HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Tomáš Foltýnek et al.
How to avoid plagiarism. Student Handbook

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Contents

DEAR STUDENTS,

You've probably heard about plagiarism before. Unfortunately, it's a real problem that we encounter in academia. You might be worried that plagiarism could happen to you, too. It can arise not only intentionally (we don't suspect you of that), but also due to carelessness or lack of knowledge.

In this handbook, we will show you how to correctly deal with sources of literature and a bibliography, which you use while writing your seminar papers, thesis and other academic texts – as a matter of fact in any work in which you use the findings of your predecessors.

We all know how tempting it is to make our job easier, especially when someone has already formulated exactly what we want to say, or when we're under time pressure. This is really tricky. It's becoming apparent that even years after the end of our studies, plagiarism can be exposed. Of course, a student handbook can't force you to obey academic integrity principles.

In this handbook you'll learn:

- how to formulate your own ideas
- how to correctly reference different sources
- what exactly constitutes plagiarism
- how to avoid various forms of plagiarism
- examples of (in)famous cases of plagiarism

➞ three tips against plagiarism

➞ and finally, some advice for avoiding time pressure

Naturally, you will not find a magic manual for writing great academic texts here. That's because it doesn't exist. You need to read a lot, write a lot, and talk a lot with your lecturers and fellow students.

For the purposes of clarity, let's describe an

Academic text

➞ It presents findings to other researchers.

➞ It is not emotional.

➞ Nevertheless, it contains a story. The story describes your exploration of the topic, how you collected data or conducted experiments, and what your conclusions are. The story also facilitates the reading of your text, and perhaps will motivate the reader to cite your work or to follow up with his or her own research.

➞ In the research part, it summarizes what we know about the topic so far.

➞ It formulates questions and hypotheses.

➞ It describes your own findings and compares them to existing knowledge.

➞ It explains the methodology used, the collection of data and their analysis.

➞ And, naturally, it makes correct and ethical use of the findings and texts by other authors.

And this is what we will look at on the following pages.

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO CITE THAT BECAUSE THE ONLINE TEXT HAD NO AUTHOR.

EXCUSE FOR A BACHELOR'S THESIS

IT TAKES YOUR OWN IDEAS

During your studies, you will write various reports, seminar papers, academic articles and finally also your thesis. In these texts, originality and your own ideas are expected. Academic writing isn't just a collage of other people's texts, no matter how nice and professional it might seem.

But what is an original idea?

It doesn't need to be ground-breaking. All it means is that you have thought through everything that you write. By yourself, you found and referenced any ideas taken from academic work, you decided that they were important, and you found their meaning and context in the texts on your own. You expressed and developed your thoughts. You formulated hypotheses, examined what you know about the topic and how you learned what you know. This is exactly why you're constantly being asked to write something.

You don't need to discover a new continent, but you need to undertake the journey across the ocean and learn something from it. It doesn't matter that much whether you sail around the world, discover a new island or have to come back home after a thunderstorm.

Where to conjure up an original idea

New findings arise in various ways. Perseverance, thoroughness and patience play a more important role than innate genius. Experienced researchers usually combine different methods; students at the beginning of their academic journey often manage with one. Commenting on the opinions of others will help you formulate your own ideas.

You can try to discover an original idea by:

— critically comparing two or more views on one issue

— supporting, disproving or modifying an existing hypothesis or theory with new arguments

— verifying an existing hypothesis or theory with an experiment, or adapting a theory or explaining existing data using an original method

— collecting new data

— formulating and verifying a new hypothesis

— suggesting a new solution to an existing problem

— proposing a new research method...

A dialogue with others

Academic texts can be compared to a dialogue. Your own ideas react to the opinions of other authors. You can agree with them, compare them, develop them, show them from a different perspective, or even rebut them. While doing that, you need to clearly distinguish the voices of different speakers.

It is assumed in an academic text that everything which is not marked as a quotation or a paraphrase is the author's original text.

