A Beginners' Guide to

PLAGIARISM

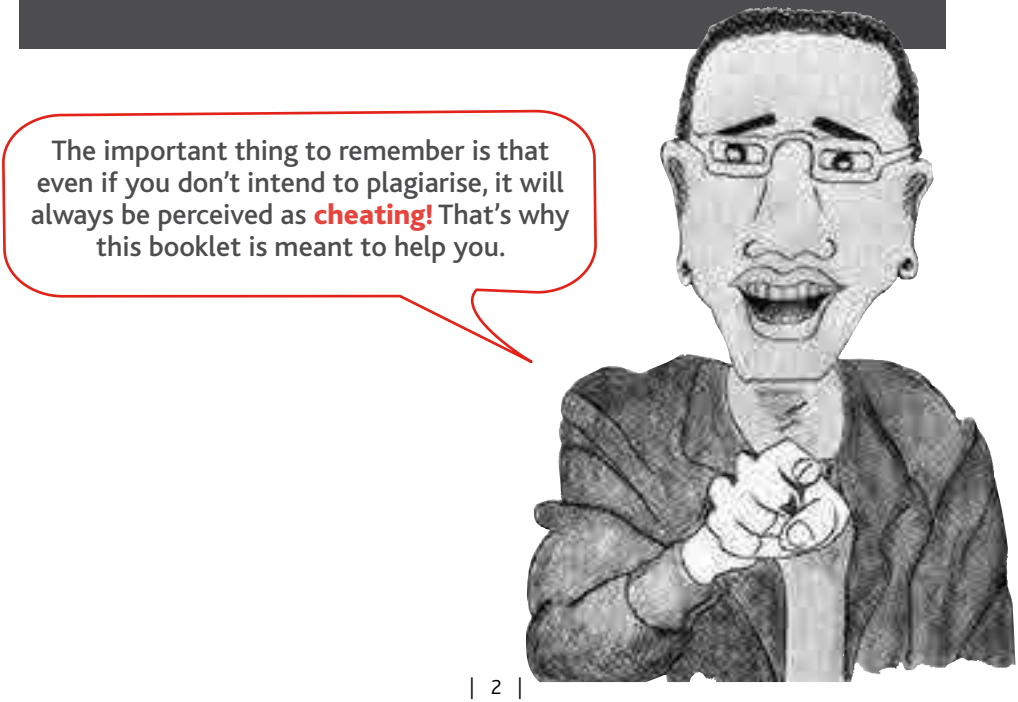
What is plagiarism and how can you avoid it?

written and illustrated by

Deb J Hill

WHAT THE HECK IS PLAGIARISM?

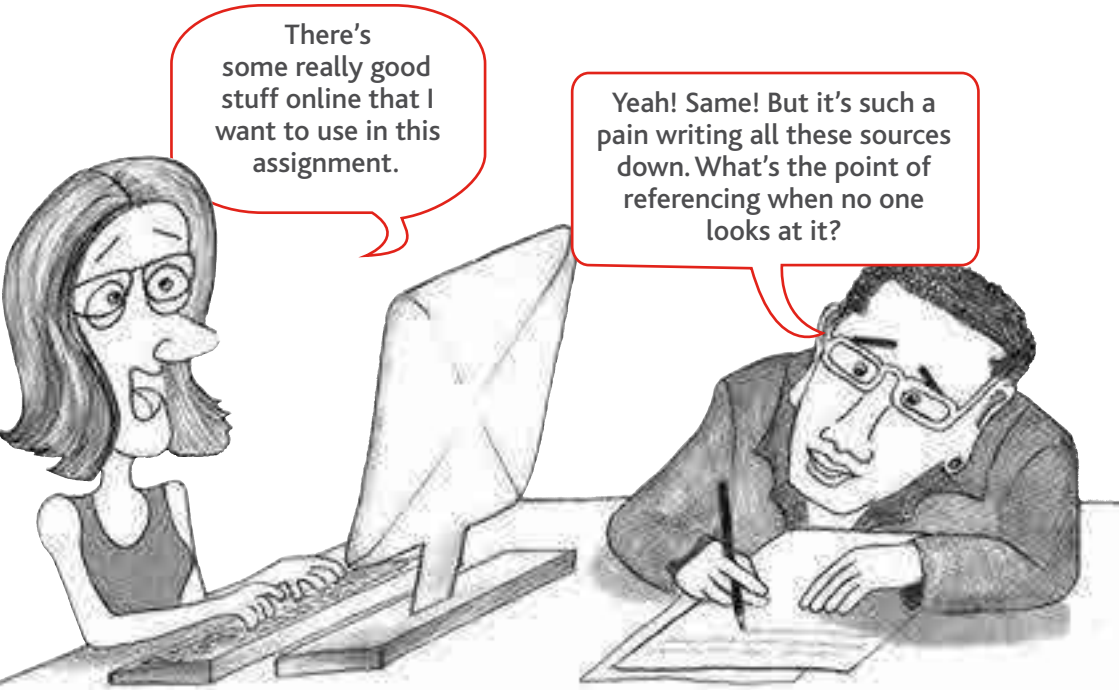
We all hate cheats and **plagiarism** is a special kind of cheating. Basically it means copying the ideas of others and passing them off as your own. It might be because you don't know the rules of writing assignments or because you choose to take short-cuts.



According to Wikipedia, the word plagiarism was first used by a poet who complained that another poet had "kidnapped his verses".

Plagiarism literally means *kidnapper*.

A lot of unintentional plagiarism occurs because people just don't realise that, as they are gathering information and ideas for a project, they need to acknowledge where those ideas came from. The trick is to take good notes and to learn to list the books, articles, websites or other source locations correctly.



