

# Nurse Author & Editor

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2 WEEKS AGO    EDIT

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

### Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

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**NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2017, 27(2), 4**

Writing is central to knowledge development and synthesis and therefore involves students at all levels and academics with varying experience. Whether writing an undergraduate or postgraduate essay, or writing for publication, specific conventions need to be followed. These are articulated in essay criteria and student policy as well as journal guidelines for publication. Integrity is a fundamental principle of academic writing. Be it an essay or a paper for publication, writing with integrity requires us to be honest about the origins of the ideas, information and knowledge we present in our work (Hayes & Introna, 2005). Writers who disregard this convention are at risk of plagiarism—the focus of this piece.

#### WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Students may encounter the term “plagiarism” in assessment criteria or guidelines as well as assessment and academic misconduct policy. Academics writing for publication are aware of plagiarism from their own studies, as well as their teaching and researcher roles. Universities and colleges take plagiarism seriously whether it involves students or academics (Vardi, 2012) and incidents can potentially derail career aspirations.

Plagiarism occurs when someone deliberately or accidentally present another person’s work as their own by neglecting to acknowledge the author(s) (Bassendowski & Salgado, 2005). People who knowingly use the thoughts, words, and information developed by others in their work and present this as their own, are guilty of engaging in “intellectual theft” (Sánchez-Vega, Villatoro-Tello, Montes-y-Gómez, Villaseñor-Pineda, & Rosso, 2013, p. 1804). When students or academics have little or no understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, are feeling insecure about their writing capability, or lack the required attention to detail in proofreading their work, then accidental or unintentional plagiarism may ensue (Fischer & Zigmond, 2011), a not uncommon error occurring when one is unfamiliar with academic writing conventions. Paraphrasing a sentence or quotation does not equate to altering a few words. The writer needs to be able to synthesize what they have read and rephrase this in their own words (Anderson & Steneck, 2011). This practice also enables critical thinking and reflection, further enhancing learning (Bassendowski & Salgado, 2005).

Technological advances have substantially contributed to student learning and research dissemination. In some ways this has also dealt a double-edged sword for writers. For those wanting to take shortcuts, the Internet has provided a wealth of information that may be “cut and pasted” into papers (Sánchez-Vega et al., 2013). The other edge of the sword has seen the growth of plagiarism detection software and its use not merely in colleges and universities but also by publishers

(Sánchez-Vega et al., 2013). This software enables authors to check for referencing errors in their work and correct these, prior to final submission. It also enables academics (and journal editors) to detect plagiarism. Despite the rhetoric from predatory websites encouraging students to purchase assessment responses that are “guaranteed” to evade plagiarism detection software, this is plagiarism and in all likelihood will be detected (Zimmerman, 2012). Deliberate plagiarism does also occur. This is evident where established referencing guidelines are disregarded such as neglecting to quote sources, and attribute work appropriately (Park, 2003). The following table lists ten types of plagiarism with brief definitions and ratings of commonness and seriousness (iThenticate, 2013).

<b>Table. Ten Types of Plagiarism</b>			
<b>Type of Plagiarism</b>	<b>Also Known As</b>	<b>Brief Definition</b>	<b>Commonness/ Seriousness (out of 10)</b>
<b>Secondary Source</b>	Inaccurate citation	Citing primary sources contained in a secondary source, such as a textbook or meta-analysis.	6.9/6.4
<b>Invalid Source</b>	Misleading citation Fabrication Falsification	Referencing incorrect or non-existent sources.	3.9/7.3
<b>Duplication</b>	Self-plagiarism Reuse	Reusing work from their own previous studies or papers without attribution.	6.3/7.5
<b>Paraphrasing</b>	Plagiarism Intellectual Theft	Taking another person's writing and changing the words and not citing the source.	7.5/7.6
<b>Repetitive Research</b>	Self-plagiarism Reuse	Repeating data or text from a similar study without proper attribution.	7.1/7.6
<b>Replication</b>	Author submission violation	Submitting a paper to multiple publications, resulting in the same manuscript being published more than once.	4.2/7.7
<b>Misleading Attribution</b>	Inaccurate authorship	Inaccurate or insufficient list of authors, either denying credit for contributions or listing authors who made no contribution to the study.	4.8/8.2
<b>Unethical Collaboration</b>	Inaccurate authorship	People working together violate a code of conduct. Also, using written work, outcomes, or ideas which do not acknowledge the collaboration or participants involved.	5.3/8.2
<b>Verbatim Plagiarism</b>	Copy-and-paste Intellectual theft	Copying of another's words and works without providing proper attribution.	2.3/8.4
<b>Complete Plagiarism</b>	Intellectual theft Stealing	Takes a study, manuscript or other work from another researcher and submits it under his/her own name.	2.3/8.8
<b>Adapted with permission from: iThenticate (2013). Research ethics: Decoding plagiarism and attribution.</b>			

