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Russ College of Engineering and Technology

Policy on

Technical Writing and Plagiarism

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Introduction

Plagiarism is when you take (i) somebody else's idea, or (ii) somebody else's words, and use them such that you appear to be the original creator or author of the idea or words. Even if you change a few words of someone else's sentence, it is *still* plagiarism if the same idea is presented.

Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that is prohibited by the Student Code of Conduct. Plagiarism is unacceptable in all academic work and all documents authored by you, including assignments and project reports. Since published documents are stored and accessed in public places, it is quite possible that a published paper, thesis or dissertation can be accused of plagiarism, perhaps years after it is published.

When you write a thesis/dissertation that includes discussion of research results from other documents, plagiarism may creep in unintentionally. Therefore, it is particularly important that you recognize plagiarism and make special efforts to avoid it.

Plagiarism can also have legal consequences. Because of the Berne copyright convention, virtually all published material (including on-line, internet material) should be considered to have copyright protection whether it has a copyright notice or not.

Suggestions to help you avoid plagiarism:

- Take notes when you read. Do not copy complete sentences unless you want to quote the sentence.
- Wait some time (or a day) after you read the original source text to write your draft.
- Don't draft your paper with the original source text (or a photocopy) open next to you. Use your notes. Go back to the source later to check something you are unsure of.

You can certainly use other peoples' ideas and words in your writing, as long as you give them appropriate credit. There are established methods of giving credit to your source of ideas and words. This is discussed in the following section.

Examples:

- If you use exact words from another source, put quotation marks around them.

Example:

According to Derrisen (2004), "since the flow of liquids in open channels is not subject to any pressure other than the weight of the liquid and atmospheric pressure on the surface, the theoretical analysis can be much simpler."

- It is *not* sufficient to use the citation alone if a direct quote is used.

Incorrect example:

Since the flow of liquids in open channels is not subject to any pressure other than the weight of the liquid and atmospheric pressure on the surface, the theoretical analysis can be much simpler (Derrisen, 2004).

- Changing a few words is not sufficient, since copying the 'writing style' is also plagiarism. Either use your own words or quote it.

Incorrect example:

Liquid flow in open channels is subject to pressure from the weight of the liquid and atmospheric pressure; therefore, the theoretical analysis is much easier (Derrisen, 2004).

- Quotes are not necessary if you just use the idea. However, a citation is still required.

Warning: it is almost impossible to put a single sentence into your own words. This is why you should read and understand, then write from your notes.

Acceptable example:

Simple models can be developed for a liquid in open channel flow since it is driven only by atmospheric pressure and weight of the liquid (Derrisen, 2004).

Note that the last part of the sentence is a fact (not an idea); one can only change the wording of a fact, not the fact itself! When you describe an experiment, the facts (e.g., specifications of a piece of equipment) will be the same for all students, but the word and sentence arrangements will be different.

- Put the citation where it will best identify which information is derived from which source.

Place the citation after a key word or phrase which suggests a citation is needed. If most or all of a paragraph is from one source, put the citation at the end of the topic sentence. Repeat the citation later if necessary to make the source of information clear.

Examples:

- In a study of gear mechanics (Brable, 2005) showed that...
- Several of these studies [5, 8-11] identified the critical control parameter...
- Heat transfer in regenerators have been modeled by finite difference method (Jurgel, 2001) and by finite element method (Mitchell, 1996, Templeton, 2003)....

Please note that it is the responsibility of the student to avoid plagiarism in theses and dissertations. Your advisor and thesis committee can help with suggestions, but only if ***you*** discuss specific instances of a potential problem. If you are concerned about the quality of your writing, you can take the help of others to proofread your thesis.