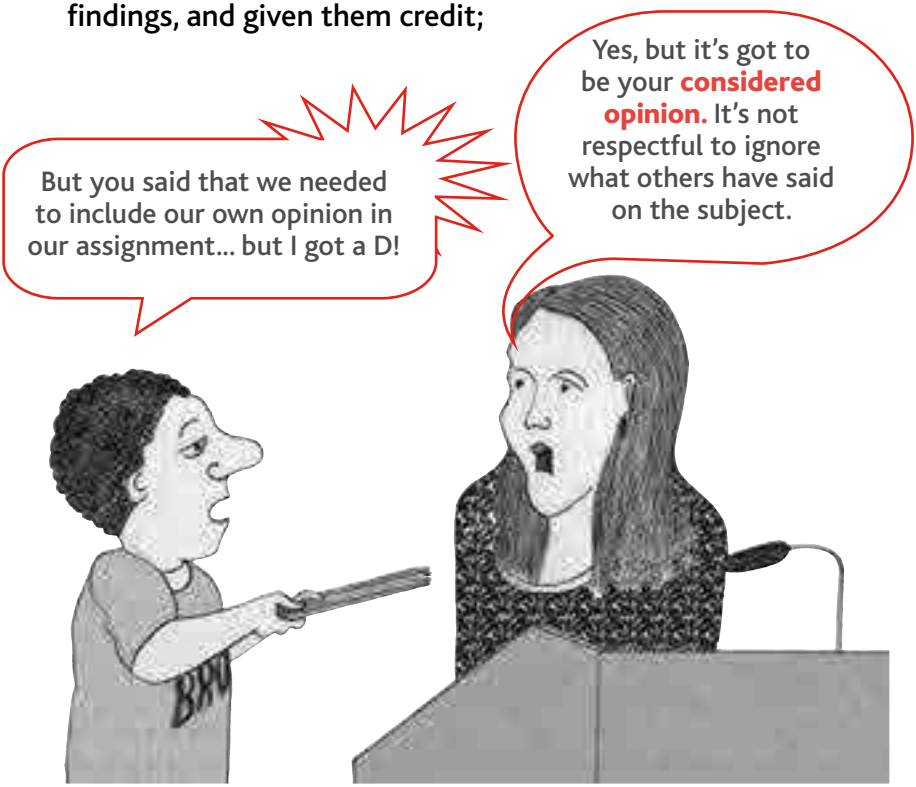
Although referencing takes time, it's really important to record the sources you've looked at when writing your own assignments.

We'll talk about references in the last section of this guide, but for the meantime, you need to know that your source can be material that is either **published** or **unpublished**. A source can be...

- Books, articles, or reports
- Text, images (including tables or diagrams) or music from the Internet
- Information, ideas, or images taken from a TV progamme, the radio (e.g., an interview, book review, documentary), the Internet or from a film
- Course, tutorial or lecture notes (old or new)
- Material gathered from other students' work (e.g., past students' essays, PowerPoint presentations, theses, etc.)
- Words taken from a letter or email or any words spoken by someone else.

The rule is that any source you look up or use in the course of creating your own assignment (essay, PowerPoint, project, etc.) **must** be acknowledged. Why?

To show that you've gone beyond what's simply in your own head; that you've considered others' ideas, concepts,and findings, and given them credit;

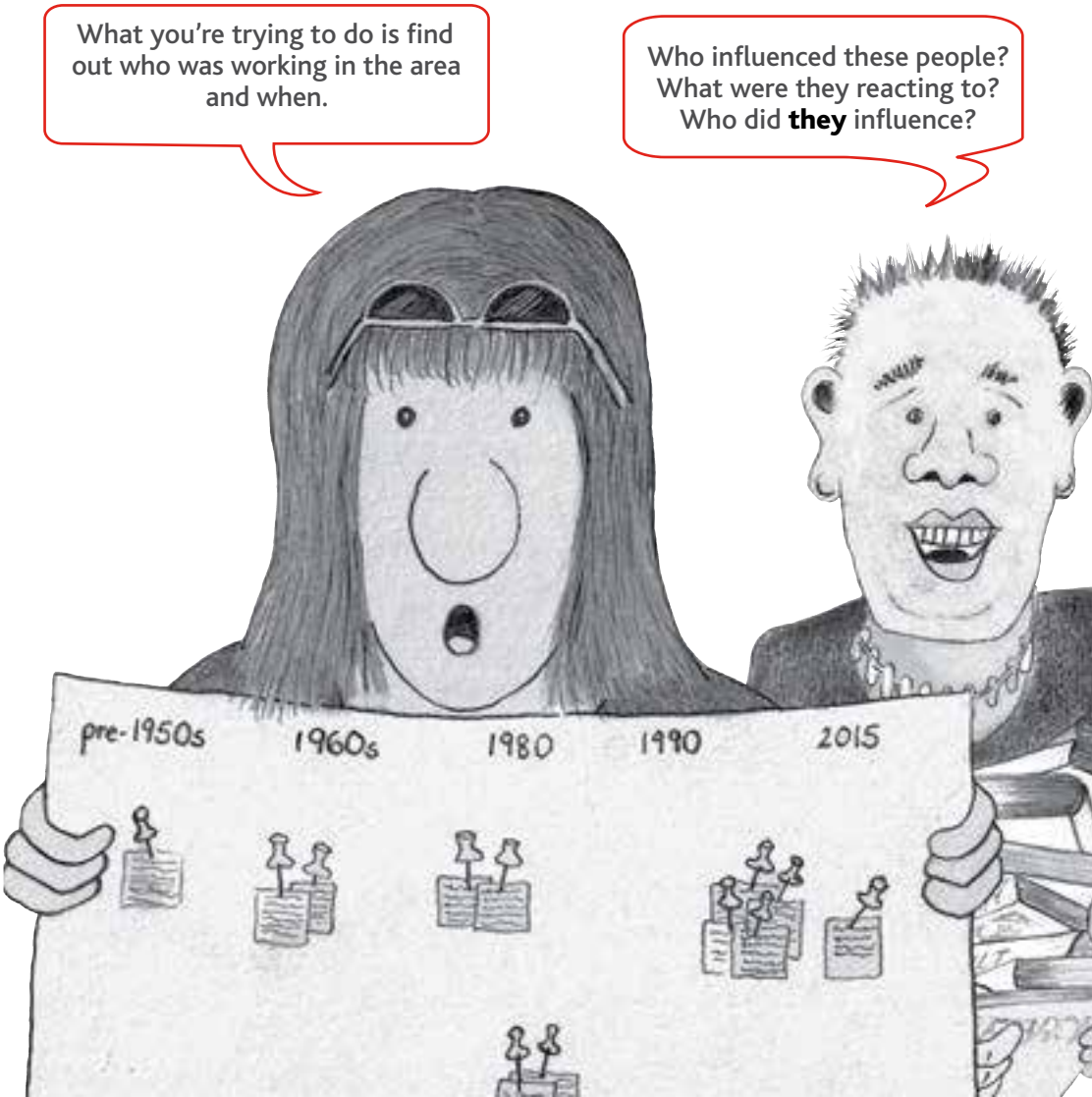


To sample what has been written in your discipline; to start to "map"

- who has been working in the area (the scholars, artists, poets, engineers, scientists, etc.)
- when they came up with their ideas (the times or context in which they were developed).

