GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND WRITING LIKE A SCHOLAR

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WRITING LIKE A SCHOLAR

Scholars are like detectives and psychoanalysts. Their work is to understand where ideas come from, how ideas relate to other ideas, how ideas can be contested, and how ideas change. In order to understand an idea as clearly as possible, scholars need to establish and then to state who presented the idea, where, and when.

Identifying the origins of an idea involves citing references. Citations enable other scholars to position and evaluate an argument. Often, as a scholar, it is not necessary to come up with a new idea, but rather to consider how to understand an issue or set of ideas. Comments are referenced, and sources cited, so that other scholars can position and evaluate the argument and then respond with their own arguments.
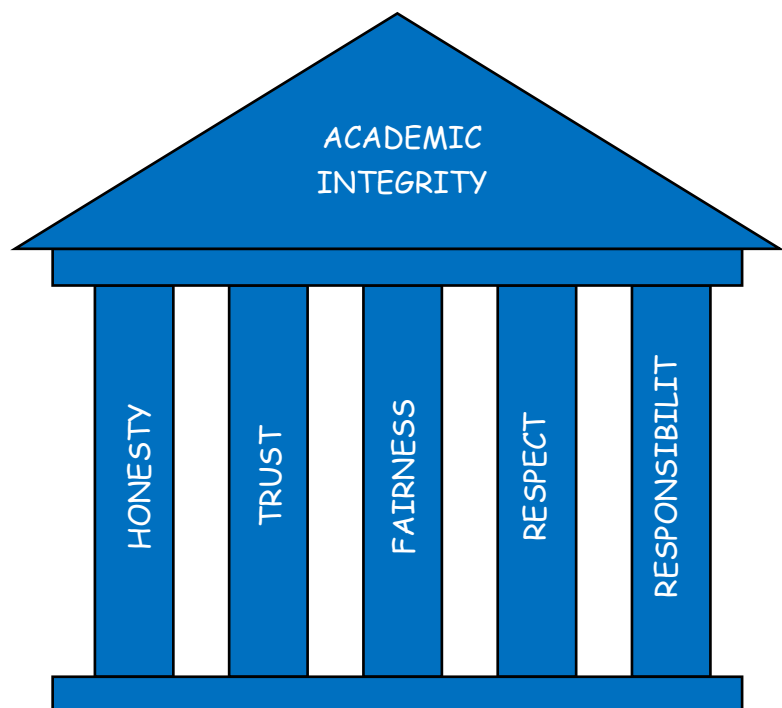
Referencing allows citation trails. This means that a reference to where an idea was found allows further consideration about how that earlier source arrived at that idea. Citation trails allow other scholars to follow the trail further, to understand the history of an idea and perhaps other paths that an idea might take, or where citation mistakes were made and misunderstandings arose or were perpetuated. Citation trails are necessary to evaluate and to understand scholarly thinking, and sometimes may themselves form the basis of new research.

This sort of exact positioning of thinking and argument is only possible with the use of precise and internationally recognised forms of referencing. It takes time to learn how to think and to write like a scholar, but a start can be made by practicing this habit of referenced thought.

Practicing writing like a scholar might be a little harder when learning online. It is easy to cut and paste and then forget the origin of a particular quotation. Without intention, a hasty and forgotten short-cut can lead to a serious mistake, and cause a reader to doubt the academic integrity of an author.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is the basis for writing like a scholar. It advances the goal of the university to expand knowledge through individual and collective thought. Academic conversations that advance knowledge, which discuss and interrogate tested and referenced findings, are necessary for global progress. For example, the extraordinary speed of the development of vaccines has been a direct result of scientists across the world sharing and analysing tested and referenced knowledge.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

HONESTY · TRUST · FAIRNESS · RESPECT · RESPONSIBILIT

As members of Wits University, we aspire to be part of this global community of scholars, and so to maintain the five principles of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Honesty

This first principle is the most important, since the other four all have their roots in honesty. This principle requires everyone (lecturers, researchers, administrative staff, students) to be honest about how ideas or intellectual work were constructed, and where the ideas or intellectual work were sourced. So, it is essential to cite sources of ideas or presentations of ideas and to reference other people's work.

"Academic communities of integrity advance the quest for truth and knowledge through intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research, and service." (Fishman, 2014: 18)

Trust

Through honesty we can establish the trustworthiness of research and researchers. This is important in the academic world because our trust in the credibility of other people's research, and their trust in us to attribute their ideas to them, allows mutual respect, which, in turn, allows us to build on each other's work. Trust in, and the trustworthiness of, research and researchers is important for the value of the university to civil society, which will only value and support universities if there is trust that the findings of research are reliable and can be applied for the betterment of all.

Fairness

Fair treatment plays an important role in ensuring that communities, in our case an academic community, functions properly. Thus, to be fair a university and all of its members (students and staff) must be transparent and clear in their actions, clearly communicate and uphold expectations and standards, and be consistent in their behaviour. This means that examinations and assessments must be as fair as possible, and that in all our writing and research we fairly acknowledge the intellectual work of others.

Respect

Respect goes further than citation (acknowledging and referencing the source); in an academic setting, respect requires that we endeavour to see ideas in their context and debate the ideas of other scholars in a professional manner. To be respectful in your scholarship, you must first try to fully understand and position the arguments that you read, and then position these arguments in relation to others, including your own. Reading carefully, taking notes, which include page references, building your thinking in relation to what you are reading, respects others and builds scholarly ability.

