

Avoiding Plagiarism

A guide for parents and carers

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Introduction

As you may be aware there is increasing concern from many quarters about students (at all levels) gaining grades/awards/certificates that – technically – they should not be entitled to because they have cheated (especially in coursework) by not producing work that is their own. This is known as plagiarism.

The following is a sample of recent newspaper headlines, mainly relating to cheating at university level:

“Warning over plagiarism in schools”

(Daily Express, 18 January 2008)

“Crime writer Lynda La Plante becomes Prime Suspect in plagiarism row”

(Daily Mail, 7 September 2008)

“Raj Persaud: TV psychiatrist admits plagiarism”

(Guardian, 16 June 2008)

“Universities review plagiarism policies to catch Facebook cheats”

(Guardian, 31 October 2008)

The purpose of this guide is to give parents an overview of the issue of plagiarism and academic honesty.

The guide considers the following areas:

- what is plagiarism?
- why do students plagiarise?
- why should other people’s work be attributed?
- student verification of work.
- identifying inauthentic work.
- what are the penalties for plagiarism?
- what help can I give?

For information on how students should use sources of information in their work please see *Using sources: a guide for students* (www.ofqual.gov.uk/plagiarism-students).



What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is defined by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), which represents the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK (including the GCSE and A level awarding organisations), as:

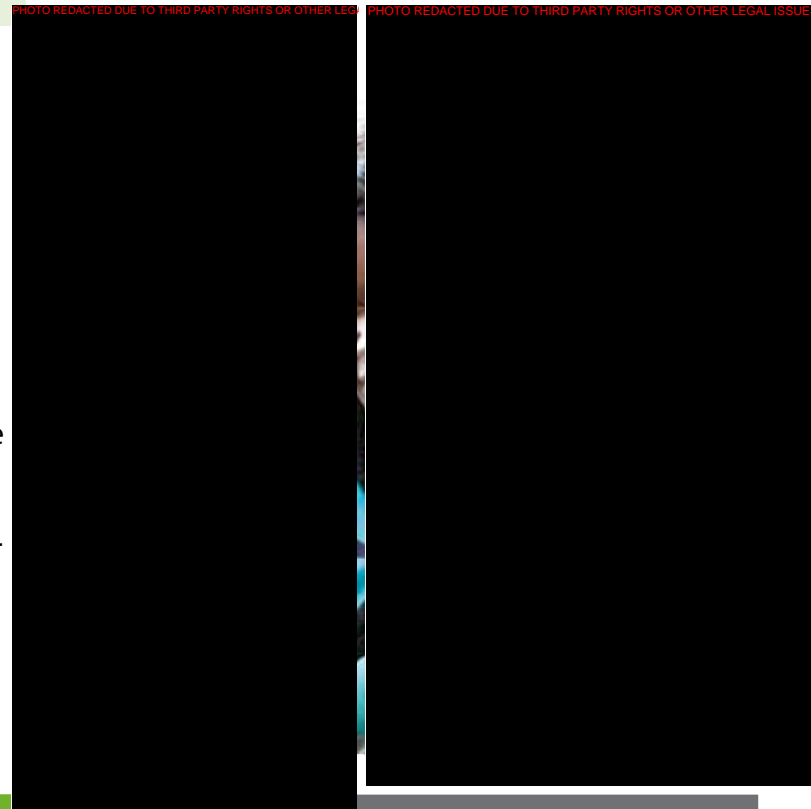
“Unacknowledged copying from published sources (including the Internet) or incomplete referencing”
(JCQ, 2008, p28)

- striving for better marks with the aim of gaining a better overall result for the whole subject
- choosing the wrong subject (particularly at AS/A level) – arguably this is a management issue for schools/colleges, which must ensure that students enrol on the right course from the outset
- poor teaching
- cultural differences – in some cultures people consider it disrespectful not to copy verbatim the words of others
- an out and out desire to simply beat the system.

Why do students plagiarise?

It is helpful to understand why students might resort to plagiarism. PlagiarismAdvice.org (2006) has identified the following possible reasons:

- ignorance on the part of the student because they do not know about plagiarism
- time-management issues for students – they may be unaware of how much research and effort should go into coursework, and may leave work until the last minute and then panic when faced with an imminent deadline



Often plagiarism occurs because of a lack of understanding by the student about academically acceptable practices and techniques for acknowledging the work of others (unintentional plagiarism) rather than a premeditated desire to cheat (intentional plagiarism).