Ideas, theories, concepts or images always have a history or "genealogy"—which means that they are part of ongoing work in an area over time.

A reference means you've "referred to" a part of this ongoing work.



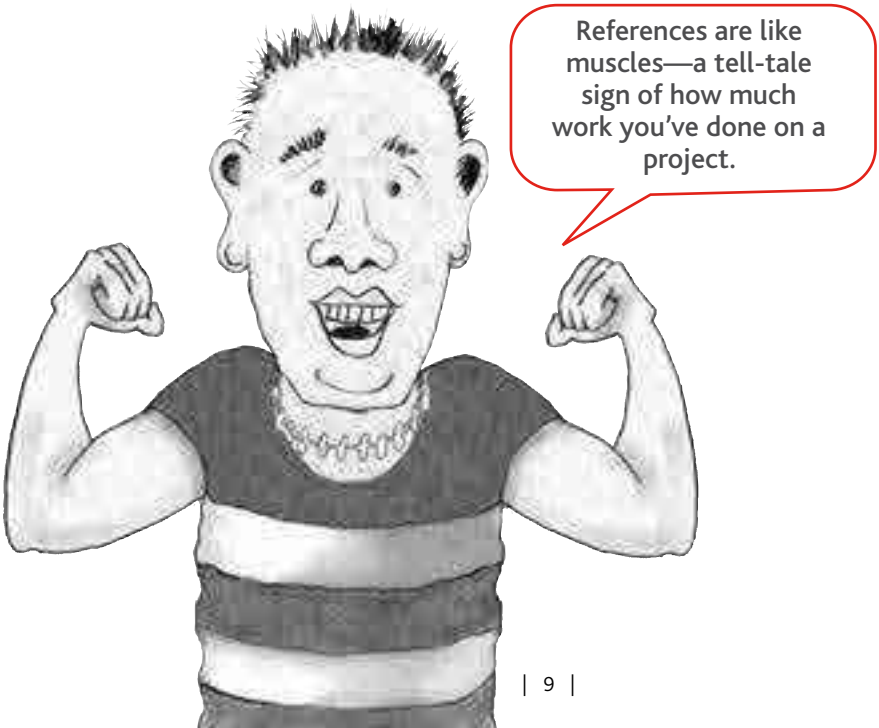
Plagiarism can easily occur if you don't learn to reference. There are different referencing styles, but each source will have a...

- Commentator, author or creator
- Title or heading of the source
- Page span—if it's an article or chapter in a book
- Specific page number—for a copied quotation
- Date of publication—or when it was originally written, presented, drawn or developed
- Place of publication—the institution or venue where it was originally written, drawn, developed or presented.

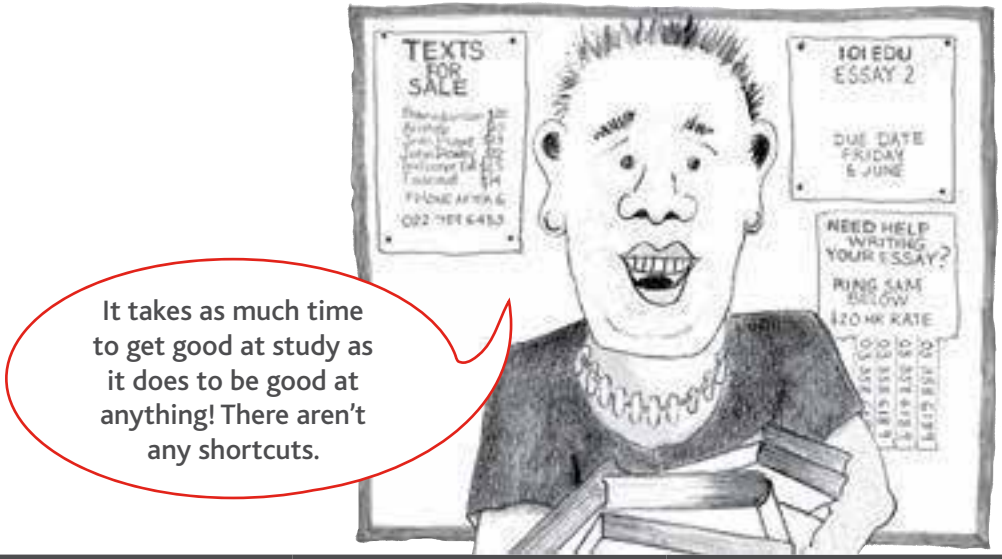
References tell others...

- The **sources** you have used in writing your assignment or creating your project
- **That you've read across your area,** which shows in turn that you haven't just done a quick flick; you've looked at heaps of material
- From the **dates of your sources,** people can see how careful you've been in your own work
- From the **type of the sources you use,** you tell others how widely you've read and thought about this stuff.

A "thin" reference list usually means a "thin" piece of work.



So, the key points so far are...



The biggest problem you'll have studying is trying to keep track of lots of bits of information. Having a good way to save your notes—and then to search through them later—is the key. The most important thing is to write down your references and the page numbers of quotes you want to use as you go.

TIPS FOR NOTE-MAKING

(to avoid plagiarism)

