

UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM AND HOW TO AVOID IT¹

Academic integrity describes the core values considered essential in studies at Technological University Dublin. Six core values aligned to academic integrity are²:

- a) **Accuracy** – making sure that your work is free from errors.
- b) **Honesty** – being truthful about which ideas are your own and which are derived from others, and about the methods and results of your research.
- c) **Fairness** – not trying to gain an advantage by unfair means: for instance, by passing off others' work as your own.
- d) **Responsibility** – taking an active role in your own learning: for instance, by seeking out the information you need to study effectively.
- e) **Respect** – for your fellow students, your tutors, and the work of other scholars.
- f) **Courage** – be true to yourself even when others may not be; holding yourself and fellow students to the highest standards of academic integrity even when doing so involves risk of negative consequences, such as a poor grade.

Plagiarism arises when you pass off another person's work as your own. It can be deliberate or more often unintentional. Either way it is wrong, and you should always avoid it. Common examples include:

- Colluding with another student to produce the same or similar work
- Directly using someone else's words without accurately acknowledging their authorship whether this is from a published source or another student
- Using ideas taken from another's work without accurately acknowledging their source
- Passing off someone else's original work (e.g. an essay / project / report) as your own

Although you may be thinking that you would never be so dishonest, it is possible to unintentionally commit plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism is still wrong, and can occur if:

- You are not careful about recording details or note-making
- You do not learn how to cite references correctly at university
- You do not fully understand the role that references play in your academic writing

Such errors place you at risk of committing **poor academic practice**. This happens when you produce work which may be fully referenced, but for instance is too reliant on only one or two sources; or is generally too derivative (i.e. includes too many words quoted from other people and not enough of your own original analysis and exposition); or is inadequately paraphrased (too close or similar to the original text).

Both plagiarism and poor academic practice expose you to penalties which may be applied at School, Faculty or University level. These can include a substantial reduction in your marks (or even a zero mark / F grade) which can affect your final degree classification, to a formal misconduct hearing which may result in your being asked to leave the University. Don't put your integrity or your future at risk!

Things you can do to avoid unintentional plagiarism

- ✓ **Make your own voice heard** – what you write must be in **your own words** and reflect **your personal understanding** and knowledge of the topic in question.

¹ Adapted from the University of Reading academic integrity toolkit at <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/academicintegrity/teachingmaterials>

² Adapted from International Center for Academic Integrity (2021), *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* 3rd edition online at https://www.academicintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/20019_ICAI-Fundamental-Values_R11.pdf

- ✓ **Read carefully and learn from your feedback** – if your referencing or approach has been criticised, find out what you are doing wrong and put it right before your next submission. A ‘second offence’ may be treated much more seriously, even if it is for another marker.
- ✓ **Develop good note taking techniques and record keeping practices** – be thorough and accurate; do not engage in ‘cut and paste’ research; read a paragraph then write in your own words what you have understood and how it relates to your assignment brief.
- ✓ **Find out when you need to use a citation** – acknowledge every idea you get from your research – not just direct quotes. Your Library and learning support centres can provide good instruction – contact them if you need help or support. Academic Writing Centre
- ✓ **Understand how to use references to support your discussion** – referring to other people’s work and showing how it helped to build your own ideas is a way of sharing your research journey and situating your work in the body of work in your discipline.