

Urkund plagiarism handbook

Tips and advice for students



What is Urkund?

Urkund is a fully automated system for combating plagiarism. It is being successfully used in universities and colleges all over Europe. The Urkund system checks all documents against three central sources: the Internet; published materials; and materials previously submitted by students (such as memos, case studies and degree work (theses/dissertations)).

About this material

Note that Urkund *never* determines what is or is not a piece of plagiarism. If we find similarities, the reports we provide to your tutors consist of text comparisons. We highlight those parts of your document that disclose similarities with other sources in the Urkund archive, on the Internet, and in published materials. This gives the tutor access to the original text where we have found similarities. Urkund compares text similarities and topic similarities. It is therefore possible that there will be hits in your document even if you rewrite the text and use synonyms. The tutor is given a percentage indication for each hit in the document. It is then up to the tutor to decide whether this should be regarded as a piece of plagiarism. For students, it is therefore of the utmost importance to learn what is regarded as plagiarism, and that you listen and comply with any instructions you have received from your tutors.

The information and examples below should therefore be regarded as teaching materials that will give you tips about how best to work to give you some idea of what might constitute plagiarism. It should however be pointed out that there are many different views about defining plagiarism, and you should first check with your tutor whether he/she accepts the definition presented in this material.

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This material will be continuously updated and enhanced with examples and Internet resources. Contact Urkund for the latest edition.

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Do not fall in to the trap

It is easy to be tempted, or perhaps we should say *tricked* into falling into the trap and ending up plagiarising material, even if that was not the intention when starting the essay. There may be several reasons for this. Carelessness, or uncertainty about what is or is not permitted may be the main reason. Of course there are people who intentionally plagiarise a source, gambling on the tutor not discovering this. But that may well be relatively rare.

Find out what matters

Make sure that you always find out exactly what is and what is not permitted. You probably know that plagiarism is not permitted — but do you know what a piece of plagiarism actually is? Do you have the same view as your tutor about what constitutes plagiarism? There are many definitions of plagiarism. Many people believe that a text that has been rewritten is at some stage transformed from being someone else's text into belonging to the person who has rewritten it, and that therefore there is no need to acknowledge the source. But the fact is that in some cases the text continues to be a piece of plagiarism even though you have changed every word in it — unless you have given the source. This may sound surprising, but the key is something usually known as “the public domain”. “The public domain” is knowledge that can be regarded as being generally or commonly known, such as the fact that the Earth orbits the sun on its own axis in ~24 hours, that the official language in Brazil is Portuguese, or that Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa. These are details that most people know without needing to consult an encyclopaedia. However, this is far from certain. The borderline between special knowledge and common knowledge may be hard to define. Bear in mind also that the borderline between these spheres of knowledge varies, depending on the context and at what level the essay is being written. As for works in the public domain, or common knowledge, you normally do not need to provide any source references — but if in doubt, ask your tutor. One rule might be that if you yourself have had to check your facts, then you should also state the source that confirmed your knowledge.

Checking facts

For example, if you are writing an essay about Brazil's political development during the latter part of the 20th century, and you need to mention that Brazil's official language is Portuguese, you do not normally need to give the source reference, though if unsure you should check this with your tutor. If you yourself have to check this fact, it may still be worthwhile giving the source. If on the other hand you are handing in a short memo with facts about Brazil and your essay relies extensively on a single source, you should always give the source. You may have found all the facts you need for this assignment in a single source like Wikipedia. If so, make sure that you always report the exact source. It must be easy to check these details. Complete Internet addresses, and references to the exact page number in the book, are always required. Whatever happens, do not forget to check your facts. It can be dangerous to rely excessively on a single source. Better to verify these facts against several independent sources. This applies particularly if Wikipedia or some other Internet website has been your prime source.

Rewriting

If, for example, you have come across a text dealing with the effects of electric lighting on people's social lives, that knowledge could never be said to be in the

public domain. It is special knowledge. If you take a text like that without giving the source and include it in an essay entitled for example "Trends in working hours in early 1900s industrial society" it will always be a piece of plagiarism, even if you change every word. This is because the text presumably does not contain anything that could be described as being in the public domain, and is in all likelihood based on research into the topic. What you are then plagiarising is the original author's thoughts and conclusions, even if you are not actually plagiarising every word.

Lack of time

It has certainly happened more than once that a student has felt himself/herself more or less forced to plagiarise part of an essay simply to get it finished in time. It may be because of a lack of time, or a lack of knowledge on the topic (perhaps this too because of insufficient time to read up the topic). Here are some tips about how to manage your time more effectively and make use of experience for part of the essay.

Plan your time

Start working on the task early, ideally on the day you are given the topic. Do some work on the task each day. Do not forget to read up the topic and to write the essay. Do at least a little of each on every day. That way you will find that your essay will more or less grow by itself day by day. Another advantage is that it forces you to start thinking about the task from day one. Your thoughts will revolve around the essay topic every day. Every experience you have and every conversation you get involved in will help to develop your thoughts about the essay.