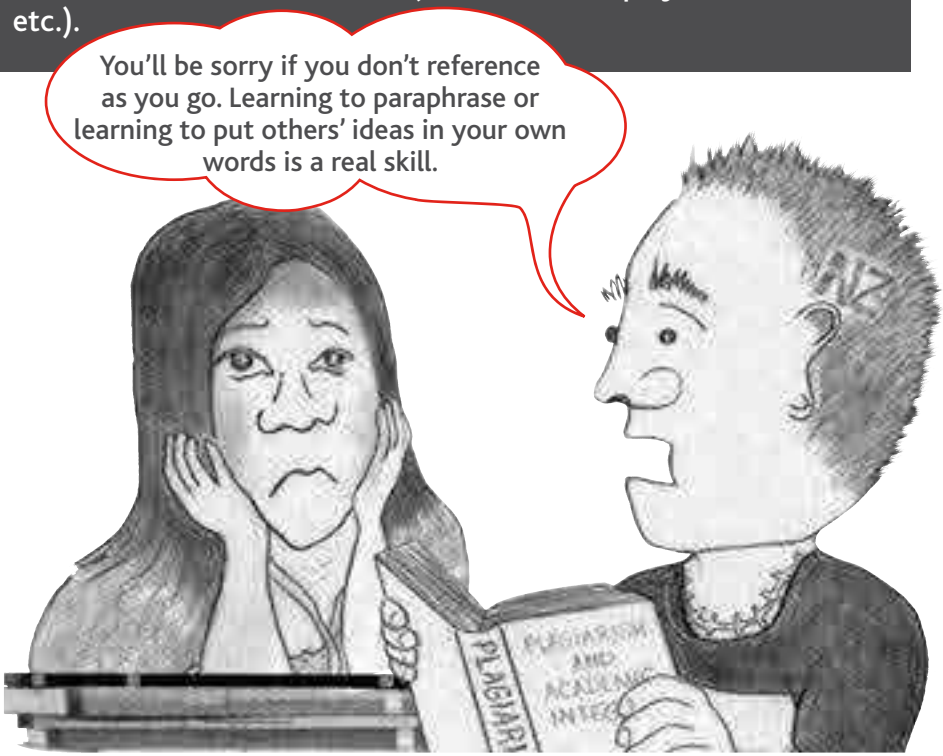
Making good notes is the secret to success if you want to do well. Getting your diploma, certificate, or degree might take you a long time so you need a system to help you remember. It will save you time!

You'll really rely on your note-making system—not only to record what you read, **but to put your reactions to what you read on paper.** The more studying you do, the more you'll need these notes.

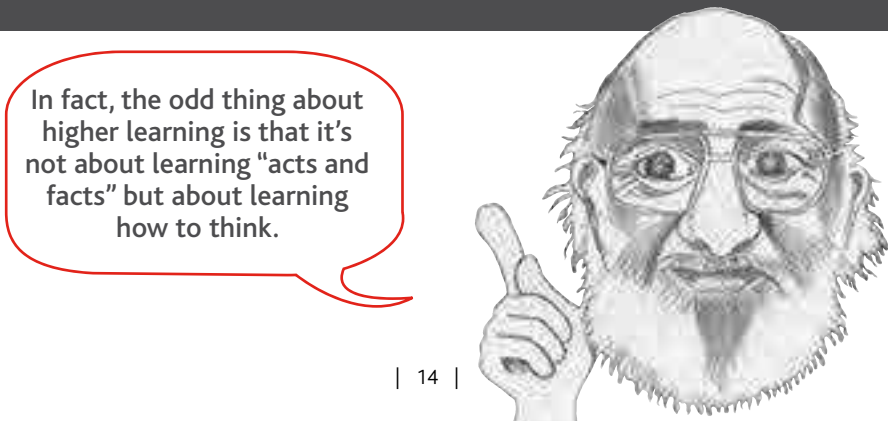
The best system to use is to have a set of notebooks or a computer note-keeping system. **or both!** OneNote or Evernote are both brilliant if you want to set up a system of notebooks stored in the cloud.

OneNote is a set of notebooks you can create electronically for your notes. It comes in Microsoft Office Suite along with Word and Excel.

A lot of plagiarism occurs because people forget to make a note of the ideas they've come across: "who" came up with the idea and "where" did it come from (a book, article, play, the Internet, etc.).