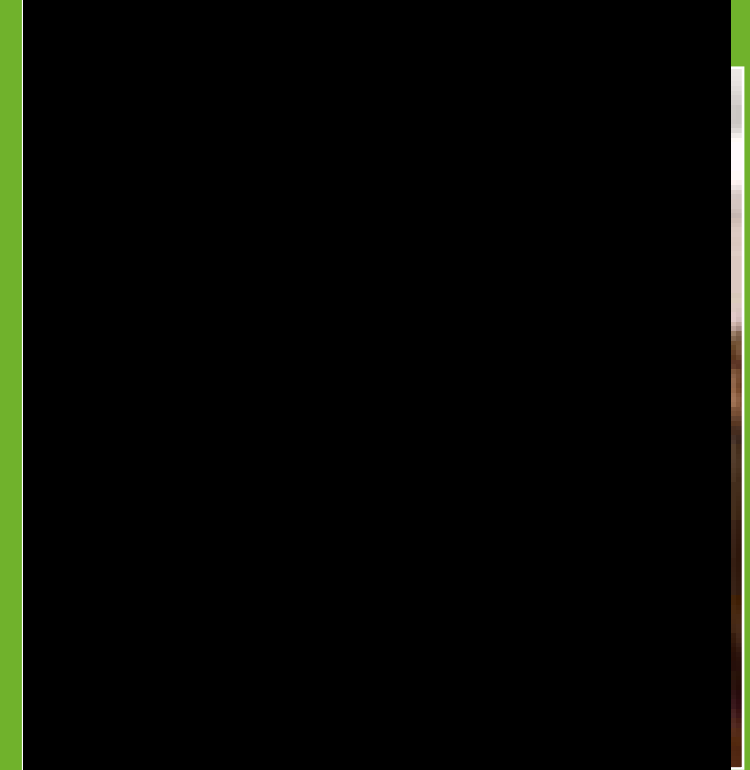
Most students know that the following activities are considered cheating:

- buying a paper from an internet site (also known as an essay bank or a paper mill)
- getting someone else to do the work for them
- giving false information about a source used in coursework.

However, students may not be aware that the following activities are also unacceptable and will be penalised:

- copying sections of work from a friend
- having a friend/family member dictate something to them (often this will occur because students know what they want to say but cannot find the words themselves)
- copying and pasting from the internet without citing the source
- copying directly from a textbook without citing the source
- omitting quotation marks from quotations
- paraphrasing without including reference to the source of the paraphrase.

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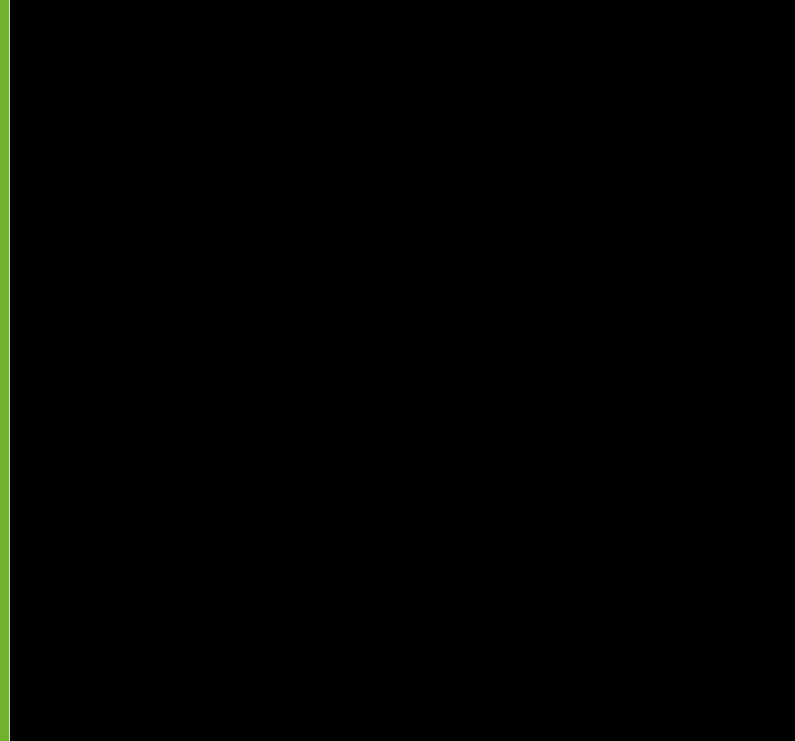


Why should students attribute other people's work?

All of these reasons are pertinent to the student themselves. However, Cottrell (1999) points out that there are also several reasons why students should attribute sources.

1. It shows politeness to the person whose ideas they have used.
2. It is clear for the people reading their work that the student is not plagiarising.
3. Other people who read the student's work can find the original source if they find it interesting.
4. It may prove useful for the student themselves if they need to find the source again later on.
5. If a student can back up their arguments with a published reference then it means that readers are more likely to have confidence in what the student has written.
6. If a student is thorough when they reference it is more likely that they will have been careful when they have checked the facts themselves.