THIS IS HOW EVERYONE WRITES THEIR MASTER'S THESIS. YOU COPY BITS AND PIECES FROM DIFFERENT TEXTS AND ADJUST THEM A LITTLE.
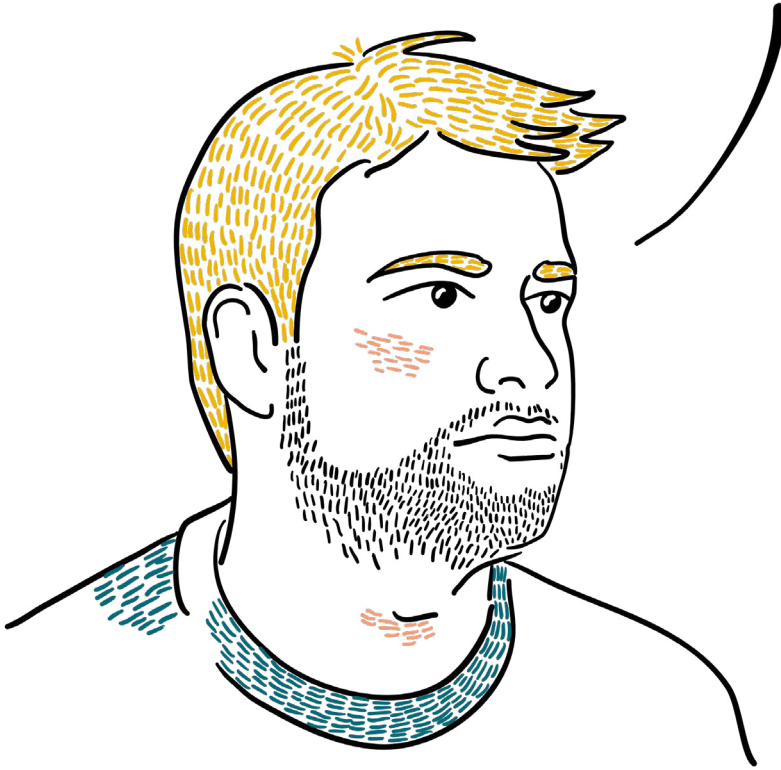
EXCUSE FOR A MASTER'S THESIS

If you read something elsewhere, state the source. This doesn't diminish the role you played in research. It was surely challenging enough to find the idea, comprehend it and put it into context. There is no reason to hide that you found it. The novelty of your work is precisely how you deal with that idea.

New is not enough

The fact that an idea is new doesn't necessarily make it good or true. Just because you have written everything by yourself doesn't guarantee that your work will be successful. Original ideas and correct referencing are just part of many components of academic writing. As a general rule, academic writing skills are improved through reading and writing.

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is **the use (of ideas, content or structures) of another work without appropriately acknowledging the source to benefit in a setting where originality is expected** (Foltýnek et al. 2019).

The reason plagiarism is wrong is not because you draw on other works, but rather because you don't declare your sources. It is absolutely fine to use other sources. However, we must always correctly reference the original source. That means referencing it in a way that we can unambiguously locate it and trace it back. Since we combine our own ideas with the ideas of others in academic texts, we need to clearly differentiate what's ours and what's been adopted. See? Here we have provided the three tips to avoid plagiarism.

Three tips against plagiarism

1. Distinguish other people's ideas from your own

2. Reference the original source

3. Identify the original source so that it can be traced back

What plagiarism looks like

1. Word-for-word plagiarism

Copying a whole text or a part of a text written by someone else without declaring its source and pretending that it is your own work constitutes the most serious form of plagiarism. Plagiarism also occurs when the text is referenced, but it is unclear what is and isn't your own idea.

Pay attention: If we copy several paragraphs, put them into our text without quotation marks and insert a reference to the end of the copied section, the extent of what we reproduced is unclear. Mark any citations with quotation marks, use italics, or differentiate them in another typographic style.

If we use a source in several places, the reference must be included in all places where we make use of the text.

2. Mosaic plagiarism

This results from compiling several short segments of text from different sources, without stating a reference for each reproduced segment.

Pay attention: Always state all your sources, even if you're only citing a portion of a sentence. It does not suffice to list all sources in the bibliography. We must also refer to each source within the text.

3. Paraphrase or translation without source

The original idea is what counts. Even if we describe it in our own words – that is, we paraphrase – or we translate it from a different language, it is not our own idea. Accordingly, we must reference it.

Pay attention: The fact that your work and the original work are not textually identical will likely mean that the current anti-plagiarism software will not detect the transgression. That, however, does not change the fact that you used an idea from another work and, as such, you must reference it.

