



Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is defined differently from culture to culture. In some cultures, sharing homework assignments, providing friends with answers to test questions, and allowing someone to copy one's papers is considered "helping". In the US, each of these actions is considered a violation of academic integrity, and violators are punished severely. At Texas A & M University, the least severe punishment is a suspension for a stated period of time (possibly a semester or longer), which could cause a student to have to reapply for continuation of their academic program. Following the suspension, an academic department could refuse to readmit the individual. Furthermore, it usually means a loss of legal non-immigrant status as student. Once this legal status is lost, an international student is no longer eligible for employment in the US and must apply for reinstatement to legal status by the Immigration and Naturalization Services. But, applying does not guarantee that reinstatement to legal status will occur.

While most international students adapt very well to the US academic system, it is important to understand the US expectations for students in relation to academic integrity and to avoid problems that could be caused by lack of cultural understanding about these issues. Indeed, many international students are simply unaware of the US expectations and university rules about this important issue and would never violate them on purpose. While this lack of understanding can have serious consequences, there are a variety of resources to assist you in learning what the rules and expectations are.

For example, the most common problem of international students in relation to academic integrity concerns giving appropriate credit to others when using someone else's ideas in a written paper, such as a dissertation or theses. This is called plagiarism. The majority of this handout focuses on this problem and how to avoid it. However, your best source of information about appropriate writing styles and formats for research papers, theses, or dissertations is the faculty member teaching the class or advising you in your research project. You should also ask your professor if it is appropriate to work with another student on homework or other class projects.

Students who are accused of scholastic dishonesty have rights within the university regulations that govern the process. For more information about the process, the punishments, and your rights and responsibilities as a student, refer to the Academic Integrity brochure published by the Department of Student Life or to the Texas A & M University Student Rules and Regulations, available in your academic department, at International Student Services, and at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu>.

Plagiarism – Plagiarism occurs when someone else’s ideas are described or words are used in a written document, but that individual is not given appropriate or correct credit for those ideas or words. The effect that is created is that the writer of the document appears to be taking credit for ideas or words that are not his or her own. In essence, it becomes a theft of ideas. This is a very serious offense in a university, which is an institution designed to explore ideas and create new knowledge.

Fabrication of Results/Data – It is never appropriate to create false data to include in a written paper or to leave data out of a study to make the results appear more significant. The academic community condemns this above all other forms of scholastic dishonesty.

Reference Citation – There are appropriate ways to give credit for someone else’s ideas in a written paper that you are writing. This is called making a reference citation. Each academic discipline is different in its expectations for correctly paraphrasing and documenting sources. For example, some disciplines use footnotes; some use endnotes. Some use names in the body of the text; some use numbers. Each uses its own stylistic format from a scientific journal or professional association. Therefore, it is vital to ask your academic advisor for help in learning what is appropriate for your academic major or a specific class. There are some basic examples listed on this page to point out some of these differences.

Literature Review – This part of a thesis or dissertation is a review of the current state of the discipline about a chosen research topic. It is never the writer’s own ideas, and it is never copied from a previously written dissertation or thesis of a research group member. It is a compilation of the ideas of others, so each idea that comes from another source must be quoted or paraphrased and appropriately given credit through a reference citation.

How to Avoid Plagiarism When Writing a Paper

1. **Quotation Marks** -- Never copy the ideas of someone else word for word without using quotation marks. In most disciplines it is not acceptable to use too many quotations in a written paper. In general, the reason to use quotations is that the original writer has used such impressive wording that it must be read as it was originally written or it will lose its impact or importance. In most cases, such quotations are not longer than a few sentences. Always check with your academic advisor if you have questions about what is appropriate for your field.
2. **Use of Tables, Charts, and Figures** – Sometimes, you will want to use a chart or some type of diagram in your paper that was originally created by someone else. Generally, this is all right to do if you provide credit to the original author. However, here are circumstances where it is not appropriate. For example, if a paper is being published, it may be necessary to obtain permission in advance from the author before the table or chart can be used in your published paper. If you are not sure about whether you should use a table or figure in your papers, ask your professor.

3. **Paraphrasing** – This occurs when you read something from an author that you want to include, but you summarize the original author’s ideas and write them in your own words. Even using paraphrasing, it is still necessary to provide a reference citation naming the original author, to let the reader know that this idea is not your original idea. If you use too many of the original author’s wording or phrasing in your paraphrase, you may still be guilty of plagiarism. If you are not sure that your paraphrasing is acceptable, ask the professor for whom you are writing the paper. Below are some examples of this.

Paraphrasing Sample 1 :

Original Text

“The association of lipids with proteins not only solubilizes lipids but also aids in their transport into cells. Triacylglycerols are transported to tissues either in chylomicrons or in VLDL.”¹

Note the use of quotation marks and the reference number “1” at the end of the quotation to indicate the reference citation.

Reference Citation:

1. Mathews, C. K., & van Holde, K. E. (1990) *Biochemistry*, pp. 576, Benjamin/Cummings Press, Menlo Park, CA.

This reference citation would appear, numbered, in a list at the end of the paper. Using the reference citation provides proper credit to the original author. Remember that citation formats are discipline specific. Ask your professor what is appropriate for your papers in class or your research group.

Bad Paraphrase of Original Text:

Lipids associate with proteins not only to solubilize themselves in blood but also to help their transport into cells. Triacylglycerols are carried to tissues by chylomicrons or VLDL particles.¹

This paraphrase is worded too much like the original quotation. Even though the phrasing is not exactly the same as the original, this pharphrasing could still be considered plagiarism.

Better Paraphrase of Original Text:

Plasma lipoproteins are composed of lipid and protein domains and are responsible for delivering the water-insoluble lipids to cells. For example, chylomicrons or VLDL particles are involved in the delivery of triacylglycerols.¹

Now, the idea of the original author is more obviously stated in the words of the writer. Notice that both paraphrases still use the reference number “1” at the end of the idea to indicate that the original idea came from a source other than the writer of this paper.

Paraphrasing Sample 2 :

Original Text

“Skills are dimensions of the ability to behave effectively in situations of action. *Skill* is a hybrid term that refers both to a property of concrete behavior and to a property of theories of action” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 12).

Note the use of quotation marks and inclusion of names of the authors, the date of the original publication, and the page number where the quotation appeared in the original text. Some disciplines use this type of reference citation format instead of numbers as used in sample 1.

Reference Citation:

Argyris, C. and Schon, D.A. (1974). Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Note that this reference citation is different than that in Sample 1. In this discipline, the references are also listed at the end of the paper, but they are listed alphabetically by the author’s last name. To make the last name easy to see, the first line of the citation sometimes hangs over the following lines as this example shows. Again, always ask your professor what is most appropriate for your papers in class or your research group.

Bad Paraphrase of Original Text:

In active situations, skills are aspects of one’s ability to act effectively. Referring to both to definite action as well as a theory of action, *skill* is a hybrid term (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

This paraphrase is worded too much like the original quotation. Even though the phrasing is not exactly the same as the original, this phrasing could still be considered plagiarism.

Better Paraphrase of Original Text:

The term “skill” can refer both to physical actions that allow one to perform effectively in a specific situation as well as to mental concepts that comprise one’s theories of action (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Now, the idea of the original author is more obviously stated in the words of the writer. Notice that both paraphrases still use reference citations to indicate that the original idea came from a source other than the writer of this paper.