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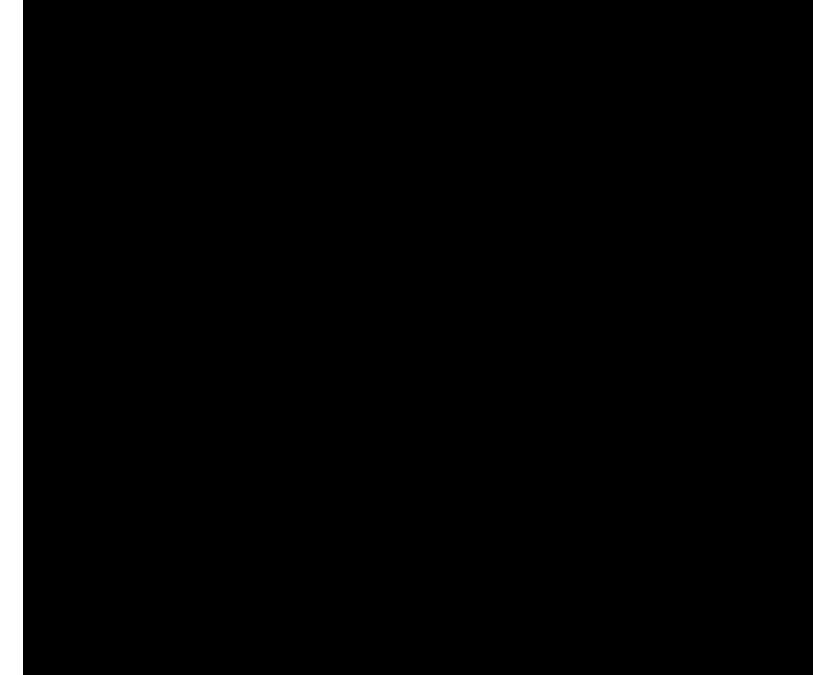
Student verification of work

Students must submit a signed declaration with any piece of assessed work proving that this work is their own. To uphold the integrity of their awards, awarding organisations (better known as exam boards) take a range of measures to ensure that a student's work is their own.

Students who wish to continue their studies at college or university must submit original work, and their college or university tutors will also use a range of strategies to check work is the student's own.

Students who submit work that is not their own at university level will be subject to disciplinary measures.

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Identifying inauthentic work

From their close work with students teachers will be aware of changes in writing style, spelling and use of grammar out of context with the main body of the student's work. They may also use computer software to help identify material that the student has taken from publications or the internet.

Such software compares student essays to a vast database of billions of pages of content including all previously submitted student essays.

All of the major awarding organisations, many further education colleges and sixth forms and most UK universities have access to such software.

The software scans a student's work and produces an originality report, which identifies material that the student has copied from elsewhere.

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What are the penalties for plagiarism?

The JCQ provides guidance to the awarding organisations on how to deal with malpractice in examinations and coursework, and outlines possible penalties for plagiarism, including:

- loss of all marks for the section
- loss of all marks for the component
- loss of all marks for the unit
- disqualification from the unit
- disqualification from all units in one or more qualifications taken in the series
- disqualification from the whole qualification
- disqualification from the whole examination series
- being banned for a number of years from taking any further examinations.

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What help can I give?

The JCQ document *Instructions for conducting coursework* (2009) outlines the help parents and carers can provide with the production of coursework. The JCQ recommends that:

- parents/carers should encourage their children to spend time on their coursework and to think about it as early as possible. They should discuss with their children the planning and timing of the work.
- parents/carers may provide their children with access to resource materials and discuss the coursework with their children but they must not give direct advice on what should or should not be included.
- a child who needs more specific help should be encouraged to speak to his/her teacher.
(JCQ, 2009, p3)

For information on how students should use sources of information in their work please see *Using sources: a guide for students*.

www.ofqual.gov.uk/plagiarism-students

References

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Further information

The following organisations also provide guidance on using sources and avoiding plagiarism:

- Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ): www.jcq.org.uk
The JCQ represents the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK, including the GCSE and A level awarding organisations. JCQ coordinates common administration of qualifications between the organisations.
- JISC: www.jisc.ac.uk
JISC inspires UK colleges and universities in the innovative use of digital technologies, helping to maintain the UK's position as a global leader in education.
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual): www.ofqual.gov.uk
The regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.
- PlagiarismAdvice.org: www.plagiarismadvice.org
PlagiarismAdvice.org provides details of news, events, resources and research for teachers and students on plagiarism and ensuring work is authentic.



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