4. Self-plagiarism

When we reuse our own work that has already been published or that we have already submitted for a different course, and we don't reference it, that constitutes self-plagiarism. That is because we repeatedly gain an advantage from the same work or its part, such as an educational grade or scientific recognition.

> **Pay attention:** A seminar paper or part of a paper which we have already submitted in one course cannot be submitted again as new in another course.

Naturally, you are allowed to utilise your own work, but you have to state that the text has already been published or submitted elsewhere, and then reference it. It's a good idea to discuss this with your supervisor in advance.

5. Incorrect citations and source referencing

We can also commit plagiarism unintentionally. This might happen, for example, when we forget to refer to a source or when we leave out quotation marks and it's unclear which ideas are the author's own and which are copied.

> **Pay attention:** Even one reference deleted by mistake might fit the definition of plagiarism. This will not usually lead to a disciplinary procedure, unlike in the cases of intentionally copied and unreferenced passages or references to non-existing sources. To be sure, check all your references and bibliography before you submit and format them according to the required referencing style. Chapter 6 will help you with that.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU. I SUBMITTED THE SAME PAPER IN A DIFFERENT COURSE AND IT WAS OK THERE.

EXCUSE FOR A SEMINAR PAPER

6. Undeclared contribution

Collective work and co-authorship are common in academic circles, and there is nothing wrong with this, when it is permitted. It is important to say if you have not worked alone on a task. We also have to clearly distinguish which portion is the result of teamwork, which portion was contributed by other authors and which is our own work.

Tip: Group projects can be dealt with the same way as journal contributions. They always state who contributed and in what ways – who brought the main idea, who conducted the literature review, who processed data, who wrote up the body of the article. This way, we can have a clear idea about the contribution of each individual author.

What about Wikipedia?

It doesn't matter if our source is publicly accessible, if we have obtained consent for its use or if it's published, for example, under a Creative Commons licence. It is someone else's work, and when we use it, we must reference it.

It is a common error to think that we don't need to reference Wikipedia because its content is publicly owned. Be careful! It is someone else's work, and as such it must be referenced. At the same time, we should primarily use works with known authors, which Wikipedia pages usually do not have.

7. Commissioned papers

Every author is entitled to provide his or her work to someone else without requiring that he or she be stated as the author. However, when we present such work as our own, we are committing plagiarism. This is called 'contract cheating' or 'academic ghostwriting'. A student commissions, usually for money, a work written by someone who agrees not to be included as the author. The student who puts his or her name to that work becomes a plagiarist.

> **Pay attention:** Contract cheating is a form of plagiarism which does not breach the Copyright Act, nevertheless it breaches good morals and academic ethics. According to the Higher Education Act, contract cheating warrants expulsion from the study programme or rescinding the academic degree. We must also take into account that the actual author of the text or the company that operates in the field of commissioned papers might easily blackmail the student.

WHAT IS NOT PLAGIARISM

1. Common knowledge

Some ideas have their own authors. For others, however, we can't determine the work that they came from. These ideas are so-called common knowledge, and we can state these without referencing a source. They should be limited in our work because they do not contribute any novel ideas. Moreover, the vast majority of the presumed readers of our work are already familiar with such ideas.

Common knowledge is useful in the introduction, discussion or conclusion sections as a prelude to other ideas, whether our own or reproduced.

> A universally known piece of information is, for example, that the capital city of Burkina Faso is Ouagadougou.

2. Proofreading, copy editing, translations

As long as the external contribution does not affect the ideas of the work, we do not consider it to be plagiarism. This includes copyediting or typographical adjustments. Translated works should state the translator, but the author remains the same. It is appropriate to mention those who helped us with our work, for example in the acknowledgements.

(IN)FAMOUS PLAGIARISM CASES

We are all tempted to make our job easier sometimes – especially when deadlines, exam period and thesis defence are looming. But, even if we get away with this now, it might happen that in ten or twenty years we will be in a position that will cause someone to inspect our academic work again. And everything will come out to light. In fact, this has happened to many public figures.

The defence of the Minister of Defence

Perhaps the most well-known foreign plagiarised work is the dissertation thesis of the former German Minister of Defence. He was writing it at a time when he was already a politician and under a lot of work-related pressure. In 2007, he defended his thesis with the highest marks and obtained a Doctor of Law degree. A routine check in 2011 revealed over eighty copied passages in more than one hundred pages of his work.

