ORIGINAL PAPER

Navigating the Ethical Terrain: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism

Minoti Karnik[1]

Abstract

In the academic and professional realms, plagiarism stands as a critical issue, necessitating a nuanced understanding to effectively navigate its complexities. This paper delves into the multifaceted aspects of plagiarism, dissecting its various forms including intentional, unintentional, accidental, and self-plagiarism. It meticulously outlines the severe consequences associated with plagiarism, spanning from academic penalties to tarnished reputations and even legal ramifications. Offering practical insights, the paper elucidates strategies for plagiarism avoidance, ranging from diligent note-taking practices to the art of original writing and judicious citation. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of integrating researched information ethically through techniques such as quotations, paraphrasing, summarising, and proper citation. By elucidating the distinction between common knowledge and original ideas, this paper equips readers with the tools necessary to uphold academic integrity and navigate the ethical terrain with confidence. This subject holds a lot of significance in the field of research and therefore students and researchers will be greatly benefited by this article as it not only describes plagiarism in detail but also gives fool-proof methods to avoid it.

Introduction

Plagiarism is an act which consists of using someone else's ideas, written content or creations without giving credit to or acknowledging the original source. It can be considered as intellectual theft because it entails passing off another's work as one's own. Plagiarism can occur in various forms: directly copying text, paraphrasing without giving credit, not citing the original source when using someone else's ideas or even self-plagiarism which involves reusing one's own work without appropriate acknowledgement (Islam et al., 2022).

✉Minoti Karnik
  office@ijngp.com

[1]Counselor-in training
Master's Student, Lifespan Counselling
Thane, India

Plagiarism follows severe consequences both academically and professionally. While in academic settings, plagiarism is a serious ethical violation and can result in adverse consequences ranging from failing grades to expulsion, in professional settings it can cost someone their job, lead to legal issues and overall damage one's reputation (Hacker, 1995).

Ensuring accurate understanding of what plagiarism really entails is integral for novice as well as experienced researchers in order to maintain academic integrity and ethical conduct. Plagiarism is not only directly copying words, but also failing to give credit for using someone else's ideas. Following appropriate citation guidelines in the designated format (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago) and maintaining complete transparency regarding the sources used in one's work are both essential conditions to ensure originality and integrity in one's research work (Islam et al., 2021).

Moreover, the principles of intellectual honesty and knowledge-sharing are completely undermined by plagiarism. It completely devalues the hard work, effort and creativity that is required to produce original work. Additionally, it also reduces the trustworthiness and credibility of the academic and professional discourse. Engaging in plagiarism is not only a betrayal for the individual's peers, mentors and colleagues in the field of research but it is also greatly detrimental to their own development, growth and learning in the field of research (Ober et al., 2013).

Preventing plagiarism is possible if one develops good research and writing habit creates their own figure or table by using someone else's data. Additionally, if one intends to reuse any published picture, table, or graphic it is essential to obtain copyright permission s. These habits include conducting research thoroughly, taking copious notes carefully and properly citing sources in one's work. Plagiarism detection tools can be an additional method to detect accidental or unintentional instances of plagiarism and ensure originality in one's work (Ober et al., 2013).

In essence, plagiarism is a violation of academic and professional ethics that undermines the integrity of intellectual discourse. By understanding its implications and taking steps to avoid it, individuals can uphold the principles of honesty, integrity, and respect for intellectual property.

Types of Plagiarism

Understanding the nuances of different types of plagiarism can help individuals navigate ethical boundaries in academic and professional settings. Islam et al. (2022) have given 4 types of plagiarism which are as follows:

Intentional Plagiarism

When someone purposely and deliberately portrays someone else's work as their own without giving due credit, it is known as intentional plagiarism. This could be taking verbatim quotes from a source, paraphrasing without giving credit, or appropriating ideas without giving credit. Intentional plagiarism can have major repercussions, such as academic sanctions and reputational harm, and is frequently interpreted as a purposeful attempt at deception.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Unintentional plagiarism, sometimes referred to as negligent plagiarism, happens when someone utilises another person's work without realising they have not given due credit. This may occur as a result of a failure to comprehend citation guidelines, inadequate note-taking techniques, or simple source omission. Even when done unintentionally, it is still regarded as plagiarism and, if found, can lead to consequences from the academic community. In general, though, people consider it less serious than intentional plagiarism.