Disagreements between scholars is a necessary part of intellectual life. Academic arguments are usually constructed with the assumption that some colleagues will disagree and that the debate will be rigorous. This is how ideas are tested and developed. You are encouraged to question ideas but not, however, to attack other authors personally. Rigorous, disciplined debates are encouraged at universities but not personal attacks. Social media trolling has no place within a university.

Responsibility

Individuals and the community are required to be responsible. Each member of the academic community, whether students, lecturers, administrators or senior leaders, is responsible for protecting the integrity of scholarship at the university. Responsible academic communities work every day to uphold the standards of academic integrity and to maintain the value and the reputation of the university and the degrees that it confers.

When each person adheres to these 5 pillars, we each contribute to the academic integrity of the university.

THE WITS PLAGIARISM POLICY

Academic misconduct is frequently connected to suspicions of plagiarism. In the *Wits Student Plagiarism Policy* (click here to access it) plagiarism is defined as follows:

> *"Plagiarism is the failure to acknowledge ideas and writings of others and/or the presentation of others' ideas or writings as one's own. This definition includes intentional and/or unintentional failure to acknowledge the ideas or writings of others"* (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020).

Let us unpack the key concepts in this definition.

Language from the definition	Rephrased
Failure to acknowledge	If you do not reference
Ideas or writing	Anything taken from the internet, a book, a podcast, even a conversation. It also refers to "ghost writing" where someone else writes something for you and you put your name on it.
Another	This includes everyone that is not you: other students, academics, published authors, internet sources, family or friends.

In other words, the policy states that we have to use a recognized citation system[1] to attribute the idea or presentation of an idea to the person or source where we found it. The idea should be referenced no matter the format or source of the idea. Thus, whether found in a book, heard in an academic podcast, read in a journal article or on the internet, or read in a personal email, a reference must be provided. Whether it is an idea, a phrase, or the presentation of the ideas of others, it is essential to provide a reference and appropriate attribution.

Does this policy mean you can reuse the same work already submitted? Not quite.

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[1] Please check with your faculty and school which system you are required to use.

The Wits *Student Plagiarism Policy* also mentions self-plagiarism, which means that you cannot present something which you have already written and submitted, or published, as something new which you can re-submit.

Plagiarism declaration form

The plagiarism declaration form is designed to remind everyone of the importance of behaving as responsible scholars and upholding individual academic integrity. Each course may already have a plagiarism declaration to submit with assignments. Please enquire from your lecturer about correct procedures if you are in any way unsure.

The University also has a template available which can be accessed here.

How do I ensure that I do not plagiarise?

- ✓ Make sure to cite everything correctly with an in-text reference and a corresponding extended reference in the reference list / bibliography. If you struggle with referencing, please enquire whether there is any support available in your school or contact your faculty's academic advisors for assistance. You can also visit the Library's LibGuides here.
- ✓ If copying a text verbatim, using exactly the same words, you must put the text in quotation marks or in an indented paragraph and reference it.
- ✓ If you are reworking a passage but using the same structure, you must reference.
- ✓ Practice integrating quotations, paraphrases and summaries in the ways shown in the table below.

TABLE: Characteristics of different ways of using sources in your text

	Characteristics
Quotations	'Short' quotes (a sentence or two) – included within the paragraph. 'Long' quotes (40+ words) – is set out from the original paragraph and indented. Only use this practice for long assignments. **Remember** that the point of an assignment is to demonstrate your own knowledge. - Quotation marks - Proper referencing - Use sparingly
Paraphrasing	- Broad theme of the chosen excerpt is retained - Contains important details related to the broad theme - Author's ideas expressed in the student's own words - Technical terms are kept, but otherwise the ideas are expressed by using different sentence structures and vocabulary - Proper referencing
Summarising	- Provides a broad overview of the source text - Only contains the main ideas of the source text - Author's ideas expressed in the student's own words - Technical terms are kept, but otherwise the ideas are expressed by using different sentence structures and vocabulary - Proper referencing

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY BEYOND WRITING

Thus far, the focus has been on writing and referencing. However, academic integrity, and becoming a scholar, permeates every aspect of our academic lives. Thus it extends to other academic activities such as taking tests and sitting for examinations.

If we get someone to write a test for us, or if we search for answers for our online exams, we are going against all five of the pillars of academic integrity. Such actions can lead to disciplinary action which may end in expulsion/exclusion.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE STILL UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHETHER YOU HAVE CORRECTLY REFERENCED YOUR WORK?

As you can see from the above, to learn to reference correctly and write like a scholar, is necessary for successful scholarship, and it is something which has to be learned. Learning to reference is key to learning how to research.[2]

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[2] WPA, 2019. Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices.

If you are uncertain about how to reference properly, or think that you might have plagiarised by mistake, you can:

- go online to learn more about how to avoid plagiarism (see link below)
- check referencing styles (see link below)
- speak to your lecturer or tutor,
- contact an academic advisor
- ask one of the writing centres for help
- contact one of your faculty librarians for support on using referencing software such as Zotero and Mendeley.

Teach yourself about how to avoid plagiarism through the following link which leads to other useful resources and exercises developed by the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University:

Learn about plagiarism at the Purdue OWL

Look for sample papers from the Purdue Online Writing Lab, which offer useful models of different referencing styles. For example:

Click here for the APA American Psychological Association

Click here for the MLA Modern Languages Association

Click here for the CMS Chicago Manual of Style

You can also access the "Make sense of Referencing" guide developed at the University of Stellenbosch here.

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