Initially, the accused Minister of Defence denied cheating and only admitted to mistakes in the annotations, which he apologised for. However, it was soon proven that he committed plagiarism and he lost his degree. A month later, he resigned from his ministerial office as well as other posts. His prosecution for copyright law violations was discontinued after he paid twenty thousand Euros to charities. That is because no serious breach of third-party rights had been committed.

A Minister who lasted thirteen days

In our country, plagiarism in the political sphere was discussed in 2018. An analysis of a master's thesis on child arrangements during divorce,

which a former Minister of Justice defended in 2011, proved similar to another thesis, a book and other online sources. The author copied entire passages of text without referring to their source, sometimes paraphrasing them. She also kept the same grammatical mistakes.

Consequently, her other thesis on the topic of rabbit breeding which was defended at a different university, was also analysed. It transpired that sixteen out of forty-eight pages were copied from another work. These were, again, unreferenced. As a result of the criticism from the professional community, the Minister of Justice resigned after just thirteen days in office.

Free time of the Minister of Labour

In the same year, plagiarism was exposed committed by a former Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. An analysis of his bachelor thesis Youth and Free Time from 2007 found similarity in almost forty out of sixty-five pages. Passages were copied including grammatical mistakes, formatting and typos.

He defended his diploma thesis, Free Time of Adults, two years later. It consisted mainly of the text of his bachelor's thesis, only with the words 'children and youth' replaced with the word 'adults'. He extended this work by twenty-four pages, which again included copied passages with no direct citations. He, too, resigned from his ministerial office after the analysis of his bachelor's thesis was published, and he gave up his political posts.

What lesson can we learn from this?

There are many cases where obtaining an academic degree with the help of plagiarism was proven. In most of them, plagiarism was only

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suspected several years after they were written. Specifically, suspicion arose when the work was published, they were analysed with improved tools for checking text originality, or the author assumed an important public office.

The authors rarely admit the truth. At first, they defend themselves with their successful thesis defence or the approval of their supervisor, or they play down their plagiarism as a small technical omission. After the evidence and the copied passages of text are exposed, they must resign from their office due to public pressure, and they may also lose their academic degree.

It is definitely correct to require moral and academic integrity from those who participate in a state's leadership, who hold important posts, and distribute financial resources. Let us require the same from ourselves. The knowledge that we will not be facing accusations in a couple of years which might end our career and cost us our credibility is invaluable. After all, this is what fairy tales teach us: we shouldn't cheat, and the past will always catch up with us.

CONSEQUENCES OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is not only shameful, but it also constitutes a serious breach of academic integrity. Any cases uncovered are usually dealt with directly by the university. Plagiarism is monitored among students, alumni, as well as academic staff. Here, we will consider the first two groups.

> The process of dealing with plagiarists is guided by internal regulations of individual universities and faculties, and the Higher Education Act. Since plagiarism might also constitute an intellectual property offence, the Copyright Act and the Criminal Code might also be relevant.

What to do with a student who plagiarises

When plagiarism is suspected, it is first decided whether the case in fact constitutes plagiarism or not. It is then determined how the case should be dealt with. At our universities, both questions are usually addressed by the same committee, which makes a decision about both the guilt or innocence of the (alleged) plagiarist and his or her punishment.

The severity of the punishment depends on whether or not the plagiarism was intentional, on its extent, seriousness and the motivation for cheating. The type of work is also taken into account, together with the level of experience of the student, his or her conduct and any attempts to remedy the situation. That means that the university will deal differently with plagiarism in a seminar paper of a first-year bachelor student than plagiarism in a master's thesis.