Accidental Plagiarism

Similar to unintentional plagiarism, accidental plagiarism usually refers to instances in which someone incorrectly thinks they are using their own original work when, in reality, it has already been published by someone else. This might happen when people accidentally use concepts they have read about or come across elsewhere in their own writing without giving due credit. Accidental plagiarism is more commonly the result of oversights or ignorance than of intentionality.

Self-Plagiarism

Duplicate publication, or self-plagiarism, is the practice of someone using their own previously published work again without giving due credit or attribution. Although authors are free to repurpose their own writing, they must do so in an ethical and transparent manner. This is especially important in academic and scientific settings where it's important to publish original research findings. Self-plagiarism deceives readers about the uniqueness and novelty of the work, which compromises the integrity of scholarly communication.

Every form of plagiarism has unique ethical ramifications and repercussions. Plagiarism in any form violates the values of intellectual honesty and academic integrity, regardless of the purpose. People can take proactive steps to prevent plagiarism and maintain ethical standards in their academic and professional endeavours by being aware of these distinctions.

Consequences of Plagiarism

The consequences of plagiarism can be wide-ranging and impactful, affecting both the individual who commits plagiarism and the broader academic or professional community.

Academic Consequences

Plagiarism in academic environments is frequently punished severely. These might be failing a course, getting a failing mark on an assignment, or possibly being kicked out of school. Plagiarism is dealt with strictly by academic institutions through policies and processes that can have a lasting impact on a student's academic record and future possibilities (Islam et al., 2022).

Professional Repercussions

Plagiarism can also have serious consequences in professional settings. Credibility and honesty are crucial in professions like academia, publishing, and journalism. One's reputation is damaged by plagiarism, and it can result in a loss of trust from the public, employers, and other co-workers. Legal repercussions may also follow, especially if the copied content is protected by copyright (Islam et al., 2022).

Damage to Reputation

The consequences of plagiarism can be long-lasting for a researcher's reputation. When plagiarism is detected, it can overshadow prior achievements and erode confidence in the person's expertise and honesty. For professors, researchers, and authors whose careers depend heavily on the uniqueness and authenticity of their output, this can be extremely harmful (Ober et al., 2013).

Legal Ramifications

Legal action may occasionally result from plagiarism, especially if the copied material is copyright protected. Lawsuits alleging copyright infringement may result in hefty fines, damages, and legal costs. In addition, if it is discovered that people or organisations have committed plagiarism or copyright violations, they risk losing their credibility and suffering reputational harm (Islam et al., 2021).

Ethical and Personal Consequences

Plagiarism has ethical and personal repercussions in addition to the immediate effects on one's career and grades. It violates the values of integrity, honesty, and respect for the intellectual property of others. Additionally, plagiarism can negatively impact a person's ethical integrity and sense of self-worth, which can result in feelings of remorse, guilt, or humiliation (Ober et al., 2013).

In general, plagiarism has considerably more negative effects than just academic or professional sanctions. They cover legal ramifications, reputational harm, and personal integrity, emphasising the value of honouring moral principles and appreciating the contributions of others' intelligence.

Avoiding plagiarism: Tips and tricks
Efficient Note Taking While Reading Literature

While conducting research and getting ready to write a paper, clearly labelling one's own ideas ("ME" in parentheses) and other people's ideas and words ("SMITH, 2005" or something similar to indicate author, source, and date) while taking notes is a habit that is very beneficial. Maintaining thorough notes of the references used and the ideas you derive from them with the help of excel sheets is often a good way of organising one's notes effectively while also knowing the original sources of all the information gathered. Early organisation will help save time towards and ease in adding citations (*Research Guides: Citing Sources: How to Avoid Plagiarism*, n.d.).

