

Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is attempting to pass off other people's work and ideas as your own.

Plagiarism can include:

- copying from another learner copying from books or the internet
- paraphrasing
- subcontracting the work to someone else
- submitting the same piece of work for two different purposes

Why is plagiarism wrong?

- It is fundamentally dishonest
- Learners who commit plagiarism are seeking an unfair advantage over other learners
- Learners who commit plagiarism are devaluing the value of the qualification they seek
- It is disrespectful to their Assessors, and a betrayal of their trust

What are the consequences of plagiarism?

- Learners who commit plagiarism learn far less than those who do not
- Assessment procedures are compromised if the work submitted is not the learner's own
- Assessors are unable to form correct decisions on the progress of individual learners
- It may result in legal action due to infringement of copyright laws
- It may be penalised by failure in one or more components of a course
- It could be unfairly interpreted as professional incompetence on the part of the Assessor.

Why does plagiarism happen?

There are many reasons. Learners may:

- not understand what is meant by plagiarism, because it has never been explained to them
- not believe plagiarism to be wrong: they download music, video clips and games all the time
- not understand the concept of individual ownership of ideas and words

- have misconceptions about the ownership of electronic material
- struggle to differentiate between intellectual property rights and common knowledge
- regard the conventions of academic documentation as unimportant or irrelevant to them
- lack referencing skills, and therefore be unable to record and cite sources correctly
- lack the study skills, research skills and writing skills needed to produce the work required
- not know how to adapt published literature sources so that they do not require citation
- regard plagiarism as a short cut to success.

What can you do to help minimise the risk of plagiarism?

The most important thing you can do is contribute to a culture in which learners do not consider plagiarism an option. You should:

- develop clear policies and procedures re plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct
- explain at induction what is meant by 'plagiarism' and how it will be monitored and policed
- explain, at an early stage of the course, the concepts of individual ownership of ideas and words, the ownership of electronic material and the difference between 'intellectual property' and 'common knowledge'
- provide instruction in study skills, research skills, writing skills, time management skills and the use of a suitable referencing system to record and cite sources correctly
- insist upon the use of referencing bibliographies from day one
- act as a team, with every Assessor rigorously applying centre policies on referencing and bibliographies
- avoid the use of highly generic assignments and, instead, produce contextualised tasks that require the learner to research in depth and individually analyse and evaluate their findings
- include an authenticity statement with every assignment brief: learners must sign and date the authenticity statement to acknowledge that the work produced is their own and that they understand the penalties that will be imposed on learners who do submit plagiarised work
- provide learners with opportunities to discuss any problems they may encounter, support them at each step and provide them with the resources they need to do the work properly
- ensure that learners are not overloaded by providing them with an assessment schedule, agreed by all of the course team, and then ensure that the team adheres to the schedule.

How can you identify plagiarism?

The expertise of individual Assessors is the best safeguard against plagiarism, supported by appropriate technology where available. Check learner work for:

- the use of unfamiliar words
- grammar and syntax of a standard far higher than that demonstrated previously
- a discontinuous rise in the quality and accuracy of the learner's work
- the use of texts familiar to the Assessor, but without appropriate referencing
- the use of American spellings and unfamiliar product names.

You might also:

- build an oral element into the assessment process, wherever appropriate, to check on understanding
- ask learners to elaborate on suspect passages within their work
- type a few selected phrases into a search engine such as Google: simple but effective
- employ a sophisticated electronic plagiarism detection device such as 'Turnitin'
- familiarise yourself with the more widely-used 'essay banks' to be found on the internet
- pay particular attention to those learners who perform well in coursework but much less well in examinations and tests
- share concerns with colleagues: if everyone has the same suspicions about a particular learner, it would seem appropriate to apply rigorous checks to all of his or her work.

What kind of policies and procedures are needed to address plagiarism?

You will need to have policies and procedures in place to address this issue.

These policies and procedures should include:

- a precise definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct
- a statement of why plagiarism, and all other forms of academic misconduct, are wrong
- the actions that will be taken by the centre to address the culture of plagiarism
- the techniques that will be used to monitor learners' assessed work and detect plagiarism
- the procedures that will be employed to investigate allegations of plagiarism and the actions taken if plagiarism is found
- details of the appeals system for learners to use when appealing against decisions made.