Each university and also each faculty has slightly different internal regulations, which guide the process of dealing with plagiarism. It usually looks like this:
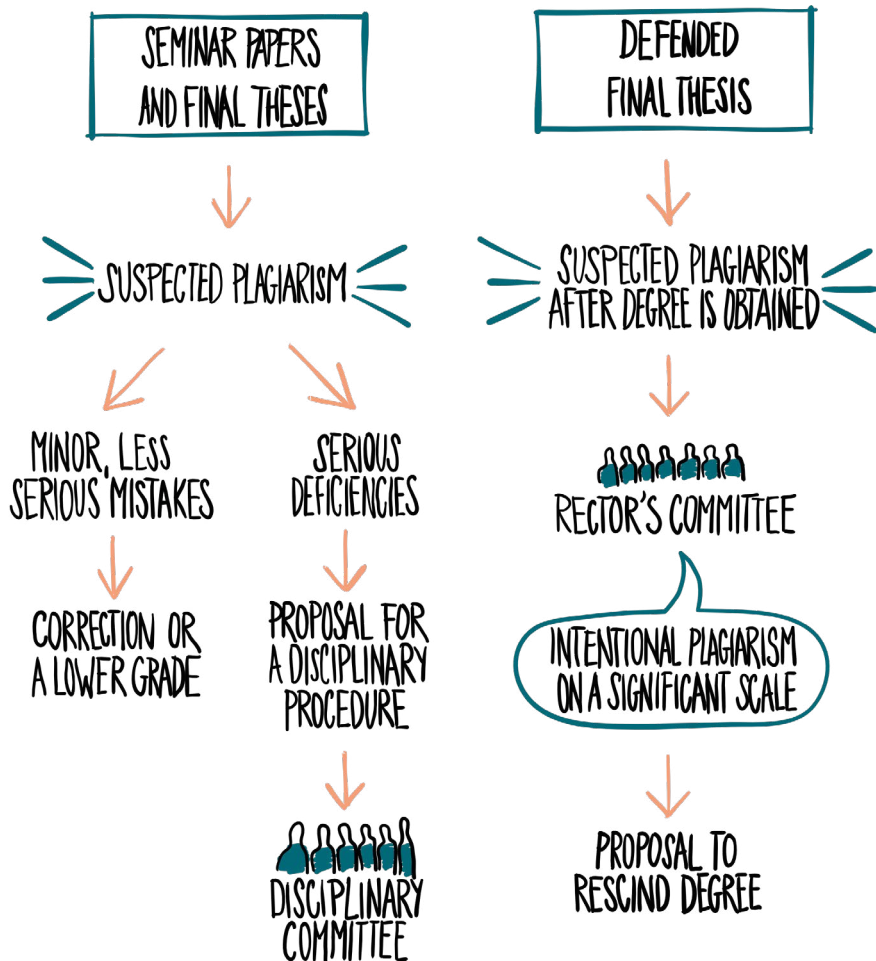
Student vs. alumnus

Universities may consider plagiarism committed by a student as a disciplinary offence. This is reviewed by a disciplinary committee. According to the seriousness of the offence, it might be dealt with by issuing a warning or deciding on a conditional, or even unconditional, expulsion of the student from the university. The last option is only considered in cases of intentional plagiarism.

Universities can now also penalise their alumni for plagiarism. That is within the responsibility of a rector's review committee. In the most severe cases the academic degree can be rescinded. Such punishment is applied in cases of intentional plagiarism which constitutes a serious violation of the Copyright Act.

When the law steps in

Plagiarism might also have legal consequences beyond academia. The aggrieved author or those who hold the rights to the work may demand rectification of the breach, an apology or financial compensation. A serious violation of intellectual property rights that has a harmful impact on society might also be treated as crime; this carries a penalty of up to two years imprisonment.

Honesty is key

We can easily avoid all these punishments by being aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. That includes knowing the correct rules of referencing, and naturally studying with integrity.

HOW TO CITE

Can you remember the three tips against plagiarism? They are the basis for all citations.

Three tips against plagiarism

1. Distinguish someone else's ideas from your own

2. Refer to the original source

3. Reference the original source so that it can be traced back

There are many ways you can refer to the original source. We call these referencing styles. Referencing styles are sets of rules that tell us what information to include, in what order, how to format them and how to use punctuation. It's important to select one referencing style and use it consistently throughout your work.

A source of information may be not only written text, but also oral communication such as an interview, a video, image, graph, table... We need to identify all of these using references.

Every profession and every school has its own rules for referencing. You should definitely look these up before you start writing. Your supervisor might even tell you his or her preferred citation style. If not, it's up to you. The most frequently used referencing style in the Czech Republic is ČSN ISO 690. If you're unsure about which style to use,

choose this one. You can also use referencing management software, which will generate your references automatically.

For referencing style ČSN ISO 690, check out www.citace.com/CSN-ISO-690. That's a really useful website.