Procrastination is Never a Good Idea

It takes time to conduct quality research. Procrastination often leads to a limited availability of time and too much pressure on the author. This kind of pressure frequently results in careless research practices and poor choices and can result in unintentional or accidental plagiarism. This is why it is integral to ensure proper planning and work well in advance and take advice from supervisors or colleagues as and when required (*Research Guides: Citing Sources: How to Avoid Plagiarism*, n.d.).

Original Writing

It is often helpful to put all original ideas down without utilising someone else's phrases or even their writing style. This generally not only helps writing original content, but also allows the author to refrain from paraphrasing as much as possible. This is because, It is only appropriate to paraphrase or rewrite someone else's writing if the paraphrase appears sparingly in the text , and the source is mentioned at the conclusion of the paraphrased portion. The simplest method to stay clear of plagiarism issues in this case is to avoid over-paraphrasing and engage in paraphrasing sparingly. It is not appropriate to combine the original and borrowed texts without citing the original (Islam et al., 2022). Original writing may seem daunting but it gets better with practice like everything else does (Hacker, 1995)!

Avoid Copy Pasting

It is inappropriate to copy words verbatim from any other paper or book, even if it is a previously published piece of the same author (Ober et al., 2013). It is preferable to take someone else's concept and put it in one's own words or paraphrasing while giving credit to the original author. As an alternative, if exact words need to be added in one;s paper it is essential to put them in quotation marks and cite it immediately after (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017). Additionally, simply adding minor cosmetic changes to someone else's words is not a very good idea. Examples of minor cosmetic changes include changing phrases in computer code, reversing the sequence of a sentence, substituting "less" for "fewer," and modifying the layout of a spreadsheet etc (Hacker, 1995).

Ensure to Paraphrase Appropriately

While paraphrasing it is essential to ensure that the relevant source is cited. It is considered to be plagiarism when an author simply re-words another author's words or phrases by utilising synonyms and then includes it in their own paper without giving due credit (*Research Guides: Citing Sources: How to Avoid Plagiarism*, n.d.). On the other hand, appropriate paraphrasing includes putting the other author's thoughts, meaning, and details into one's own words (Hacker, 1995). A real understanding of the original source and using one's own words to summarise an idea or argument, putting any original words or phrases used in quotes and adding relevant citations are all necessary for effective paraphrase (*Research Guides: Citing Sources: How to Avoid Plagiarism*, n.d.).

Avoid Copying Images and Figures

Videos and images/figures are also copyrighted and appropriate permissions need to be obtained before using them for one's research paper and the original copyright owner needs to be credited through citations. If this is not done it becomes plagiarism (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017).

Additionally, it's often preferable to refrain from republishing a figure you've already published. If necessary, however, the author should include a citation to the original article in the caption of the figure or table, note in the text that the material is from their previous publication, and get permission if the copyrights have not been kept. It is not appropriate to reuse text/labels of figures on different papers, the author needs to re-create the text for every paper. If the author fails to follow these steps it will be considered as self-plagiarism which is viewed the same as deliberate plagiarism even if it's frequently inadvertent (Ober et al, 2013).

Ask for Permission from Copyright Owner

When a researcher wants to utilise a figure, table, or any other data that hasn't been previously published and was created or assembled by an individual who isn't one of their co-authors, they must obtain the consent of the researcher who created it originally. This also holds true if someone creates their own figure or table by using someone else's data. Additionally, if one intends to reuse any published picture, table, or graphic it is essential to obtain copyright permission before actually using it (Islam et al., 2022). Asking the copyright owners for formal consent is preferable even if one is copying minor portions of a work for transformative use, such as a brief quote or a comment (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017).