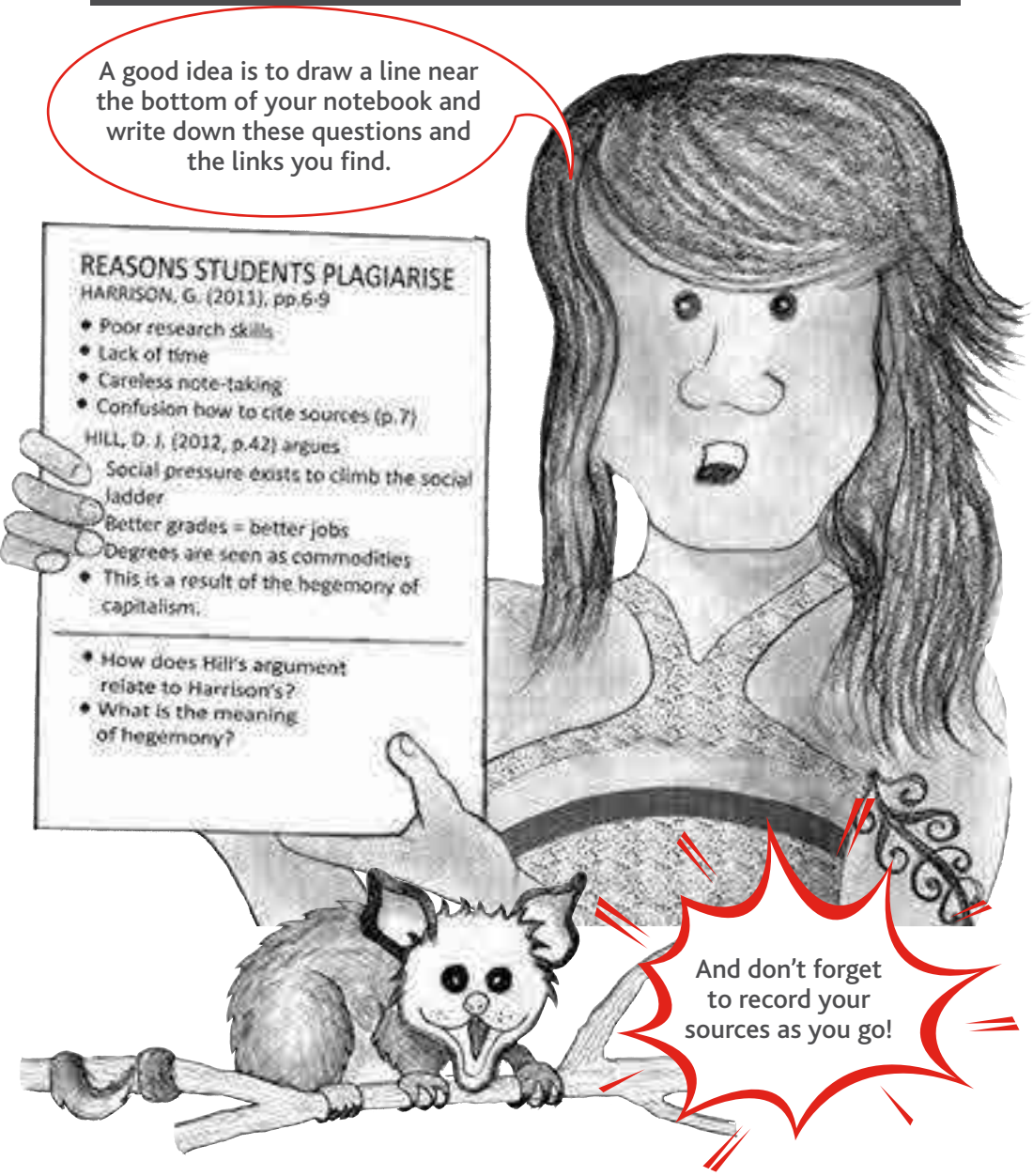


You don't have to "know" the detail of everything you come across but you **do** have to record this stuff "in detail" because your references are the "map" of your learning journey.

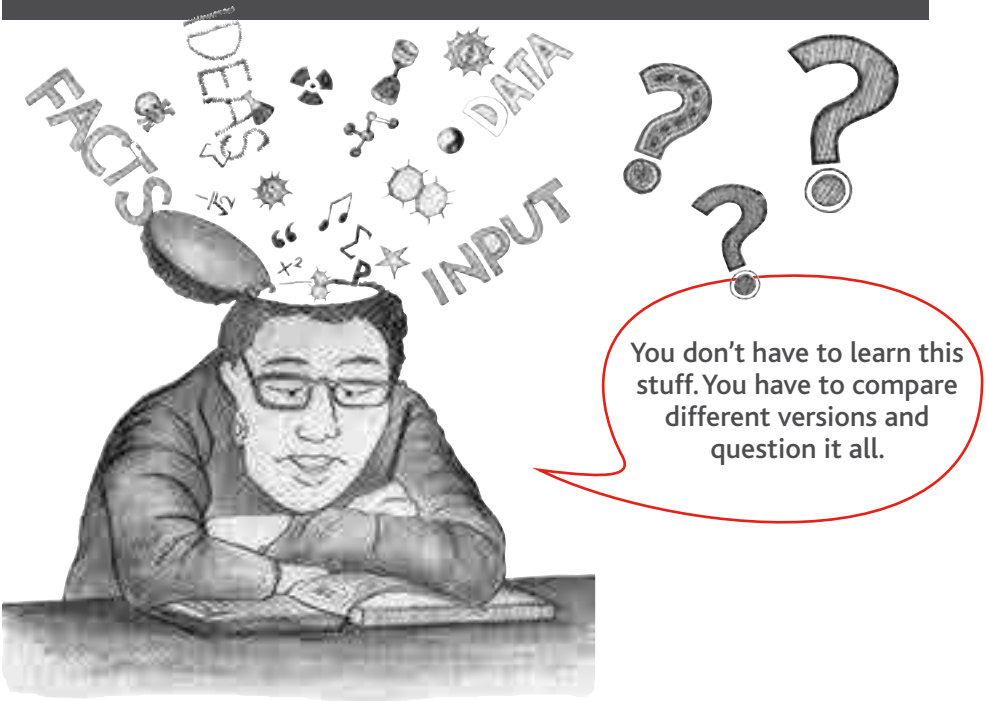


The further on your learning journey you go, the more you'll realise that it's not the stuff you know that counts but what you do with what you discover.

So don't take notes that are word-for-word from the text. Yes—jot down the gist of what you read, but your notebooks should also include your **questions** and the **links you're making.**

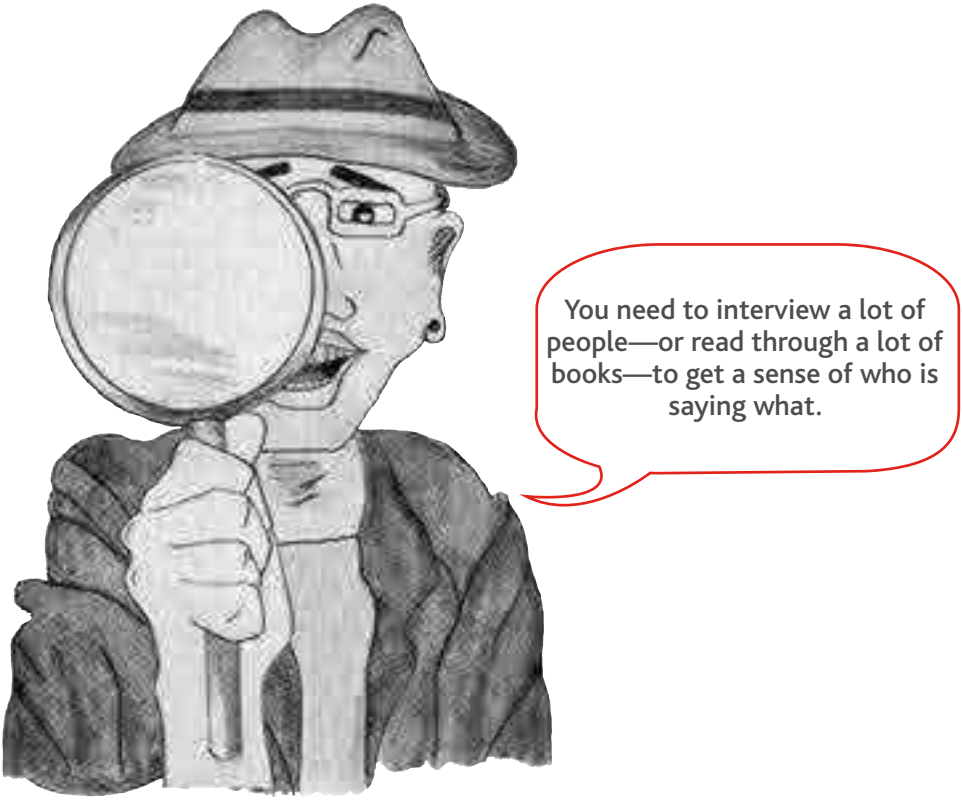


Research just means that: we have to look at stuff again. We have to "re-search" and "re-think".