Inseparable partners: citation and bibliography entry

References have two components: a citation and a bibliography entry. The citation is information in the text that refers to the bibliography entry. We include the bibliography entry in the bibliography index, usually at the end of the work. It is clear, therefore, that each in-text citation has to have its partner in the bibliography, and vice versa.

According to ČSN ISO 690, we can use one of three ways of creating references:
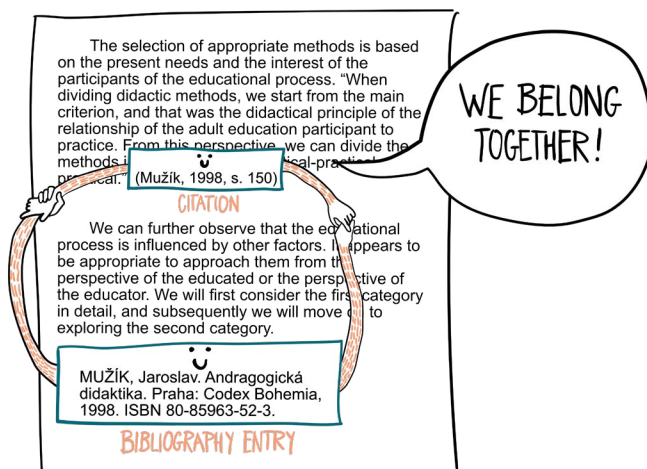
- word in-text citations (so-called Harvard style, typically Surname, year of publication, page number)
- numerical in-text citations to a list of references at the end of a chapter or work
- numerical citations to footnotes

Bibliography entry of an online article in different citation styles:

ČSN ISO 690

DHAR, Sandipan, Ramkumar RAMMOORTHY, Samujjala DEB a Deepak PARIKH. Nanotechnology in pediatric dermatology. *Indian Journal of Paediatric Dermatology* [online]. 2019, 20(4), 290-294 [cit. 2020-05-06]. DOI: 10.4103/ijpd.IJPD_95_17. ISSN 23197250

APA

Dhar, S., Rammoorthy, R., Deb, S., & Parikh, D. (2019). Nanotechnology in pediatric dermatology. *Indian Journal of Paediatric Dermatology*, 20(4), 290-294. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijpd.IJPD_95_17

MLA (7th edition)

Dhar, Sandipan et al. "Nanotechnology in pediatric dermatology". *Indian Journal of Paediatric Dermatology* 20.4 (2019): 290-294. 06 May 2020.

YOU'RE RIGHT, I COPIED IT. BUT YOU ARE THE FIRST ONE WHO ACTUALLY READ IT.
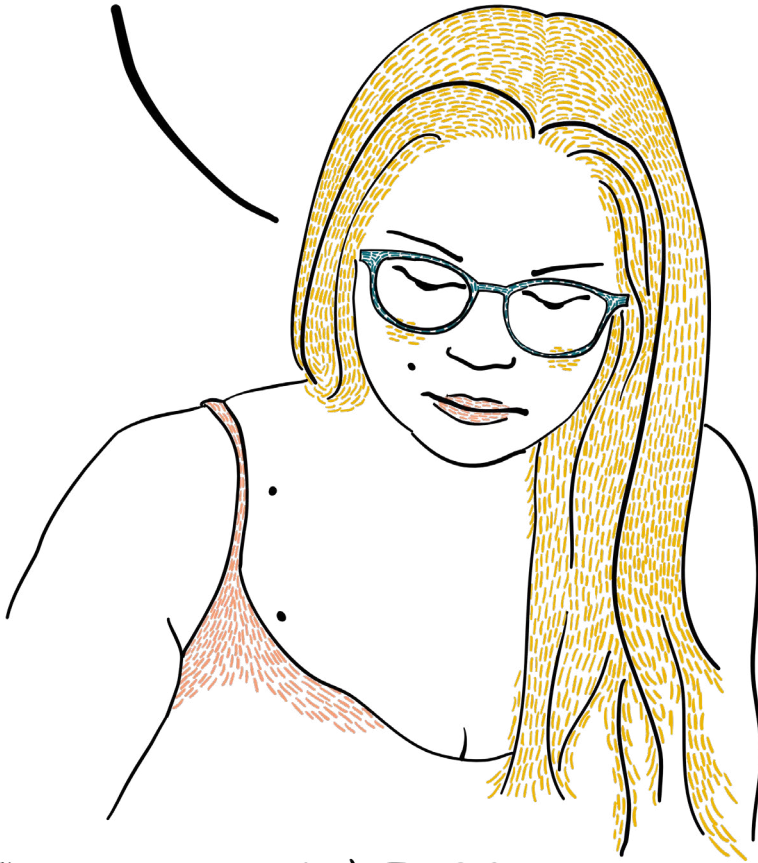
EXCUSE FOR A MASTER'S THESIS