Avoid Self-Plagiarism

Self-plagiarism frequently results from an author using their own writings or images in their newspapers. When one sends their work to a publisher, they typically give up copyright, which is why self-plagiarism is frequently considered a copyright infringement. Therefore, republishing content that already exists elsewhere is not only unethical but also

may violate copyright (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017).

The Difference Between Common Knowledge and Original Ideas

It's critical to recognise the distinction between original ideas and common knowledge when writing academic papers or articles. Information that is generally acknowledged as real and known, such as historical truths or scientific laws, is referred to as common knowledge. Since this kind of material is regarded as general knowledge that is accessible to everybody, it does not need to be cited. However, one must credit the source if they are using a unique notion or idea that is not well-known. This could include novel ideas that haven't yet been extensively shared, theories, or research findings. It's crucial to remember that common knowledge might change based on the area of study or the audience's degree of experience. As a result, if in doubt, it is best to err on the side of caution and provide a citation. This can help protect one's academic reputation and avoid plagiarism successfully (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023).

It is frequently unnecessary for researchers to acknowledge the source of their common knowledge. They typically do not need to cite anything if it falls into the category of what is considered public domain information or general knowledge. If one is unsure about whether a particular component is considered "common knowledge" in their field, it is helpful to review various general reference materials. If the information is located in many general reference materials may classify it as "common knowledge." It is essential to recognize that "common knowledge" is restricted to facts and excludes viewpoints and arguments that one may find objectionable or counter (Islam et al., 2022).

An instance given by Islam et al. (2022) to distinguish common knowledge with information that needs to be cited is as follows:
- J.S. Bach was a famous composer during the Baroque period.
- J.S. Bach was the greatest composer during the Baroque period (Sterling, 1977)
- The principal statement is a reality that many people are aware of. The second one is a fact

that people may differ with and must be referred to."

Appropriate and Adequate Citations

Plagiarism is the use of another person's work without giving due credit, and it carries harsh penalties. Giving credit where it's due can prevent the penalties that follow. This can be done by referencing outside sources of ideas and information throughout your work using in-text citations (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023). Any words, concepts, or phrases that you employ in your paper—whether directly or indirectly—should always be cited. Not only text but every source of information needs to be cited regardless of whether they are text, graphics, illustrations, charts, tables, books, articles, or websites (*Research Guides: Citing Sources: How to Avoid Plagiarism*, n.d.). In case someone wants to include the exact words written by someone else it is required to cite the source and use quotation marks when doing so. Citations are still essential if the text/images/chart are modified for use (Hacker, 1995).

When using someone's exact words, it is essential to be careful not to quote entire paragraphs. Quotes should not exceed one or two important sentences. Additionally, keep the total number of quotes in your article to a minimum. A text with several quotation marks is less readable (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017). Using excessive quotation marks is often a sign of not using enough original wording while writing. This may indicate a requirement for major changes or even reworking the research paper. Additionally, quoting common knowledge is not appropriate, but explanations of concepts need to be properly cited (Islam et al., 2022).

In addition to the in-text citations, it is integral to have an exhaustive reference list at the end of the research paper. In addition to exhibiting academic integrity, proper citation makes it simple for readers to find, confirm and even refer to the sources used in the research paper (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023). It is often helpful to add in references while writing the paper to prevent missing any. Losing track of the original source of the written information is very likely when one leaves citations for the end rather than adding them in while writing (*8 Simple Rules to Avoid Plagiarism*, 2017).

Plagiarism Detection Software

Software for detecting plagiarism is made to find instances of plagiarism in written works. To find out if any portions of the work are similar to previously written material, it compares the work entered into its system to a database of previously published information. Plagiarism detection software is used by many colleges and companies to make sure that the work that employees or students produce is unique. One such programme that is frequently used is Turnitin. Before submitting one's work, it's a good idea to run it through a plagiarism detection programme to make sure there is no accidental or unintentional plagiarism to ensure greater integrity of one's work (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023).