Always make a note of the source

Purchase a notebook and always make a precise note of the source *before* you note down the contents. If it is your own idea or your own conclusion it is worth making a note of this as well, plus how you came to think of it. If you make this a rule, it becomes easier to check the source later on. If you forget to note the source, it is time-consuming later on to search for the source again in order to give a precise reference. Then there is a risk of skimming on the work and rewriting the text instead. If this is discovered, there may be serious consequences.

Check yourself before Urkund does it

Bear in mind that your essay will probably be checked for plagiarism when it is submitted, either automatically or manually by your tutor. It may therefore be well worthwhile going through your essay once more before you hand it in, and consider whether there is any text for which you have forgotten to give the source. The idea is that you should produce new knowledge, or new ideas about a new or old topic. The main thing is that your thoughts and formulations should be distinguishable from other people's formulations by means of quotation marks, if it is a word for word quotation from another text, but at least a source reference where you have changed the wording but nevertheless retained the underlying ideas in the text. Show clearly from where you have obtained the text, idea or picture. That way you will never run into trouble.

Have you interpreted the task correctly?

To give an extreme example: suppose you were going to take an entire text straight from a book, for example Rolf Eidem's book *Planekonomi eller ramhushållning. Ekonomiska reformer i östeuropa*. If you clearly state that the

text is not your own but comes in its entirety from Rolf Eidem's book, and you provide a correct source reference with the page number, you will not be accused of cheating, though you will very likely have to do the essay again, on the grounds that you have misunderstood the task. The whole idea is not simply to retrieve a text, but you have at least been honest and given the source correctly. If you do the same thing but fail to give the source, you run the risk of having to defend your action before a disciplinary board. To quote a well-known saying by Martin van Buren (US President 1837-1841), "It is easier to do a job right than to explain why you didn't."

Some examples

The next few pages give some examples you can look at to familiarise yourself with what is generally regarded as plagiarism. But we would like to point out yet again that if in doubt, contact your tutor. The basic rule remains — always give your source if you have been influenced by ideas or formulations in a particular source.

Original text 1

"The earliest metals must have been discovered as lumps of pure metal. In all probability, they were pieces of copper or gold, as these are among the few metals occasionally found in their pure form in nature. The reddish colour of copper or the yellow lustre of gold must have caught the eye much more readily than the lifeless indeterminate colouring of most rocks. The metals must surely have first been used as ornaments in the state they were found, just as people used pebbles and pearly snail shells."

(Asimov, Isaac, A Short History of Chemistry, Heinemann Educational Publishers : 1972, p 11)

Example 1

The earliest metals must have been discovered as lumps of pure metal. These metals are among the few that can be found as lumps in nature. Early man probably started using the metals as ornaments, and only later did people see their practical utility

Is this a piece of plagiarism? The writer has not taken the entire text, has reworked it and for the most part used his/her own words.

Answer: This is a rewrite (or paraphrasing), and despite everything can be regarded as plagiarism, as the writer has not given any reference to the original author. Despite everything, the text is rather close to the original source. The actual conclusion is still Isaac Asimov's, even though it is not that difficult to reach the same conclusion oneself.

Example 2

How did man first discover that metals could be extracted from ore? The earliest metals must have been discovered as lumps of pure metal. In all probability, they were pieces of copper or gold, as these are among the few metals sometimes found in their pure form in nature. Once this discovery had been made, people began to look for ways of extracting even small quantities of metals from ore. (Asimov, Isaac, A Short History of Chemistry, Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1972)

Is this a piece of plagiarism? Here the writer has in fact indicated the source.

Answer: Despite everything, this can be regarded as a piece of plagiarism. The writer has copied a couple of sentences straight from Asimov's book without using quotation marks. These sentences are surrounded by the writer's own text, which makes it hard to see what is the writer's own text and what is Asimov's. What is more, there is no reference to the page number in the source reference.

Example 3

The technology of extracting various metals from ore is fascinating. What was it that early on drove people to start experimenting on ways of extracting these metals? According to Isaac Asimov, it may be that the first metals to be discovered were gold and copper which occur freely in nature in the form of lumps. Once these had been found, people might conclude that more metal could be extracted from various types of ore. Experiments to try to extract the metals then got under way (Asimov, Isaac, A Short History of Chemistry, Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1972, p 11)

Is this a piece of plagiarism? Here the writer has no quotation marks, but indicates the source.

Answer: This is not plagiarism. This is a synopsis. The writer has expressed Asimov's ideas in the writer's own words, and given a correct source reference. Furthermore, there are synopsis indicators ("according to Isaac Asimov ..."). It is vital to ensure that the source reference ends up next to the synopsis, in order to make it easy to distinguish your ideas from Asimov's ideas.

