The Meaning and Prevention of Plagiarism

Plagiarism and the Academic Community

As a UC Davis student, you are expected to create original work to fulfill the requirements of the courses you take. Fair evaluation can occur only when submitted work reflects each student's efforts and aptitude. As a scholar, you are expected to cite the sources you use to support your arguments. Acknowledging the words and ideas of others demonstrates respect for the contributions of other authors and confers value to your own original work.

The Code of Academic Conduct outlines University Policy on plagiarism:

> Know what plagiarism is and take steps to avoid it. When using the words or ideas of another, even if paraphrased in your own words, you must cite your source. Students who are confused about whether a particular act constitutes plagiarism should consult the instructor who gave the assignment.
> ("Code of Academic Conduct")

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism means presenting the words, phrases, ideas or **work** of another, including certain facts and statistics, as if they were your own. To avoid plagiarizing, you must clearly acknowledge the **source** of any borrowed language or ideas that you present in your own work. Quotation marks, followed by documentation, should be used to indicate the exact words of others. A signal phrase identifying a source and/or parenthetical citation or a superscript number should denote the summarized or paraphrased ideas of others, depending on the particular style the paper follows.*

What types of work must be cited?

The **work** of others includes not only written words and ideas, but also "art, graphics, computer programs, music, [. . .] charts, pictures, graphs, diagrams, data, websites, or other communication or recording media," including "formatting," images, statistics, and problem solutions ("Avoiding Plagiarism").*

Which sources must be cited?

Both published (in digital or traditional formats) and unpublished **sources** must be cited. Published sources include "books, magazines, newspapers, websites, plays, movies, photos, paintings, and textbooks" and online papers; unpublished sources include "class lectures or notes, handouts, speeches, other students' papers, or material from a research service" ("Avoiding Plagiarism").

Distinguishing "common knowledge" from original work

Facts can be viewed as common knowledge if they are generally known and widely established. The term "common knowledge" implies that the audience and the author have agreed on certain facts, so accepted common knowledge might vary depending on your audience. For example, dates referring to well-known events can be viewed as common knowledge. So, when referring to December 7, 1941 as the date the Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor, you would not need to cite a source for your information—if Americans comprise your target audience.

Be wary, however, when treating information as common knowledge. When making this judgment, consider whether the information is both widely known and undisputed. As your expertise within your field grows, your base of common knowledge, as it pertains to

that field of expertise, will also grow. **When in doubt about the status of a piece of information, err on the side of caution and include a citation.**

While some facts may be viewed as common knowledge, the presentation of those facts is considered the unique work of an author. Again, when using the language or words of another, you must properly acknowledge his or her work.

Student Misconceptions about Plagiarism and the Internet

Some students view all information on the Internet as equal to common knowledge simply because it is free, publicly shared, widely available, and indeed, quite "common." Nevertheless, the language, ideas, and work in electronic sources, even those without an identifiable author, must be cited.*

Consequences for violating the Code of Academic Conduct, including cases of plagiarism, range from **disciplinary sanctions** such as disciplinary probation, deferred separation, suspension, and dismissal to **educational interventions** such as attending a workshop or writing a paper. In addition, any work that is the product of plagiarism is generally assigned a grade of zero by the instructor. For more information on student discipline, see "The Student Disciplinary System at UC Davis" @ http://sja.ucdavis.edu/pdf/Integrity1.pdf

Strategies for Success:
Meeting the Demands of University-Level Scholarship

To avoid plagiarizing accidentally:
- **keep accurate notes when doing research**
- **educate yourself on university plagiarism policies**
- **master the procedure for citing sources and**
- **learn to paraphrase without borrowing the language or structure used in an original source.***

To avoid the temptation to plagiarize intentionally:
- **Visit the Learning Skills Center (LSC) where tutors can help you edit a paper or plan an essay. The LSC also offers workshops in subjects ranging from calculus to composition. For more information on the services at the LSC, link to: http://lsc.ucdavis.edu**
- **Visit your instructor during office hours and ask questions in class to clarify course requirements or instructions for assignments.**
- **Consult the web-based resources in the Webliography that follows. These sources will help you through the stages of writing a research paper, from planning to polishing.**
- **Consider the consequences of plagiarism before you try passing off the work of another as your own. Missing a deadline or receiving a low score will not tarnish your academic record in the same way that sanctions from Student Judicial Affairs would.**

*The next module, "Citation: The Key to Responsible Research," will provide further instruction on paraphrasing your sources, integrating your citations, and formatting your references.

Works Cited

"Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship." Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. 18 July 2003
        <http://sja/ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm>.

"Code of Academic Conduct." Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. September 15, 2003
        <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/pdf/CAC.pdf>.

"The Student Disciplinary System at UC Davis." Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. 18 July 2003
        <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/pdf/Integrity1.pdf>.