

Plagiarism: A Comprehensive Guide for Students

Introduction

Plagiarism is one of the most serious academic offences in university life. This guide explains what plagiarism is, why it matters, how to recognize it, and most importantly, how to avoid it. By understanding these principles, you can protect your academic integrity and ensure your work is genuinely your own[1].

What is Plagiarism?

Definition

Plagiarism is **passing off, or attempting to pass off, another's work as your own**. This includes copying:

- The words of another person
- Ideas and research results
- Images and visual content
- Published or unpublished material

All of the above constitute plagiarism if presented without acknowledgement[1].

Forms of Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs in multiple forms:

- **Direct copying:** Reproducing text verbatim from another source without quotation marks or attribution
- **Copying from peers:** Using another student's work, coursework, or assignments
- **Institutional copying:** Taking work from university staff or published articles without credit
- **Enabling plagiarism:** Allowing your own work to be plagiarized by sharing it with others

Importantly, persons who allow their work to be plagiarized are also guilty of this offence[1].

Automatic Plagiarism Detection

At the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), you have consented to your work being scrutinised using advanced detection methods:

- **Electronic checking:** Your work will be checked electronically through Turnitin, a plagiarism detection service integrated with Moodle
- **Database comparison:** Your submissions are compared against 800 million websites, academic databases, and the work of other UK higher education institution students

- **Personal review:** Academic staff also review work in person to identify plagiarism

This two-pronged approach ensures fair assessment for all students[2].

Why Plagiarism Matters

Academic and Institutional Consequences

Plagiarism is considered one of the worst offences in academic life because it:

- **Undermines scholarship:** It corrupts the foundation of genuine academic inquiry and research
- **Violates integrity:** It breaches the trust between institutions, staff, and students
- **Distorts assessment:** It prevents fair evaluation, allowing dishonest students to gain higher marks than those who complete genuine work
- **Devalues degrees:** It reduces the credibility and worth of qualifications for all graduates
- **Causes unfairness:** Honest students are disadvantaged when others gain credit for work they did not complete

The University takes this matter extremely seriously because academic integrity is fundamental to the value of every degree awarded[2].

Avoiding Plagiarism: Key Principles

The Golden Rule

When in doubt, provide references.

Remember: there are **no penalties for asking for advice and guidance**. In contrast, there are **severe penalties for plagiarism**. Always consult your tutors if you are unsure about citing methods or referencing conventions.

Fundamental Guidelines

1. Direct Quotation

Anything copied or quoted from another source—including electronic sources such as the internet—must be:

- **Placed in quotation marks** to denote that these are not your own words
- **Attributed to the original author** either in the body of text or as a footnote
- **Accompanied by full source details** in your bibliography, including author name, publication date, and page number
- Example: "Hart (2003, p. 52) states that 'academic integrity is fundamental to university education.'"
- Example: Smith argues that "climate change represents an existential threat"[3], requiring immediate policy intervention.

2. Paraphrasing and Synthesis

Synthesising the work of others involves rewriting their ideas in your own words. This is entirely acceptable—and indeed expected in academic work. However, you must still acknowledge your source.

Methods of attribution for paraphrased material:

- 'Hart (2003, p. 52) maintains that...'
- 'Hart (2003, p. 52) provides evidence for...'
- 'It is argued that...' or 'It is submitted by Hart (2003, p. 52) that...'

Then provide the full source reference[1].

3. General Indebtedness

Where you are generally indebted for your ideas to one or two main sources, make this relationship clear to your reader:

- If the ideas (or the way they are presented) come primarily from one or two sources, state this explicitly
- If ideas derive from lectures, acknowledge the lecturer and course code
- Never claim originality where it does not exist
- Indicate generally where your information originates

4. Examination Situations

In timed, unseen examinations, full formal citations are not expected. However, you should:

- Indicate general indebtedness to sources or theorists
- **Always credit any quotations** you have managed to remember accurately
- Provide author names and approximate dates when possible

Even in exams, acknowledging sources demonstrates academic integrity and critical thinking[1].

How to Use Turnitin and Plagiarism Detection Tools

Before Final Submission

The JISC Turnitin software is a valuable resource available to you:

- **Students can check their own work** against the Turnitin database before final submission
- **Tutors can also review** for sections that mirror material found on the internet
- **Use this proactively** to ensure you have properly acknowledged all sources

This is not about catching plagiarism—it's about helping you improve your work and identify any sections where your acknowledgements might be incomplete[2].

Moodle Submissions

- Most coursework will be submitted electronically via Moodle
- Your module tutor will have alerted you to Turnitin as part of Moodle induction
- Submit early to allow time for checking and revision if needed

Alternative Submission Formats

For submissions outside the Moodle platform:

- **Hard and electronic copies:** Your work may be checked against the UK Higher Education Plagiarism Detection Service database
- **Handwritten work, portfolios, and process workbooks:** Check with your module tutor if you are unsure about plagiarism regulations for these formats

Your tutors are there to assist you—ensure you take advantage of their expertise[1].

Understanding the Referencing System

What is Referencing?

Referencing is the practice of acknowledging all sources of information and ideas you have used in preparing your work. References:

- **Identify intellectual ownership:** They acknowledge whose ideas you have used
- **Prevent plagiarism:** Failure to provide references constitutes a form of theft
- **Add credibility:** They demonstrate your engagement with existing scholarship
- **Allow readers to verify:** Sources can be traced and checked by others

Referencing is not an afterthought—it should be an ongoing part of your work as you research and write[1].

