

intentional or not, constitutes plagiarism. Using a paper written by someone else is obviously plagiarism. In addition, the improper citation of references can fall under this spectrum of offences. Plagiarism is equivalent to looking at someone's test and copying down their answers—the theft of intellectual property. The simplest way to avoid plagiarism is to give credit where credit is due. This document has been developed by the biology department faculty to explain plagiarism by clarifying appropriate academic behavior, identifying common mistakes or violations, and warning students of the serious consequences for academic misconduct relating to the misrepresentation of original work.

Recognition of and respect for the ownership of property is one of the distinguishing features of civilization. Ideas come from individuals and are effectively owned by their originators; thus they are intellectual property. In the academic sphere, the ideas of others are often encountered, most often in published form. As with tangible property, intellectual property is subject to ownership and protection. Moreover, publication establishes ownership of intellectual property. It is essential to respect the ideas and writing of others by scrupulously citing the sources of any and all ideas that are taken from other people's work.

Writing assignments are a very important way for students to demonstrate the ability to assimilate information and express personal knowledge in a coherent manner. The writing process is an active learning experience involving the demonstration of academic skills such as analysis, inference, and appropriate presentation. (<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>) gives the following guidelines for avoiding

plagiarism. You must give credit whenever you use

- x another person's idea, opinion, or theory;
- x any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings, or any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge;
- x quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or
- x paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

\* In the sciences there is one important clarification to these rules. Any information, even if it is a theory or original idea, that has become widely circulated enough to be found in textbooks is defined as common knowledge. For example, Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace do not need to be cited every time "natural selection" is mentioned.

There are a variety of ways to obtain assistance on writing assignments. Your professor can clarify expectations in class, help individually in an office conversation, or elaborate instructions by email. The VSU

## Quotations

Sometimes students get a little carried away with the use of quotations. Copying large volumes of material and placing it in quotes and citing the author is not plagiarism, but neither is it evidence of your ability to write a paper. So, you may receive a failing grade for excessive quotations because you failed to actually write a paper (see paragraph 3 above). There is a huge difference between transcribing a paper (quoting) and writing a paper (using your own words). You should use quotations judiciously when writing science papers. This style may differ from what instructors in other disciplines are telling you, so remember that science papers rarely use quotes of any kind. Generally, no more than five words should be used in a single quote, and not more than one or two quotes per page. If you do more than this then you must discuss it with your professor before you turn in your paper for grading.

## Punishment for Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in the biology department. A student caught plagiarizing will receive a failing grade on the assignment and depending on the situation, may automatically fail the course. Ask before making mistakes and do not assume that we are too lazy to check or too stupid to catch cheaters. Ignorance is no excuse and do not expect sympathy for academic misconduct.

## Lab Reports

Students will frequently work in groups during the laboratories. However, lab reports are group projects unless specific instructions to the contrary have been given by the instructor. When lab groups work together on projects, each person is expected to do their analysis of the results