Example 4

Man's fascination with gold and shiny metals stretches back to the dawn of history. We do not know how people came across the astonishing idea of trying to extract metals from various types of ore. There are numerous theories about this. One plausible explanation is that the first metals to be found were those likely to be discovered lying freely as clumps on the ground. One example of the kinds of metal to be found without processing ore is gold. Having become acquainted with the metal, people started to search for it, and found small quantities in gold ore. Based on that, people began to experiment in order to extract even small amounts of metal — and in the process discovered other useful metals and the best ways of extracting them.

Is this a piece of plagiarism? No source reference, and the text does actually seem to be based on the original text.

Answer: We are now in a grey zone. There is no exact similarity, but if the writer had indeed made use of Asimov's book when the text was produced, there should have been a source reference. However, the conclusions are not that difficult to reach, and if the writer had done this himself/herself and was not aware of Asimov's conclusions, the writer cannot be accused of plagiarism.

Example 5

Man's fascination with gold and shiny metals stretches back to the dawn of history. We do not know how people came across the astonishing idea of trying to extract metals from various types of ore. There are numerous theories about

this. One plausible explanation is that the first metals to be found were those likely to be discovered lying freely as clumps on the ground. One example of the kinds of metal to be found without processing ore is gold. Isaac Asimov formulated this explanation as follows:

The first metals must have been discovered as lumps of pure metal.

In all probability, they were pieces of copper or gold, as these are among the few metals sometimes found in their pure form in nature. The reddish colour of copper or the yellow lustre of gold must have caught the eye much more readily than the lifeless indeterminate colouring of most rocks. The metals must surely have first been used as ornaments in the state they were found, just as people used pebbles and pearly snail shells.

(Asimov, Isaac, A Short History of Chemistry, Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1972, p 11)

Having become acquainted with the metal, people started to search for it, and found small quantities in gold ore. Based on that, people began to experiment in order to extract even small amounts of metal — and in the process discovered other useful metals and the best ways of extracting them.

Is this a piece of plagiarism? There are no quotation marks around the paragraph taken from Asimov's book, and the writer's thoughts in the rest of the text have clearly been influenced by Asimov.

Answer: This is the correct way of handling quotations of this length. This is called a block quotation. It does not require any quotation marks, as the text is clearly separated from the writer's own words. This may be a better way of giving a quotation of this length. Quotation marks should instead be used when the text being quoted is limited to approximately one sentence. As the writer is quoting from the paragraph in Asimov's book which includes the ideas that have influenced the writer, no further reference is needed. It is self-evident.

Original text 2

"The Earth spins round the sun one revolution a year. That is precisely what is meant by the word "year". At our latitudes we are continually reminded of this, as the inclination of the Earth's axis in relation to the orbit round the sun means that we have very distinct seasons of the year. Around the equator it is summer all year round, but both there and here we can follow the annual cycle by looking at the night sky. It shifts a little bit each night, until after one year we see precisely the same stars again."

Berner, Christer, <info@rymdforum.nu>: Rymdforskning, 2007-03-15, <www.rymdforum.nu/?id=1473> (2008.01-25)

Example 1

As you all know, the Earth spins round the sun one revolution a year. That is precisely what is meant by the word "year". At our latitudes we are continually reminded of this, as the inclination of the Earth's axis in relation to the orbit round the sun means that we have very distinct seasons of the year. In other countries closer to the equator, there may be less difference between the seasons. The reason for the more distinct seasons is to do with the inclination of the Earth's axis. At the equator, the inclination of the Earth's axis is less important, as the sun's rays fall at nearly the same angle.

Is this a piece of plagiarism? This is of course "common knowledge", but the writer has copied parts of Berner's text.

Answer: It is of course common knowledge, but could nevertheless be regarded as a piece of plagiarism. Most of us do not need references to write this. It is nevertheless plagiarism, as the writer has used Berner's text as the basis. In this case, it is not Berner's conclusions that have been plagiarised. Most people would be able to draw the same conclusions. However, Berner's formulations have been plagiarised, and therefore both quotation marks and source references must be included.

Internet resources

If you want to learn more about what is considered as plagiarism, the Internet offers you a variety of relevant sites. Below follows a couple of addresses that might be useful to you:

A quiz, in English, from Indiana University, on their view of plagiarism:

<http://education.indiana.edu/~frick/plagiarism/>

Examples from copied material, paraphrasing and abstracts

<http://www.pluggad.net/kolla/KollaLinks/main/plagiat.html>

A learning material from "Akademi Sydost" that wish to enhance the understanding about plagiarism, and how to avoid it.

<http://www.bi.hik.se/Refero/1intro.php>

Information from Lund University about academic honesty. You can find examples, exercises and a short film from a lecture about academic honesty by Göran Bexell – former Vice-Chancellor of Lund University.

<http://www.lub.lu.se/laeranderesurser/akademisk-hederlighet>

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If you are a tutor and wish to copy or write about parts of this material, or if you have come across this material even though not connected yet to Urkund, contact Urkund for assistance.

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