

The Urkund Plagiarism Handbook

Advice to students

What is Urkund?

Urkund is a fully automatic system for preventing plagiarism and has been successfully used in several universities throughout Europe. Urkund's system is based upon controlling documents towards three central areas of source material; Internet, Published material and through Urkund's own archive of documents sent in by students – such as case studies and essays on different academic levels.

About this material

Urkund does not have an opinion about what should be considered as plagiarism. The reports we can provide indicates parts of a document that shows similarities to other sources. By comparing to Urkund's own archive, the Internet and other published materials, we provide your teacher with information about the original documents that has been traced by our system. Urkund operates through a systematic technique, comparing similarities in a text and in subject matter, which makes it possible to discover likeness to other documents even when adjustments in the text are made, or synonyms are used. We provide your teacher with comprehensive information about your document and the similarities to other documents, stated in percentage so that your teacher get the information needed to decide if it should be considered as plagiarism or not. It is very important for you as a student to be aware of the policy about plagiarism and to pay attention to the instructions provided from your teacher.

This folder is for you to use as information about what can be considered as plagiarism. It should however be pointed out that plagiarism sometimes is a question of interpretation or definition and therefore it is beneficial for you to discuss this information with your teachers to make sure that this information corresponds to their view of plagiarism.

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This edition: Translation of Swedish v1.3

Look out for the pitfalls

It is sometimes easy to be tempted to copy a text illegitimately even if that was not intention from the beginning. The reasons for this differ. A careless mistake or uncertainty of what is allowed and what is, not might be the most common reasons for plagiarism. Of course one might also deliberately copy a text and then wish for the teachers to fail in detecting it– but this is fortunately enough very rare.

Find out what the rules are

Make sure you know what your teachers expect from you and what is allowed and not. You probably know that plagiarism is not allowed, but are you aware of what plagiarism really is? Does your view of what is included in concept of plagiarism correspond to your teachers view? There is a common opinion that if you change a text sufficiently enough, the text will transform into something new and then there will be no need to declare the original source. The fact is that you can still be accused of plagiarism even if you change every single word in a text, if you also neglect your obligation to mention your sources. This might sound a bit absurd, but the key for this is called “common knowledge”. Common knowledge is the kind of knowledge that can be considered common and shared, like information about things like; “earth is moving around its own axis in every twenty four hours”, “ the official language in Brazil is Portuguese”, or “Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa”. These facts are all examples of information that can be considered as common knowledge. The borders between common knowledge and special knowledge are not always obvious and it should be pointed out that it is also depending on the level of your essay. When you are referring to something that can be considered common knowledge, there are normally no sources required. Ask your teacher if you are not sure on how to define common knowledge. One good rule is that if you need to check your information in a reference book, there is probably not longer a question of common knowledge. You should then refer to the source where you got the information.

Check your facts

If you are writing an essay about the political development during late 1900s in Brazil and in the context want to mention that the official language is Portuguese, you normally do not have to state your source material even if you, when uncertain, should talk to your teacher. If you have to control this fact you should, however note your source material anyway. If you are writing a short PM with facts about Brazil and the information is collected from one single source, you should always state what main source material is giving you the information. If you for example find the information needed for your assignment at Wikipedia, then always mention the exact information about your source material. It must be easy to check your information. The details from an Internet site or the exact pages in a book are always required. And do not forget to control the facts you are using. It might be unsafe to trust one single source. Verify the information by using independent sources to compare with. This is especially important when using information from for example Wikipedia or other web pages alike as your main source.

Rewriting or paraphrasing text

If you find a text dealing with the effects of the electrical light on people's social life, this knowledge can never be regarded as common knowledge. That kind of information is what we describe as special knowledge. If you are dealing with this kind of information without stating source material in a paper about for an example: "Working hours development during industrial society in the late 1900th century" it would be considered as plagiarism even if you would change every word in the text. This is due to that the text and the information about this topic most likely is based on scientific research in the area. You are therefore copying the thoughts or the conclusions of the author even though you are not using the author's specific words.