Direct quotation vs. paraphrasing

The text we are using may be either a verbatim quotation that is directly copied, or a paraphrase that is rewritten in our own words. A citation as well as a bibliography entry must, of course, be included both with a direct quotation and paraphrased text, so it is clear which ideas are our own and which are someone else's.

Direct quotation

- the text is copied word for word
- the quoted text is enclosed in quotation marks; alternatively, we can use italics or indentation

Indirect quotation, i.e. paraphrasing

- the text is rewritten in our own words, but we don't change the meaning of the original idea
- it is not enclosed in quotation marks

To avoid including too many quotation marks in the text, we shouldn't use too many direct quotations. Paraphrasing is welcome. We should be careful, however, not to change the meaning of the original idea. We should pay attention to ensure that it's clear which parts of the text are paraphrased and which are our own.

Examples of in-text citations in Harvard style ČSN ISO 690:

Direct quotation enclosed in quotation marks

The selection of appropriate methods is based on the present needs and the interest of the participants of the educational process. *"When dividing didactic methods, we start from the main criterion, and that was the didactical principle of the relationship of the adult education participant to practice. From this perspective, we can divide the methods into theoretical, theoretical-practical, and practical."* (Mužík, 1998, p. 150)

Paraphrasing one sentence with included citation

Teaching methods can be divided with respect to different aspects. In relation to an adult education participant's relationship to practice, we can divide the methods into theoretical, theoretical-practical, and practical (Mužík, 2010).

Paraphrasing an entire paragraph

We can characterize a workshop as a didactical method which follows from a different educational activity, e.g. a lecture. The participants engage in a specific chosen topic, and the result or output will continue to operate after end of said workshop. (Mužík, 2010)

Pay attention to the full stop!
The reference in parentheses is located before the punctuation mark when paraphrasing a sentence. When paraphrasing an entire paragraph, the reference is located after the punctuation mark.

I DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME,
SO I DIDN'T MANAGE
TO CITE THAT ARTICLE.

EXCUSE FOR A SEMINAR PAPER

Paraphrasing with an in-text mention of the author

Mužík (2010) characterizes a workshop as a didactical method which follows from a different educational activity, such as a lecture, during which the participants in a closed session engage in a specific chosen topic, and the result or output of which will continue to operate after the end of such session. I agree with such characterisation of a workshop.

FINAL TIPS

Few people decide to become plagiarists at the outset. But then they might realise that their topic is too complex, or they want to save their time and effort. Or they're not really into their studies. Or they just want to come up with a new, original idea at any cost. The most common motive for plagiarism is lack of time. The deadline is quickly approaching and secretly borrowing a couple of paragraphs or pages seems like the easiest way out at that point. Here are a couple of tips for avoiding time pressure:

1. Plan your time. And multiply it by two

Producing an academic text requires time. It's not just about writing, but also searching for sources, reading them and making notes. Insufficient time before the deadline can undermine your otherwise strong integrity.

Estimate the time necessary for writing your paper. Set milestones of what you want to have finished and by when. Allow for some free time in your plan – you can't just work and write the entire time.

When planning, consider these:

1. How does the supervisor imagine that the work will be carried out?

2. Does the supervisor require consultations? How often?

   How often will I need them?

3. What do I need to research before I start writing?

   How will I find my sources?

4. Do I need to conduct my own research or experiment?

5. How many standard pages do I have to write?

6. Approximately how long will the writing take? (You will need to guess at the beginning of your studies, later on you will have a clearer idea.)

7. When do I need to submit my work and how? Should I print it, submit it electronically or both?

2. Consult

Keep in touch with your supervisor regularly. That doesn't necessarily mean often. It's also not necessary to hold personal consultations; some people prefer e-mail, a phone call or Skype. The consultation shouldn't be just a formality – it should be beneficial for both sides. Don't hide it if you're behind schedule, and don't pretend that you understand if you're unsure about something. Two heads are better than one, and your instructor or supervisor was assigned to you for the very purpose of helping you.