Take Responsibility

Above and beyond all the points that are already touched upon, ensuring that the work that is generated is original and correctly cited is a responsibility that must be taken on by the researcher while generating any kind of work, academic or professional. Plagiarism is a grave infraction that can seriously harm the researcher's reputation and professional prospects. It is therefore crucial for the researcher to take the required actions to guarantee that researcher work is original and correctly cited in order to prevent any problems. Extensive reading and accurate comprehension of the said reading are two ways in which the researcher can ensure that the work is original and accurately cited. The researcher should therefore spend some time reading over all the pertinent material and jotting down any important thoughts or points. Efficient note taking and appropriate and adequate citations as mentioned above would additionally help the researcher take responsibility for creating research while maintaining their academic integrity (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023).

A crucial component of accepting accountability for one's work is being aware of the negative effects of plagiarism. Plagiarism has both professional and legal ramifications as it has already been stated above. It is therefore crucial that every researcher takes this seriously and makes sure that their work is consistently unique and appropriately referenced. In conclusion, accepting accountability for one's work is key to preventing plagiarism and its detrimental effects (HAMNIC Solutions, 2023).

Integrating researched information without plagiarising

Islam et al. (2022) have given the following methods to integrate information a researcher reads about into their research paper while avoiding plagiarism.

Quotations

To effectively use quotations in a research work, they should be effortlessly integrated to support claims, provide proof, or highlight important concepts from sources. Important recommendations include choosing relevant quotes that support the thesis and are closely related to the subject, making sure they provide significance and understanding. Quotations must be introduced with context, which should include the author's name, the work's historical background, and the reason the quote is relevant to the thesis. Following the required citation style, such as APA, MLA, or Chicago, is essential to properly credit the original author and avoid plagiarism. Using signal phrases such as "According to [Author]" or "As [Author] argues," along with a seamless integration of quotations into the narrative, supports coherence. Enhancing understanding after presenting involves evaluating the significance of the quoted information and explaining how it adds to the argument or research, all the while referencing the thesis or main points. Readability and engagement are further improved by utilising brief quotations inside the text and structuring longer ones as block quotations.

Examples of quoting
Short Quotation:
- Original Text: "The only way to do great work is to love what you do." - Steve Jobs
- Incorporated into Paper: Steve Jobs emphasises the importance of passion in one's work, stating that "The only way to do great work is to love what you do" (Jobs, Year, p. X).

Long Quotation:
- Original Text: According to Jane Austen, "It isn't what we say or think that defines us, but what we do" (Austen, Year, p. X). In her novels, actions speak louder than words, revealing the true character of her protagonists.

Block Quotation in Paper:

- Jane Austen highlights the significance of actions over words in defining character: [Indent the quotation]
- "It isn't what we say or think that defines us, but what we do" (Austen, Year, p. X).
- [End the block quotation]
- It is important to remember that quotations are meant to enhance one's argument and contribute to the coherence and flow of the paper. Avoiding overuse of quotations and ensuring they are effectively integrated into one's own writing is therefore key to effective quoting.

Paraphrasing

In academic writing, paraphrasing is an essential ability that allows one to rephrase source information in one's own words while maintaining its substance and properly citing it. Understanding the original text in its entirety, paraphrasing it without mentioning the source, assuring accuracy and integrity, and comparing the paraphrase to the original text to check for inadvertent plagiarism are important tasks. By following these guidelines, one can preserve their academic integrity and make sure that their work properly cites outside sources.

Here are some examples of paraphrasing:

- Original Text: "The development of artificial intelligence has revolutionised various industries, including healthcare, finance, and transportation."
- Paraphrased text: "The advent of AI technology has brought about significant transformations in several sectors, such as healthcare, finance, and transportation."