You'll be much less likely to plagiarise if you think of yourself as a detective. A detective needs to get things right or the evidence will be thrown out of court. Your notes will do four things:

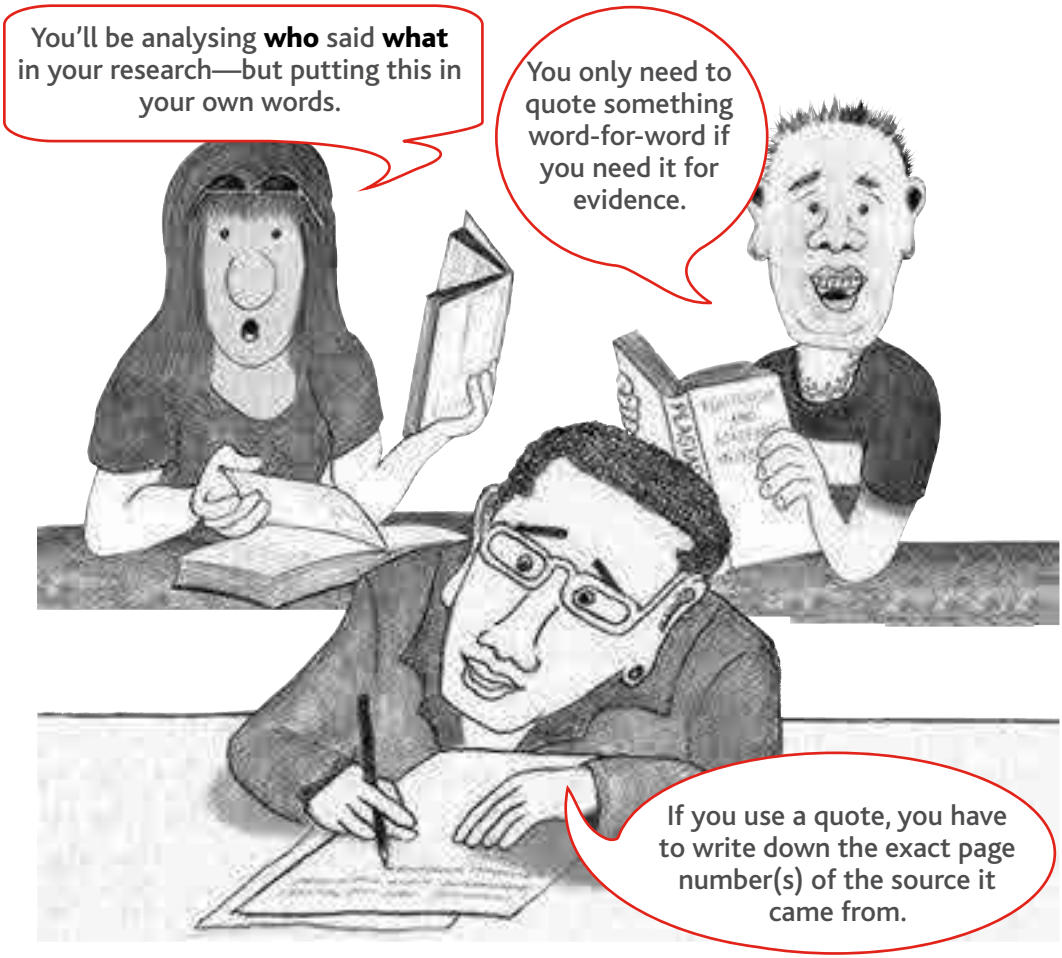
FIRST, they will record WHAT you saw or heard—which must be an accurate record of what you find.



Just like a detective, who has to include some word-for-word accounts of what happened with dates and times, you'll be recording the same sort of "evidence"—which is just another name for the "data" or information you gather.

SECOND, your notes will help you to compare and contrast what you find.

- Check what's being stated, one against the other.
- What "gaps" are there between the stories? Who seems to be getting the story right; who's reliable?
- Check out your "witnesses" (authors/commentators). Are they a credible witness (authoritative)?



THIRD, your notes will help you look at wider "trends"—who exercises power (gender power, aged power, ethnic dominance) and at whose expense?

FOURTH, your notes will help you to come to conclusions based on your "best judgement" of the whole narrative. You should be doing some "upside-down thinking" by now. You should be asking questions of what appears "normal".

So. have you got that?

Don't use random bits of paper for note-taking. You need a system you can build on over time.

Never take notes that are word-for-word from what you are reading or listening to. Notes are to help you work through your own ideas.

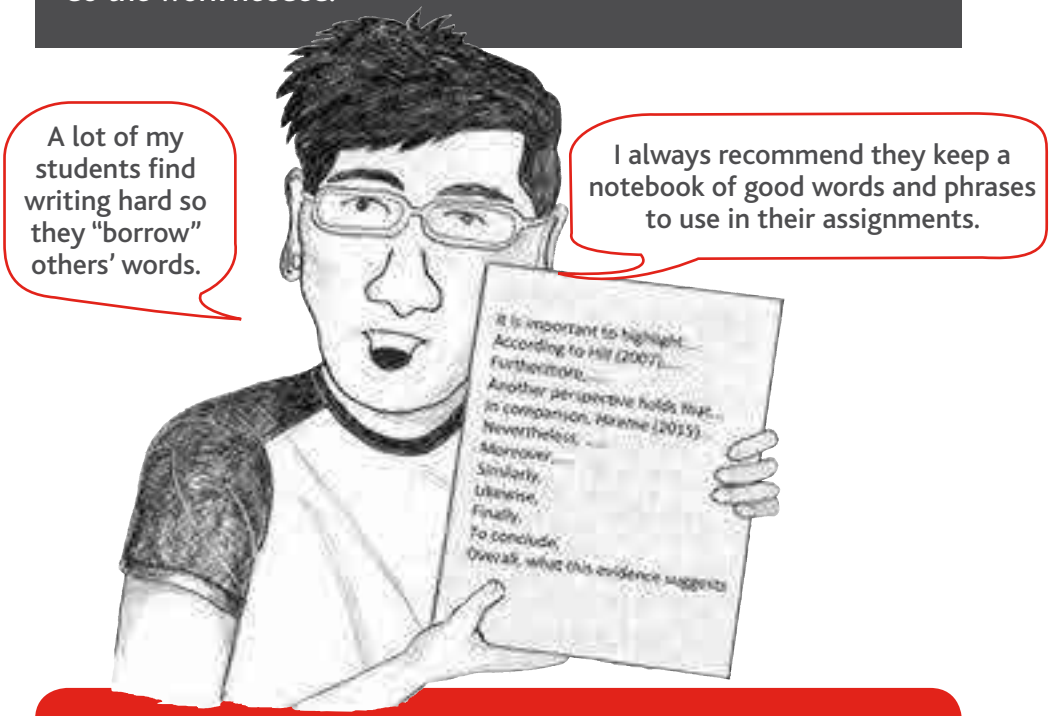
HOW NOT TO PLAGIARISE

The most obvious way of not plagiarising is to leave yourself enough time to get your assignment done so 1) you won't be tempted to "borrow" too much from others or 2) you won't muck up your citations and references.

