

Plagiarism: Academic Deceit and Dishonesty

Plagiarism is one of the most flagrant violations of academic standards. The consequences of plagiarism are accordingly drastic.

1. What Is Plagiarism?

The aim of writing an academic paper is to convince fellow scholars of your own opinion or viewpoint. Your readers will assume that the argumentation is yours and they will expect you to show reasons for, sometimes proof of, the validity of your case. You will, however, almost always find it necessary, and it is perfectly justified, to use the ideas of other people, especially other scholars who have researched your topic before, and you will use their ideas and sometimes their actual words in building up your own argument. Whenever you do this, you have a moral responsibility to tell your reader clearly and precisely what ideas and which words you are using and where you have found them, in other words, to indicate your sources. Failure to do so is called "plagiarism" and is an extremely serious offence, the consequences of which are explained below.

Plagiarism is deceitful and dishonest. It must, therefore, be absolutely clear to you what plagiarism means. In *The MLA Style Manual* plagiarism is defined and explained as "the use of another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source [...] to plagiarise is to give the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from someone else" (Achttert and Gibaldi 4). There are various types of plagiarism, from using someone else's *exact words*, to paraphrasing or using someone else's *ideas*. Some examples of what plagiarism is and is not are given below.

As a student new to university studies you may find you are plagiarising without realising what you are doing. You may be accustomed to using material taken from various sources, for example, books in the library or material downloaded from the Internet and no one has informed you that you are duty bound to show your reader exactly where you have taken this material from. Plagiarised passages may involve particular words, whole sentences or particular expressions; they may include someone's argument or line of argument; they may include another person's theory or terminology. This also applies to oral presentations in class. It is even an offence to use your own material, for which you have already received credit, in a new paper, without stating that you are doing so.

Furthermore, as a learner of a foreign language you may even find yourself using special phrases that you have learnt almost unconsciously from a book or from the Internet. This might also be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism does not include references to knowledge which would be shared by any educated English native speaker (e.g. that William the Conqueror invaded Britain in 1066, or well-known proverbs or famous quotations). If you are not sure about what constitutes plagiarism in such cases, please ask your teachers. Ultimately, the most important criterion is honesty: do not present material which is not your own as if it were.

To avoid plagiarising, you should keep detailed notes of anything you read when preparing your paper and make sure that when you use this material you acknowledge it, firstly, in your own text, and, secondly, in your Works Cited (literature) or References (linguistics) at the end of your paper.

Works Cited / References

Achttert, Walter S. and Joseph Gibaldi. *The MLA Style Manual*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1993.

2. Examples

[Note : all correct examples follow the bibliographical style used in literary studies; linguistics uses a different bibliographical style, the author-date style, e.g. (Shklovsky 1989 : 20) rather than (Shklovsky 20) for student version 1 below]

Original passage (by Victor Shklovsky, a member of the Russian Formalist school of literary theory, who seeks to define the nature and purpose of art):

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

Student version 1:

Early twentieth-century critics sought to define the nature and purpose of art. For the Russian Formalists, art enables us to “recover the sensation of life;” it refreshes our experience of the world and “exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (Shklovsky 20).

Comment: Correct. The student uses his or her own words in order to paraphrase Shklovsky’s argument, puts the original words in quotation marks, and indicates the source. He or she uses Shklovsky’s opinion for the development of his or her own thesis.

Student version 2:

Shklovsky argues that “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. [...] The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (20).

Comment: Correct. The quotation marks acknowledge the words of the original writer and the information in bracket tells us the source of the quote. (The complete reference must be given in the works cited section).

Student version 3:

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make the stone *stony*. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar.”

Comment: Obvious plagiarism. Word-for-word repetition without acknowledgment.

Student version 4:

Art enables us to regain the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things more vividly, to make the stone *stony* again for us.

Comment: Still plagiarism. A few words have been changed or omitted, but the student is not using his or her own language.

Student version 5:

Art makes the world unfamiliar and thus refreshes our perception and experience of it.

Comment: Still plagiarism. The student uses his or her own words but fails to indicate the source of the idea. Adding (Shklovsky 20) before the full stop would make this a perfectly correct example.

Student version 6:

Art helps us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. (Shklovsky 20)

Comment: Still plagiarism. Merely indicating from where you have taken the idea alone is not enough. The language is the original author’s, and only quotation marks around the quoted passage (plus the reference in brackets) would be correct.

Works Cited

Shklovsky, Victor. “Art as Technique.” *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. New York: Longman, 1988. 15-30.