

## AVOIDING PLAGIARISM IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

In recent years, the matter of plagiarism has reared its ugly head in local academic circles, and the University of Malaya has not been exempt from this curse.

Anytime you take someone else's words and pass it off as your own, you are guilty of plagiarism. A journalist guilty of plagiarism gets fired. If you are a student, and you plagiarize, you risk failing your assignment and the possibility of failing the class. Plagiarism is a grave scholastic offense, and in many Universities, the punitive measure for such intellectual theft is suspension and often, dismissal. It is clearly unfair to the original author(s) to use their words without giving them credit and it is deceptive to take credit for anyone else's creative and intellectual output, be it text or images.

Plagiarism includes both using words or phrases of another person and restating another's thoughts in marginally altered form. The most common forms of plagiarism involve the copying word-for-word from some other source without acknowledging that source by quotation marks, footnotes or references; authors are of course free to quote thoughts or passages from someone else's work, provided the original author is credited and acknowledged. Other forms of plagiarism include: turning in as your own work a paper or product or portion thereof, that was jointly conceived and developed by a group of researchers. Representing someone else's ideas as your own, even if those ideas are expressed in your own words, also constitutes plagiarism. Paraphrasing is a restated approximation of the original authors ideas and/or words. Paraphrasing without acknowledgement of authorship is also plagiarism and is as serious a violation as unacknowledged quotation. It is important to remember that it does not matter if the original work is copyrighted; you are still plagiarizing if you use

material from uncopyrighted work without giving credit.

To avoid plagiarizing, it is important to be as clear as possible in your writing or articulation to ensure that your audience can distinguish easily between your own words and thoughts and those that you are paraphrasing or quoting. As writers, it is therefore imperative that one cites references whenever and wherever in the document it is relevant to do so.

Paradoxically perhaps, computers have made it increasingly easy to "cut and paste" from someone else's work; it is thus wise to keep electronic material that you have copied for study and research purposes in a separate document to avoid inadvertent copying. To help you cite works that you find online, a brief document is available on the Internet ([http://www. Library. uwa. edu/au/libweb/wsch/sc\\_melvin.htm](http://www.Library.uwa.edu.au/libweb/wsch/sc_melvin.htm)).

It is my conviction that most scientists wish to avoid plagiarism, but are not always mindful of how they can. Simply put, the lack of sufficient knowledge on how one may avoid plagiarism the skills of proper and effective citation of language and ideas obtained from others - is the principal cause of grief in most cases. To this end, the Faculty and University have in the past organized workshops and seminars on the essences and pitfalls involved in scientific and medical writing, with some measure of success. However, as academics, besides being concerned with the intricacies of literary style and manuscript acceptance, we must also be alive to the threats and realities of unwitting or deliberate plagiarism. As teachers, we need to explore lacunae within the already tight medical curriculum and use every opportunity to impart the same cautionary messages to our students, and provide them with clear directions on the elements of responsible and competent professional writing.

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