideas without including your own voice. What's more, many students are surprised to learn that if you turn in the same material for credit more than once, that is called "self-plagiarism," even though it's your own words. That's because it's unfair to your fellow students, and it's also cheating yourself of an opportunity to learn something new. Also, keep in mind that Self-plagiarism is forbidden in the BU Academic Code of Conduct.

Grey Areas: Excessive Collaboration

Excessive collaboration is also a form of plagiarism, because you're not giving your collaborator credit for their words or ideas. If a friend, family member or roommate comes up with your argument for you, or rewrites your draft in more academic-sounding English, that's plagiarism. However, it's also true that some forms of academic collaboration are okay, such as group projects, feedback from your instructor, peer review workshops, and getting help from tutors at the University writing centers.

Here's the way to stay safe: collaboration under the guidance of your instructor is okay. If you are getting help through a Boston University-run organization such as a Writing Center, you'll be okay because Writing Center consultants are trained to know how much collaboration is acceptable. But if you go to someone for help outside of these situations, you could get in trouble for excessive collaboration with someone who doesn't know where that line is.

Grey Areas: Cultural Differences

The Western concept of individual ownership of words and ideas isn't universal. Some cultures may consider the knowledge in classic texts common property and therefore may not cite the original source in all cases. However, Western academic culture requires that any use of someone's original work is identified and documented properly so that due credit is given for all intellectual property. Even though these rules may just seem like cultural conventions, they are not negotiable as long as you're operating in a Western academic context.

Grey Areas: Common Knowledge

You must be wondering by now if there is ANYTHING you don't have to cite. The answer is, Common Knowledge! Information that's easily observed and universally accepted, like the fact that the sky is blue, common sayings such as "birds of a feather flock together," or facts that are widely known and universally accepted, don't have to be cited. But beware: it isn't always obvious if something is common knowledge or not, and some things that we think are common knowledge aren't even true. When in doubt, cite!

Video 3: *Consequences of Plagiarism*

Consequences May Vary

Imagine it's the night before the due date, your notes are a mess, and you've lost track of what were your own ideas and what came from other sources. You may think that if you end up plagiarizing and get caught, you can tell your instructor you just made a mistake, and you'll get a lesser punishment. Maybe you even know someone who got away with that. It's true that plagiarists aren't always caught. However, the severity of punishment for plagiarism can depend on factors beyond your control, or even beyond your instructor's control when the

university gets involved. Whenever you plagiarize, even if it's an accident, you're putting your future at risk.

BU's Policies

That said, BU does have a system in place for dealing with plagiarism. If you know that you've plagiarized and you admit it: You will receive a grading penalty at the professor's discretion (either for the assignment, or the whole course). However, if it's not your first time or if the violation is severe, the Dean may decide that the grading penalty isn't enough. If that happens, or, if you don't admit to academic misconduct: You will be referred to an academic conduct committee made up of faculty members, staff members, and students. They will hear your case and may recommend one of the following penalties: reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

The Academic Code of Conduct

(Script): You're responsible, but you're not alone! Review Boston University's Academic Conduct Code: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/> Seek help from your instructor, consultants at one of the University Writing Centers, or a librarian.

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