Lack of time

There is probably more than one example of students feeling forced to copy parts of a paper to be able to finish the assignment in time. It can be a question of lack of time or lack of knowledge within the topic area. There are, on the other hand, a few guidelines that can help students to be more efficient and use all the experiences as a part of an essay or a paper.

Plan your time

Start writing in time. Start the same day you actually get your assignment. Try to do some of your work every day. Do not forget to read and do not forget to write on your paper. You need to work on an every day basis. If you do, you will find that your essay seems to grow on its own. Another advantage in working every day is that you will discover that you are paying attention to your topic from day one. By letting your thought touch the topic every day, you will find an increasing understanding in the area and you will also be able to use your experiences and conversations during the time to develop your knowledge and thoughts in the paper.

Always refer to your sources

Buy your self a notebook and write down the exact details about the source you use, before you take part of the information offered. If you have a personal thought or conclusion, you have to note that and of course, how you reached your conclusion. This technique allows you to confirm the sources when you need to. It is time consuming to find source details that have been used in an essay afterwards. There is also a risk that you instead change your paper to avoid that extra work and if you do, you might be accused of plagiarism.

Check your information before Urkund does

Remember that your paper probably will be checked for plagiarism when handed in to your teacher – either automatically or manually by your teacher. It might be valuable to go through your essay one extra time before handing it in and to put effort into the detail of the source material that has been used during your work. You are expected to generate new thoughts or knowledge in the topic area. Therefore, it is essential for you to note your own thought and thoughts coming from other sources or materials. You need to use quotation marks when words are collected directly from a source, but you also have to state accurate details on source materials when using somebody else's basic thoughts as a base for your own thoughts or conclusions. By being thorough with stating details of the material you use when working with texts or pictures, you can avoid the mistakes leading to plagiarism.

Have you understood the assignment?

To give you an example: Imagine you would take an amount of text directly from Rupert Browns book: "Group Processes – Dynamics within and between Groups". You then carefully note that the text is not your own but instead collected from Rupert Brown's book. You make a correct comment about your source material and you state the pages that you have used. By doing this, you probably won't be accused for cheating, but you will still fail the assignment and be asked to do it again. The reason is that you are not supposed to copy-paste a text – even if you somehow try to be honest when you acknowledge the legitimate author or source. If you would have done the same thing failing to elucidate where you collected your information, you probably would have to explain yourself in a disciplinary board. To quote Martin van Buren, president of the United States 1837-1841: "It is easier to do a job right than to explain why you didn't."

Some examples

The following pages offer examples that illustrate what can be considered plagiarism. We would like, once again, to encourage you to contact your teacher when you are uncertain of what is required. Remember the basic rule to always state your source when you have been influenced by thoughts or contents from a specific material.

Original text

" Why the queen never remarried is an interesting question. She was only 27 years old when King Haakon died, and could have found a suitable husband without any difficulty. The Nordic kingdoms could easily have financed her dowry and trousseau, and in any case she had a large income from her estates. I believe the answer is clear. She could only keep her political position if she remained unmarried and could act as guardian and co-regent for the king. There can be no doubt of her political ambition, which was demonstrated most obviously when she was elected regent just a week after her son's death in 1387."

Etting, Vivian (Author). Queen Margrethe I, 1353-1412, and the Founding of the Nordic Union. Leiden, , NLD: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004. p 227.

Exempel 1

When King Haakon died, Queen Margrethe was only 27 years old and could have found a suitable husband quite easily. The reason to why she never remarried was probably that she only could keep her political position if she remained unmarried and could act as a co-regent for her son, the young king Olaf IV Haakonsson.

Is this a case of plagiarism? The writer has not used the entire text but rewritten it in his own words.

Answer: This can be considered to be plagiarism or cheating. The writer of example 1 has done something called "paraphrasing" (re-writing of an original source). He haven't copied the whole text from its original source but it has a lot of similarities to the source. In a sense, this can be considered cheating since no reference to the source or its author is made. The writer of example 1 should have made clear that neither conclusion nor facts is his own.