Summarising

Another way to integrate the information in one's research paper effectively such that plagiarism can be avoided is summarising. It basically entails condensing someone else's thoughts and ideas. It is important to take just the major idea of the original content without changing the meaning of said content. Strictly avoiding copying, pasting details and examples and accurately citing the original source is key to a good summary. An example of summarising is as follows:

- Original Text: "A recent study conducted by Smith et al. (2023) explored the effects of sleep deprivation on cognitive function in college students. The study involved 100 participants aged 18 to 25 who were randomly assigned to either a sleep-deprived group or a control group. Results showed that participants in the sleep-deprived group exhibited significantly lower performance on cognitive tasks compared to those in the control group. The findings suggest that adequate sleep is crucial for maintaining cognitive function, particularly in the college-age population."
- Summary: Smith et al. (2023) investigated the impact of sleep deprivation on cognitive function in college students. The study, comprising 100 participants aged 18 to 25, assigned individuals randomly to either a sleep-deprived or control group. Results demonstrated a notable decline in cognitive task performance among sleep-deprived participants compared to the control group, emphasising the importance of sufficient sleep for preserving cognitive abilities, especially among college-aged individuals.

Citation

Effectively citing references in a research paper is essential for acknowledging original authors, bolstering arguments, and preventing plagiarism. To do so the following steps must be followed:

- Selecting a citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) and adhere to its specific formatting guidelines.
- Familiarising with citation components, including author(s), publication year, title, and URL.
- Incorporating in-text citations following each reference and compiling a separate references page organised alphabetically.
- Ensuring accurate formatting, consider utilising citation management software for efficiency, and maintain consistency throughout the paper for professionalism and coherence.
- Example of in-text citation (APA style):
- Paraphrase: (Smith & Johnson, 2019)
- Direct Quote: (Johnson, 2018, p. 45)

- Example of a reference entry (APA style):
- Book: Smith, A., & Johnson, B. (2019). Title of Book. Publisher.
- Journal Article: Johnson, C. (2018). Title of Article. Journal Name, volume (issue), page numbers.

By following these guidelines, one can effectively cite references in the research paper while maintaining academic integrity and credibility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, negotiating the complexities of avoiding plagiarism is a sign of intellectual honesty and academic integrity as much as it is an issue of compliance. Researchers preserve the standards of scholarly discourse and further knowledge by appreciating the contributions of others through appropriate citation and attribution. As this paper has demonstrated, using techniques like paraphrasing, quoting, and meticulous referencing promotes originality and critical engagement with the body of existing literature while protecting against unintentional plagiarism. In the future, a dedication to ethical research will require not just becoming proficient in the technical aspects of citation but also accepting a culture that values intellectual property and the variety of viewpoints that contribute to the enrichment of academic discourse. In doing so, researchers not only honour the work of their predecessors but also pave the way for future generations to build upon a foundation of integrity and accountability.

Declarations

Conflicts of interest: The author has no conflicts of interest.

References

8 simple rules to avoid plagiarism. (2017, September 20). Research Matters - Ediqo Blog. https://www.ediqo.com/blog/8-simple-rules-to-avoid-plagiarism/

Hacker, D. (1995). *Avoiding Plagiarism*. https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/_files/docs/avoiding-plagiarism.pdf

HAMNIC Solutions - Comprehensive research guidance and project writing support. (2023, November 28). *How to avoid plagiarism | 5 simple rules (Five simple rules to avoid Plagiarism)*. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-avoid-plagiarism-5-simple-rules-five-hamnicwriting-h2iaf/

Islam, M. N., Koka, N. A., Wahab, M. O. A., & Khan, M. R. (2022). Plagiarism: All About How to Avoid. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, *10* (1). 1-11. https://doi.org/10.37745/bjel.2013

Ober, H. K., Simon, S. I., & Elson, D. S. (2013). Five simple rules to avoid plagiarism. *Annals of Biomedical Engineering*, *41*(1), 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10439-012-0662-9

Research guides: Citing sources: How to avoid plagiarism. (n.d.). https://guides.library.ucla.edu/citing/plagiarism/avoid