Doing all the reading and note-making and thinking for an assignment will take quite a bit of energy and effort.

Writing well takes a lot of practice. You will only get out of your studies what you put into them.

Running short of time is a recipe for disaster! A lot of plagiarism happens because people don't leave themselves enough time to do the work needed.



We all struggle to find the right word or phrase, so start a notebook that has in it...

- Good sentence beginnings
- Really good phrases you've come across that you can use
- Conjunctions, or joining words or phrases that help you turn the corner in sentences
- Alternative words because we all have favourite words we tend to overuse
- Ways to "round off" your work; endings are hard!

Use your writing notebook to help you **paraphrase** the ideas you've read or heard. A lot of plagiarism occurs because people don't know how to paraphrase properly.

Paraphrasing means to re-phrase without copying the exact words. It's like writing a summary.

There are some good sites to visit to help you learn to paraphrase but here is an example to show you...

ORIGINAL TEXT

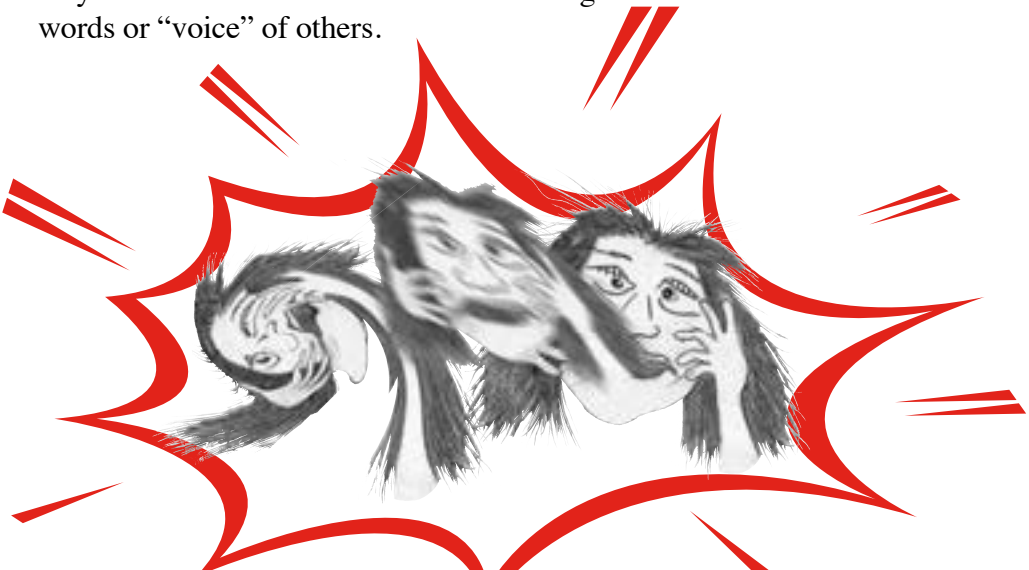
When students rush their assignments, there is a greater chance that they will borrow quite heavily from the sources they have been reading. Some students even think that stringing a lot of quotations together from different writers is enough for them to pass an assignment. What needs to be made clear to them is that only 10% of their work should include the direct words or "voice" of others, and that the whole point of an assignment is to present your own ideas in your own words.

AN OKAY PARAPHRASE OF THIS TEXT

Hill and colleagues (2015) argue that a lot of plagiarism is the result of students leaving their assignments to the last minute. A well written assignment is one where the student's "voice" comes through clearly in the text. One of the biggest failings is where students overuse quotations.

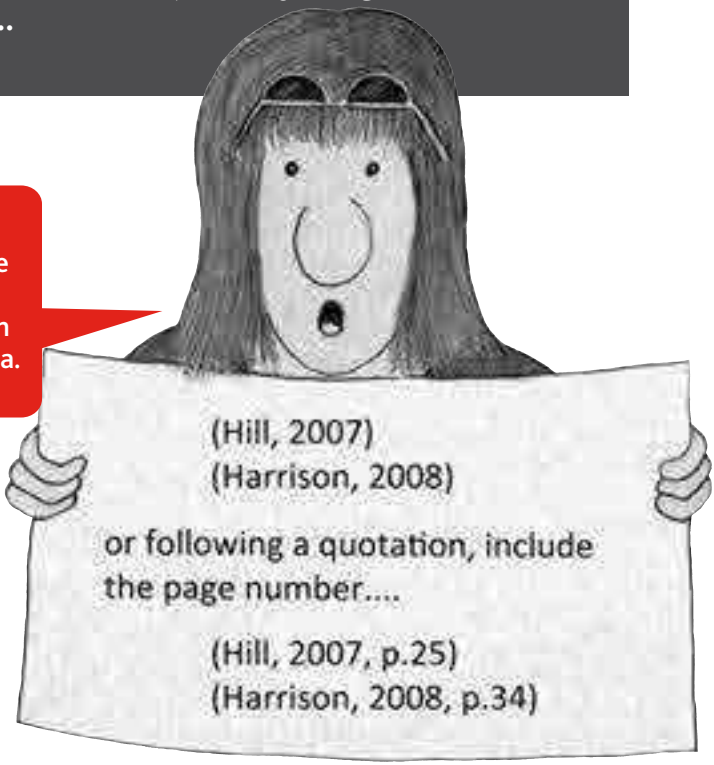
THIS IS NOT OKAY!

Stringing together a lot of quotations from different authors is not good writing. Usually, students borrow heavily from other sources because they rush their work. About 10% of an assignment should be the direct words or "voice" of others.



As a rule of thumb, signal where you borrowed the idea (picture, diagram, table, or set of statistics) from by using what is called an **in-text citation...**

No one can say you tried to cheat if you've put the name of the author in the text or in brackets beside the idea.



