



## How to Be “Plagiarism-Free” A DeVry Student’s Guide

(prepared by DeVry Addison Writing Center Staff for Plagiarism Awareness Week 05/18/09)

The explosive growth of the Internet has provided students increasingly easy access to a wide array of materials. Does such a wealth of information have a cost? Many schools think so. Recent news articles report that plagiarism is increasing on college campuses and high schools because some students use the sources that they find and take credit for them, in part or in whole, as a substitute for doing their own work. *Trying to get credit by taking someone else’s words, concepts, or structure is called plagiarism.*

All college students need to learn to give credit where credit is due. You are likely to earn more academic, professional, and personal respect when you understand and can appropriately represent the source of the ideas that you use in preparing oral and written work for a grade.

As a college student, you should welcome the learning benefits that you receive through easy access to information, but you should also be aware of the challenge of using sources well...and the consequences for using them inappropriately.

### What is Plagiarism? Two Definitions

*From the DeVry Student Handbook*

<http://www.add.devry.edu/studenthandbook.html>

**Plagiarism:** In speaking or writing, plagiarism is the act of representing someone else’s work as one’s own. In addition, plagiarism is defined as using the essential style and manner of expression of a source as if it were one’s own. If there is any doubt, the student should consult her/his instructor or use a “when in doubt, document” philosophy. Also, any statement made without documentation is claimed as your own and therefore subjects you to this plagiarism policy.

*From the Web site of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*

<http://www.wpacouncil.org/>

**Plagiarism:** In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.

This paragraph is similar to our university definition, but it adds an important dimension—the **student-writer’s intent**.

## Why might students *intentionally* plagiarize?

We have learned from talking to students in the ASC that students...

- **Fear failure.** Students fear that their writing ability is not adequate and that their instructors expect “expert” knowledge from them. A lack of confidence leads students to believe that information they find on the Web is better than anything they might think or write.
- **Lack information-processing skills.**
  - Students may lack the ability to figure out good information from bad. For instance, a student may choose an academic article that is far beyond her knowledge and comprehension, which can make it difficult to paraphrase, summarize, and quote sources appropriately. Students may not take notes on what they read, or if they do, they are sloppy notes that lead to errors in giving credit later.
  - Students are not aware of the conventions for using sources such as the use of acknowledgment phrases.
- **Have problems with time management and planning.** Procrastination or not fully understanding the writing task can lead students to plagiarize in order to complete work on time.
- **Set their priorities too low.** The course or assignment becomes low priority. Students don’t feel the assignment is of interest to them. Students may feel their writing “doesn’t matter” and are surprised to learn that instructors actually read their work.
- **Perceive an “empty policy.”** Some students may feel that instructors “never” report cheating or enforce existing policies. Such a belief can lead students to think that cheating to get ahead is acceptable.
- **Share different cultural attitudes about plagiarism.** It’s true that there are differences across cultures in the beliefs about plagiarism, but DeVry’s academic code governs the conduct that all students should follow.

The above points offer an explanation for some students’ behavior, but these are certainly not excuses to plagiarize.

**Challenge yourself to do better and learn more...**

- **To address the fear of failure, take a breath.** Your instructors know you are a student. You are not expected to talk with the knowledge and expertise of people who have practiced in their field for many years. Don’t be intimidated by expert-sounding sources, either. Your job as a student-researcher is to learn about a topic and support your assignment with what you’ve learned.
- **To improve your ability to process what you read,**
  - **Go for the “big picture.”** When you choose a research topic that you don’t know much about, try to read some background information from an encyclopedia or other general-audience source, or talk to someone more expert, such as your instructor or a peer-tutor in the ASC.
  - **Find a source at your level of expertise.** Because it’s so easy to find information on the Web, students often don’t ask if it’s the right type of

information. For instance, if you're doing a report on smoking, you might find a medical article that discusses the drug treatment for emphysema. The information is related, but it may be too technical and beyond you and your reader's understanding. Stop and ask: Is this the kind of information I need? Don't settle for the first "hit" that comes up in your research.

- **Research like an investigator.**  
Take careful notes on what you read. Be sure that you have a consistent way of gathering information. Try highlighting material that is a direct quote. It's a very bad idea to leave your citations for last!
- **Know which documentation style you're supposed to use.**  
You may not know a lot about the conventions of APA or MLA or the ways to talk about sources through acknowledgment phrases. Ask your instructor to clarify which documentation style you should use, or bring your assignment guidelines to the ASC.
- **Improve time management and planning skills.** Be sure that you understand the writing and research task you've been assigned. Read the whole syllabus during the first week of class and note any research projects. Plan mini-deadlines for yourself and talk frequently to your instructor about your progress. Build in time to plan, draft, revise, and proofread your written work in every class, every time.
- **Re-set your priorities.** You will take a range of courses in your curriculum at DeVry. While some may be more interesting to you than others, the consequences for plagiarizing—for taking credit for something that isn't yours—are shared across curricula. Documenting sources and plagiarism are not just concerns in your English classes.
- **Be aware that you can't always trust your perceptions.** Just because someone you know didn't "get caught" doesn't make violating your academic integrity a good option for you. For privacy reasons, you won't see or hear talk of specific cases of plagiarism, but trust your instructors. Each can share examples of students trying to cheat or plagiarize in his/her class. Cheating or plagiarizing to get ahead is not acceptable.
- **Understand the academic culture.** While deeply held culturally beliefs are difficult to put aside, U.S.-style universities differ from those in other countries. The institution granting your degree in this case decides the academic policy you must follow. Be sure to familiarize yourself with these policies if you are new to the United States. See the link to the student handbook at

<http://www.add.devry.edu/studenthandbook.html>

**Want to test your knowledge of plagiarism online? Try this free 10-minute tutorial:**

<http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism>

**Do you have more questions? Bring your assignment, and stop in the ASC (Room 244) to talk to a faculty writing tutor. We can help you strive to be "plagiarism-free."**