

TIP SHEET for Students

Understanding Plagiarism

It may seem that plagiarism means different things to different people; there are various cultural understandings, discipline-specific understandings, and context-dependent understandings of plagiarism as well. Copying, sharing, and reusing material may be acceptable practice in some areas of your life but could be a real problem in your classes.

In your role as a student at the University of Alberta, there is only one definition of Plagiarism you need to understand, and it comes from the Code of Student Behaviour:

30.3.2(1) **Plagiarism**

No Student shall submit the words, ideas, images or data of another person as the Student's own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, project, assignment, presentation or poster in a course or program of study.

While it looks straight-forward, there are a number of things in this definition that are very important to understand.

1. Any time you hand in something with your name on it, it is presumed to have been generated entirely by you **unless you indicate otherwise**. If you use another's words, you would indicate that using quotation marks, others' ideas, images, data and so on would be indicated with in-text citations or footnotes (depending on the citation style you are using). If you use any material that you did not generate yourself and do not acknowledge it, **you are submitting it as your own work**. It's perfectly okay, and often desirable, to use other people's work but you must give them proper credit.

2. Many students understand plagiarism to refer only to copying words without attribution. You can see in the definition that it is possible to plagiarize **"words, ideas, images or data."** Any content you use that you did not generate yourself (ideas, graphics, photographs, charts, statistics, etc.) must be cited.

3. Another common misconception about plagiarism is that it only happens in written form. While plagiarism is written work is certainly the most common, it is also possible to use others' words, ideas, images or data in **any kind of assignment**: oral presentations, blogs, paintings or graphic arts, even interpretive dance! Your

work at the University is expected to be original, but is often based on existing research or the work of others. You must acknowledge that work.

4. Our definition of plagiarism **does not take into account whether or not the act was intentional**. This is crucial; the onus is on you to cite all borrowed work. Our definition of plagiarism encompasses a wide range of acts – from copying a sentence without proper citation to paying someone to write a paper for you, and all kinds of variations in between those two extremes. Decision-makers under the Code of Student Behaviour will take into account all of the circumstances of the offence when deciding what the best response (sanction) is. However, it is important to understand that simply accidentally forgetting to cite a source is still plagiarism.

5. Keep this definition in mind when working on group projects as well. If one person includes plagiarized materials in the project, the entire group has submitted the work under their own names and everyone could be in trouble. This makes it especially important for groups to ensure that any borrowed work is carefully documented.

For more information please contact Student Conduct and Accountability at 780-492-0777, or [studentconduct@ualberta.ca](mailto:studentconduct@ualberta.ca).

Please note this publication does not replace or supersede the policies and procedures outlined in the Code of Student Behaviour. In the case of any disagreement, the Code of Student Behaviour takes precedence.