And use quotation marks around the bits you borrow....with the page number(s) as well.

If in doubt, use a citation. There are a number of software programmes that you can get to help you with referencing, among them being...

EndNote

zotero

The only time where you don't need to cite a source is for things that are "commonly known". This is a grey area because what's common to you might not be to me, and "common facts" change over time.

One of the best online sites to visit is "plagiarism.org"

plagiarism.org

In short, whatever referencing style you use, you must credit your ideas to the people who influenced you. You do this by including in-text citations and then by referencing these sources within your work.

There are heaps of referencing styles. Think of them as different tools in a toolbox. Find out what style you need to use for each subject.

In this e-age, most learning institutions will get you to put your assignment through plagiarism detection software. Some of the most well-known names include...

chimpsky

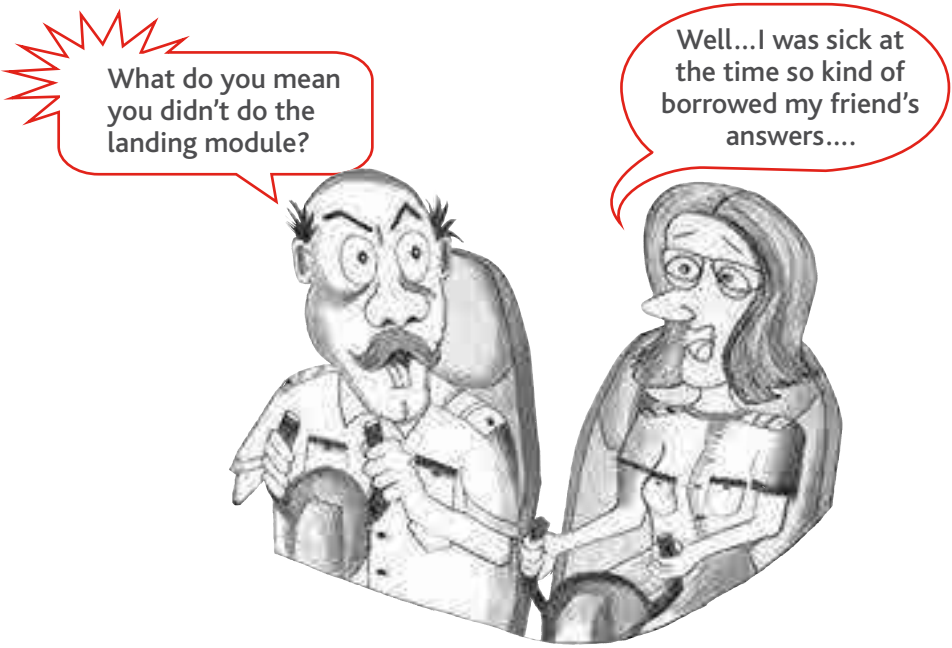
:::plagium™

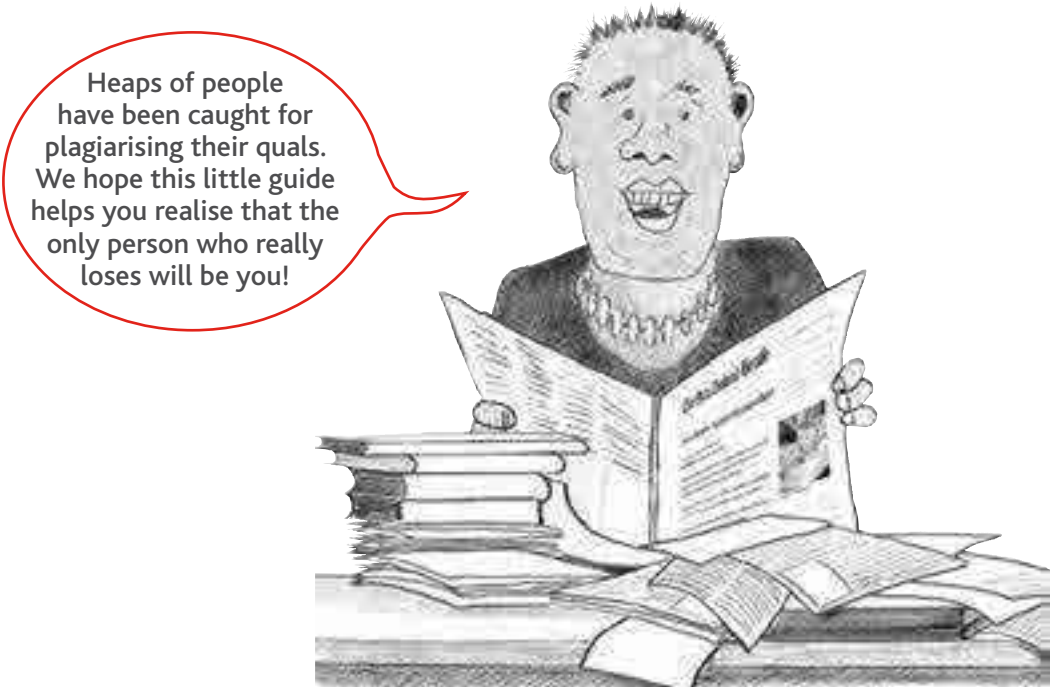
turnitin™

safeassign™

I'll make a right monkey out of you if you cheat!!

If your work doesn't pass the test and come out as your own work, you can guarantee it will come back to bite you later.





Guides you'll find helpful

Wikipedia has a good overview of plagiarism.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism

Plagiarism.org is the best website to visit.
http://www.plagiarism.org/

"The Little Book of Plagiarism" is also an excellent source that you can retrieve by typing in the title and searching for the file (PDF file). There are various versions available for free download.
http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/schools/artsandhumanities/english/BookofPlagiarism.pdf

The University of Canterbury has produced a great little guide with a question and answer challenge that helps you identify when you need to cite a source.
http://www.lps.canterbury.ac.nz/lsc/documents/plagiarism_07_05.pdf

How to cite this publication source:
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I'm Debs. I'm an academic who has taught Political Philosophy of Education in several New Zealand universities over the past 30 years.

My passion is to help people to think for themselves, to think critically and learn to question everything. For me, this is what education is all about.

You can find me working at the Creative Hub in the Whanganui Learning Centre.
My email address is debs.wlc@gmail.com

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