Exempel 2

Why did Queen Margrethe never remarry? Well, the answer could seem clear if you look at the circumstances. She was only 27 years old when King Haakon died, and could have found a suitable husband without any difficulty. But her son, Olaf, who became king of Denmark only 5 years old and king of both Denmark and Norway at the age of 9 when his father died in 1380, was still too young to burden the role of the king according to the Queen. She could only keep her political position if she remained unmarried and could act as guardian and co-regent for the king.

Etting, Vivian. *Queen Margrethe I, 1353-1412, and the Founding of the Nordic Union*. Leiden, NLD: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004

Is this a case of plagiarism? The writer has made a reference to the source.

Answer: Even though the writer has made a reference to the source, the text in example 2 can be considered to be (a mild form of) plagiarism. The writer has copied a couple of sentences straight from Etting's text but has failed to use quotation marks. These sentences are surrounded by the writers own text which makes it hard to determine what is the writers own text and what is Etting's. In addition, no note of the page number is made in the source reference.

Exempel 3

You can ponder about why Queen Margrethe never remarried. According to Vivian Etting (Author of *Queen Margrethe I, 1353-1412, and the Founding of the Nordic Union*) it is quite clear. If the queen wanted to keep her political position, she had to stay unmarried. This made it possible for her to act as guardian and co-regent for the new and young king, her son Olaf. Queen Margrethe was only 27 years old when King Haakon died and to Vivian Etting it seems obvious that Queen Margrethe easily could have found a suitable husband if she wanted. Etting's conclusion is therefore that not to remarry was a deliberate choice of Queen Margrethe.

Is this a case of plagiarism? There are no citation marks but the source is stated.

Answer: This is not plagiarism. The writer clearly marks out what Etting's thoughts are and what are his own thoughts by making references to the author ("according to Vivian Etting..."). It is important though, that the reference is placed in connection to the section where the writer has referred to someone else's thoughts so that it is clear what are his and what are somebody else's thoughts.

Exempel 4

Queen Margrethe's son, Oluf II, became king of Denmark only five years old, when his grandfather, Valdemar Atterdag died. Four years later, when his father Håkon VI Magnusson died, he also became the king of Norway (in Norway he was known as Olav IV Håkonsson). In 1387 Oluf died only 16 years old, leaving the rule to his mother Queen Margrethe. Of course, she was the guardian and co-regent for Olaf during his reign. This was probably the reason to why she never remarried. If she had remarried, she would have had to leave the reign to her new husband.

Is this a case of plagiarism? There is no source reference and the text does indeed seem to be build on the original text.

Answer: Now we are in a bit of a grey-area. There are not any direct text matches in the text and the facts are available in other sources than Etting's book. Further, the conclusion is not that hard to draw on your own. Of course, if the writer concluded this by himself, no reference has to be made, but if the writer actually used Etting's book as a source for the text, a reference to the source really should have been made.

Internet resources

If you want to learn more about what is considered as plagiarism, the Internet offers you a variety of relevant sites. Below follows a couple of addresses that might be useful to you:

A quiz, in English, from Indiana University, on their view of plagiarism:

<http://education.indiana.edu/~frick/plagiarism/>

Examples from copied material, paraphrasing and abstracts

<http://www.pluggad.net/kolla/KollaLinks/main/plagiat.html>

A learning material from "Akademi Sydost" that wish to enhance the understanding about plagiarism, and how to avoid it.

<http://www.bi.hik.se/Refero/1intro.php>

Information from Lund University about academic honesty. You can find examples, exercises and a short film from a lecture about academic honesty by Göran Bexell – headmaster of Lund University.

<http://www.lub.lu.se/laeranderesurser/akademisk-hederlighet>

Urkund is a fully automated system for preventing and detecting plagiarism and is successfully used by universities and colleges all over Europe. Urkund checks submitted documents against three central source areas; The Internet, previously submitted documents and information made available by our partners.

This material is developed to support teachers and students by informing about plagiarism. If you have questions about Urkund please do not hesitate to ask your teachers about us or contact us at support@urkund.com or at +46 (0) 8 738 5210

If you, as a teacher, would like to copy this material or use parts of it, despite being part of an organisation that use Urkund, please contact us and we will be glad to assist you.

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