Referencing Styles

The University uses multiple referencing conventions depending on discipline:

- **Harvard referencing**
- **Author-Date systems**
- **Numerical systems**
- **Subject-specific variations**

Check your programme handbook or consult your module tutor to identify the required referencing style for your course. Different subjects may have different conventions—this is normal and expected[2].

Creating Your Bibliography

Your bibliography should contain:

- **Complete source information:** Author(s), publication date, title, publisher or journal details
- **Consistent formatting:** All entries formatted according to your institutional style guide
- **Page numbers:** Where relevant, particularly for direct quotations

- **URLs and DOIs:** For electronic sources

A well-organised bibliography demonstrates your research process and supports your arguments with evidence[1].

The Consequences of Plagiarism

University Procedures and Penalties

Full details of the University's procedures and penalties for dealing with plagiarism are contained in:

- **Chapter 7 of the Academic Quality Handbook:** Available on the University intranet and website, or from Faculty Offices
- **University Regulations – Undergraduate Student Guide:** Provides a summary of procedures and penalties

Penalties for plagiarism can range from:

- Written warnings for minor infractions
- Failing a specific assignment
- Failing an entire module
- Loss of marks for the level of study
- Cancellation of all marks and disqualification from your programme[2]

The severity of the penalty depends on the nature and extent of the plagiarism detected.

Your Student Contract

When you registered as a student at UWTSD, you consented to:

- Your work being scrutinised both electronically and in person for plagiarism
- Your submissions being checked against Turnitin and related detection services
- The University investigating any suspected instances of plagiarism

This is a fundamental condition of your student status[2].

Building Good Practices: A Practical Strategy

During Your Research Phase

1. Keep careful notes about all sources you consult
2. Use a signal phrase at the start of notes: "According to [source]..."
3. Clearly distinguish in your notes between:
 - Your own ideas (mark with one colour or symbol)
 - Paraphrased material (mark with a different colour)
 - Direct quotations (mark with quotation marks and page numbers)
4. Record full bibliographic information immediately for each source
5. Highlight statements that will require citations in your final work

During Your Writing Phase

1. Include citations as you write, not as an afterthought
2. Use in-text citations for all paraphrased material
3. Place quotation marks around any text copied directly
4. Reference page numbers for all direct quotes
5. Build your bibliography progressively as you write
6. Use your institution's referencing system consistently

Before Final Submission

1. Use Turnitin to check your work against the database
2. Review any flagged sections and verify your citations
3. Ensure every source is acknowledged
4. Check that your bibliography matches all in-text citations
5. Proofread your references for accuracy and consistency
6. Ask your tutor if anything remains unclear

FAQs: Common Plagiarism Questions

"Can I use Wikipedia as a source?"

Wikipedia can be a starting point for research, but you should verify information against primary sources. If you use specific ideas or facts from Wikipedia, cite it. However, most tutors prefer citations to original scholarly sources.

"Do I need to cite common knowledge?"

Common knowledge (facts widely known and found in multiple sources without attribution) generally does not need to be cited. However, if you are unsure whether something is common knowledge, cite it anyway. The golden rule applies: when in doubt, provide a reference.

"Is paraphrasing the same as avoiding plagiarism?"

Paraphrasing is using someone else's ideas in your own words. This is acceptable—and expected in academic work—but you must still cite the original source. Paraphrasing without citation is still plagiarism.

"What about using AI to help write my essay?"

Check your institutional policies. Some universities prohibit AI-generated content entirely; others require disclosure. Never submit AI-generated work as if it were your own without explicit permission and acknowledgement[3].

"Can I reuse work I wrote for a different course?"

Self-plagiarism—submitting work you have already submitted for credit elsewhere—is a serious academic offence. Always write original work for each assessment, or seek explicit permission from your tutors before reusing material.

Summary: Your Responsibilities

As a student at UWTSD, you are responsible for:

- **Understanding plagiarism:** Know what constitutes plagiarism in all its forms
- **Acknowledging sources:** Cite all material that is not your original work
- **Using Turnitin:** Check your work before submission using available detection tools
- **Asking for help:** Consult tutors about referencing and citation methods—there is no penalty for asking
- **Maintaining integrity:** Submit genuine, original work that represents your own understanding
- **Following guidelines:** Observe the referencing conventions required by your programme

Key Resources

- UWTSD Academic Quality Handbook: Available on the intranet and website
- Reference Guidance Handbook: Detailed guidelines on referencing for your discipline
- UWTSD Moodle platform: Plagiarism checking tools and module-specific guidance
- Module tutors: Your first point of contact for questions about referencing and academic integrity
- UWTSD Students' Union Advice Service: Support for academic misconduct queries

Conclusion

Plagiarism is avoidable. By understanding what constitutes plagiarism, developing good research and note-taking habits, using referencing consistently, and taking advantage of the support available to you, you can protect your academic integrity and ensure your success at university.

Remember: **the integrity of your degree depends on your commitment to honest, original work.** If you have questions, ask your tutors. If you make a mistake, it is far better to acknowledge it than to conceal it. The University's commitment to academic integrity serves all students—it ensures that your degree, and the degrees of your peers, are genuine, verifiable, and respected.

References

- [1] University of Wales Trinity Saint David. (2024). Plagiarism guidance for students. University regulations and academic quality handbook.
- [2] University of Wales Trinity Saint David. (2024). Academic misconduct policy and student agreement. Retrieved from <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/academic-quality-handbook>
- [3] University of Wales Trinity Saint David. (2024). Academic quality handbook, Chapter 7: Academic misconduct procedures. Available from Faculty Offices or University intranet.