Plagiarism can have far reaching consequences (Kiehl, 2006). This behavior contradicts professional expectations and that of patients to receive competent quality care by well-educated staff who model ethical professional behaviors (Bassendowski & Salgado, 2005). The reputation of universities and colleges and the qualifications awarded may be questioned where plagiarism is problematic as society often equates plagiarism with cheating (Vardi, 2012). Safeguarding academic integrity is echoed in policy and the teaching of referencing conventions.

## PLAGIARISM AND STUDENT WORK

The majority of people do not plagiarize. However, the rise in instances of plagiarism has been attributed to multiple causes including:

- the need to achieve good grades;
- viewing a degree as a commercial transaction;
- competing priorities for students: work versus study;
- limited writing/study skills including paraphrasing;
- ineffective time management skills and/or feeling overloaded with coursework;
- previous studies where plagiarism in students work was not drawn to their attention;
- poor understanding of course requirements and assessment tasks;
- limited understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and poor understanding of subject matter (adapted from Postle, 2009, pp. 352-353).

Examples of plagiarism include colluding with peers whilst developing assessment responses; buying essays from websites; transposing work from published papers and texts (Postle, 2009); paraphrasing others work but omitting references or adding direct quotations but excluding quotation marks (Elander, Pittam, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2010) and presenting another individual's work as one's own (Walker, 2010) (unbeknown to the person concerned) as occurs by copying work prepared on a shared computer or disk (Park, 2003) (see other examples in the Table).

Students who have been made aware of plagiarism and associated policies and procedures may not deliberately intend to act dishonestly when presenting their work but nonetheless their work may be detected to contain some plagiarism. For

example, clinical nurses returning to study as postgraduate students may not necessarily be familiar with the requirements of academic writing, and how to avoid plagiarism. That said, whilst most people act with integrity, there will always be some who choose not to. Individuals who consciously engage in plagiarism not only do themselves a disservice by their actions but also their peers, given that plagiarism impacts learning and potentially individual and group grades as well as undervaluing the endeavors of honest people (Granitz & Loewy, 2007).

Academics and nurse authors also need to be familiar with assessment and academic misconduct policy and trained in using and interpreting plagiarism reports generated from detection software prior to taking action, if required. Nonetheless, penalties arising from plagiarism in student work range in severity: for example in our experience a warning may be given to the student who has not deliberately plagiarized. In other circumstances points may be deducted from an assessment task. Where serious breaches occur the student may be directed to withdraw from their studies or the university or college (Vardi, 2012). These actions are not lightly taken and can disrupt personal and career goals, and impact self-esteem, and self-worth.

## **PLAGIARISM AND NURSE AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS**

Nurse authors and researchers consider plagiarism with disdain and acknowledge that it represents interference and manipulation of the very system enabling acknowledgement of researchers' efforts, credibility, and achievements (Anderson & Steneck, 2011). According to Anderson and Steneck (2011), "plagiarism is viewed by the research community as a serious violation of the norms of research" (p. 90). Whilst some researchers and academics are pressured to "publish or perish," this may adversely influence the propensity for plagiarism by some (Jackson, Walter, Daly, & Cleary, 2014; Kenny, 2007). Researchers need to ensure that they acknowledge and cite others work appropriately and accurately

(Anderson & Steneck, 2011; Cleary, Sayers, Walter, & Nicoll, 2016). Many researchers submit their work through plagiarism software detection programs as a matter of course prior to finalizing their work for peer review and publication. Upholding these professional standards conveys to all the importance of honesty and integrity within the nursing profession (Bassendowski & Salgado, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Playing a supportive role to students and colleagues who are unfamiliar with academic writing practices is an academic responsibility. It begins with conversations about expectations and instances where there is concern about the potential for plagiarism and a punitive approach is not necessarily helpful. Careful submission and review of reports generated from papers submitted through plagiarism software detection is integral, and many of us routinely use these tools when writing for publication. Ultimately, modelling honesty and integrity demonstrates professional expectations to our peers and students (Vardi, 2012).

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