3. Don't be afraid to admit what you don't know

Academic writing should be part of your curriculum. If it isn't, or if you weren't paying attention, don't be ashamed to admit it and make up for

what you've missed. Your schoolmates, instructors or this handbook will help you.

4. Read

This might sound hackneyed, but you won't get any better advice. By reading research and scientific papers, you learn much more than you think. Apart from gaining an insight into different topics, theories and figures, you will also learn about academic text, its rules and structure. You will then have a model on which to base your own work.

5. No secrets, tell everything

Always reference ideas that you borrowed. Even your own ideas, if they proceed from your earlier work. If you're unsure as to whether you need to reference something, reference it. Even if you don't feel like searching for the original source, give it the extra couple of (fine, sometimes even couple dozens) minutes, find the original source and reference it. And if someone was helping you, for example with proofreading or translation, which not forbidden, include this information.

In an academic text, it's better to give more information than to hide something. The clear conscience that your work was really written by you and you correctly referenced everything is invaluable.

Even in a text that was produced fairly, anti-plagiarism software will find similarities. It is just a mechanical aid. It's necessary to consider and evaluate the result. A similarity percentage by itself means nothing.

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## 6. Remember the three tips against plagiarism

You always need to:

1. Distinguish someone else's ideas from your own

2. Reference the original source

3. Identify the original source so that it can be traced back

7. Admit a mistake if you make it

If your plagiarism is exposed, admit it. If you're already trying to cover up some error, don't wait until it's exposed and own up to it. You will still be punished, but at the same time you will have opened a way out. This will ease your conscience and you will be one of those who face up to their problems.

I JUST FORGOT
THE QUOTATION MARKS.
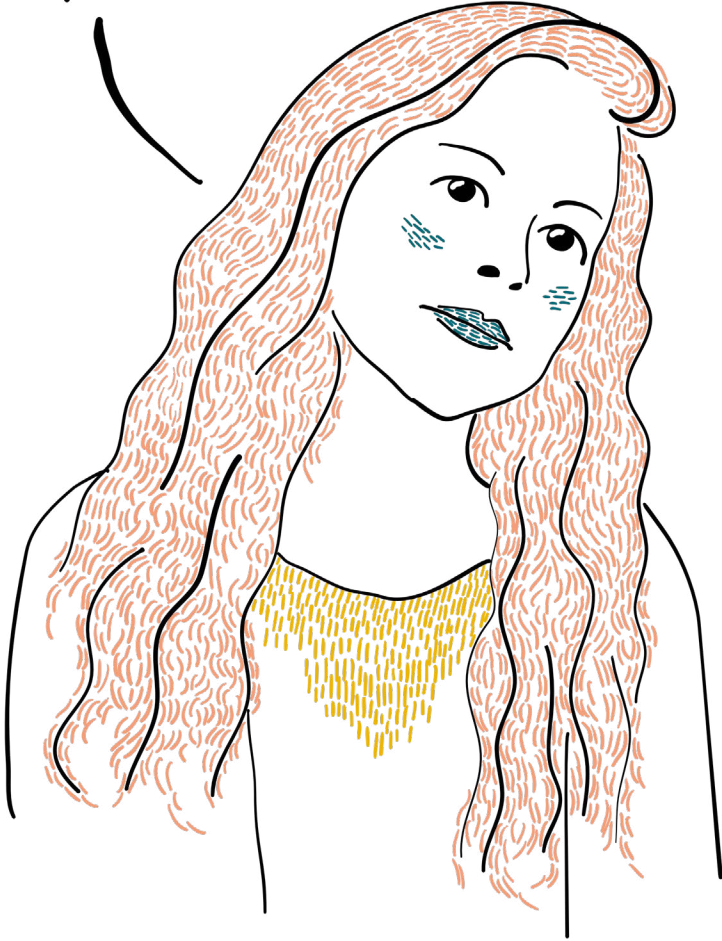
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Act No. 111/1998 Coll. Act on higher education institutions and on amendments and supplements to some other acts (the Higher Education Act).

Examples of well-known plagiarised works | (In)famous plagiarised works

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