

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work.

Within [academia](#), plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered [academic dishonesty](#) or academic fraud and offenders are subject to academic censure. In [journalism](#), plagiarism is considered a breach of [journalistic ethics](#), and reporters caught plagiarizing typically face disciplinary measures ranging from suspension to termination. Some individuals caught plagiarizing in academic or journalistic contexts claim that they plagiarized unintentionally, by failing to include [quotations](#) or give the appropriate [citation](#). While plagiarism in scholarship and journalism has a centuries-old history, the development of the [Internet](#), where articles appear as electronic text, has made the physical act of copying the work of others much easier, simply by [copying and pasting](#) text from one web page to another.

Plagiarism is not [copyright infringement](#). While both terms may apply to a particular act, they are different transgressions. Copyright infringement is a violation of the rights of a copyright holder, when material protected by copyright is used without consent. On the other hand, plagiarism is concerned with the unearned increment to the plagiarizing author's [reputation](#) that is achieved through false claims of authorship.

## Sanctions

### Academia

In the academic world, plagiarism by students is a very serious offense that can result in punishments such as a failing grade on the particular assignment (typically at the high school level) or for the course (typically at the college or university level). For cases of repeated plagiarism, or for cases in which a student commits severe plagiarism (e.g., submitting a copied article as his or her own work), a student may be suspended or expelled. Many students feel pressured to complete papers well and quickly, and with the accessibility of new technology (the Internet) students can plagiarize by copying and pasting information from other sources. This is often easily detected by teachers, for several reasons. First, students' choice of sources are frequently unoriginal; instructors may receive the same passage copied from a popular source from several students. Second, it is often easy to tell whether a student used his or her own "voice." Third, students may choose sources which are inappropriate, off-topic, or contain incorrect information. Fourth, lecturers may insist that submitted work is first submitted to an online plagiarism detector.<sup>[1]</sup>

In many universities, academic degrees or awards may be revoked as a penalty for plagiarism.

There is little academic research into the frequency of plagiarism in high schools. Much of the research investigated plagiarism at the post-secondary level.<sup>[2]</sup> Of the forms of cheating (including plagiarism, inventing data, and cheating during an exam), students admit to plagiarism more than any other. However, this figure decreases considerably when students are asked about the frequency of "serious" plagiarism (such as copying most of an assignment or purchasing a complete paper from a website). Recent use of plagiarism detection software (see below) gives a more accurate picture of this activity's prevalence.

For professors and researchers, plagiarism is punished by sanctions ranging from suspension to termination, along with the loss of credibility and integrity.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Charges of plagiarism against students and professors are typically heard by internal disciplinary committees, which students and professors have agreed to be bound by.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Journalism

Since journalism's main currency is public trust, a reporter's failure to honestly acknowledge their sources undercuts a newspaper or television news show's integrity and undermines its credibility. Journalists accused of plagiarism are often suspended from their reporting tasks while the charges are being looked into by the news organization.<sup>[6]</sup>

The ease with which electronic text can be reproduced from online sources has lured a number of reporters into acts of plagiarism: Journalists have been caught "copying-and-pasting" articles and text from a number of websites.

## Online plagiarism

Content scraping is a phenomenon of copy and pasting material from internet websites, affecting both established sites <sup>[7]</sup> and blogs<sup>[8]</sup>.

Free online tools are becoming available to help identify plagiarism <sup>[9]</sup>, and there is a range of approaches that attempt to limit online copying, such as disabling [right clicking](#) and placing warning banners regarding copyrights on web pages. Instances of plagiarism that involve copyright violation may be addressed by the rightful content owners sending a [DMCA](#) removal notice to the offending site-owner, or to the [ISP](#) that is hosting the offending site.

It is important to reiterate that plagiarism is not the mere copying of text, but the presentation of another's ideas as one's own, regardless of the specific words or constructs used to express that idea. In contrast, many so-called plagiarism detection services can only detect blatant word-for-word copies of text.

## Other contexts

Generally, although plagiarism is often loosely referred to as theft or stealing, it has not been set as a criminal matter in the courts.<sup>[10]</sup> Likewise, plagiarism has no standing as a [criminal](#) offense in the [common law](#). Instead, claims of plagiarism are a [civil law](#) matter, which an aggrieved person can resolve by launching a lawsuit. Acts that may constitute plagiarism are in some instances treated as [copyright infringement](#), [unfair competition](#), or a violation of the doctrine of [moral rights](#). The increased availability of intellectual property due to a rise in technology has furthered the debate as to whether copyright offences are criminal.

## Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism is the reuse of significant, identical, or nearly identical portions of one's own work without acknowledging that one is doing so or without citing the original work. Articles of this nature are often referred to as [multiple publications](#). The issue can be either legal, in the case where copyright of the prior work has been transferred to another entity, or merely ethical. Typically, self-plagiarism is only considered to be a serious ethical issue in settings where a publication is asserted to consist of new material, such as in academic publishing or

educational assignments. It does not apply (except in the legal sense) to public-interest texts, such as social, professional, and cultural opinions usually published in newspapers and magazines.

In academic fields, self-plagiarism is when an author reuses portions of his or her own published and copyrighted work in subsequent publications, but without attributing the previous publication.<sup>[11]</sup> Identifying self-plagiarism is often difficult because limited reuse of material is both legally accepted (as [fair use](#)) and ethically accepted.<sup>[12]</sup> Some professional organizations like the [Association for Computing Machinery](#) (ACM) have created policies that deal specifically with self-plagiarism.<sup>[13]</sup> As compared to plagiarism, self-plagiarism is generally unregulated. Some universities and editorial boards choose to not regulate it at all; those consider the term *self-plagiarism* [oxymoronic](#) since a person cannot be accused of stealing from themselves.

Some recommended best practices for avoiding issues of self-plagiarism include:

1. Provide full disclosure — mention in the introduction that the new or derivative work incorporates texts previously published.
2. Ensure there is no violation of copyright; this may require licensing the previous material from its copyright holder.
3. Cite the old works in the references section of the new work.

The term "self-plagiarism" is a rhetorical device which attaches pejorative connotations to all reuse of previously published material, some of which may be legitimate reuse. Issues of plagiarism and self-plagiarism are often discussed in codes of ethics of various academic disciplines, while issues of copyright infringement must be distinguished from them as matters of applicable law in the country in which they arise.

## Factors that justify reuse

[Pamela Samuelson](#) in 1994 identified several factors which excuse reuse of one's previously published work without the culpability of self-plagiarism.<sup>[12]</sup> She relates each of these factors specifically to the ethical issue of self-plagiarism, as distinct from the legal issue of fair use of copyright, which she deals with separately. A review of the literature reveals her discussion of self-plagiarism is probably the most cogent and well-reasoned treatment of the few that are in print.

Among other factors which may excuse reuse of previously published material [Samuelson](#) lists the following:

1. The previous work needs to be restated in order to lay the groundwork for the contribution in the second work.
2. The previous work needs to be restated in order to lay the groundwork for a new contribution in the second work.
3. Portions of the previous work must be repeated in order to deal with new evidence or arguments.

4. The audience for each work is so different that publishing the same work in different places was necessary to get the message out.

5. The author thinks he or she said it so well the first time that it makes no sense to say it differently a second time.

These factors constitute compelling reasons for reuse of previously published materials in the specified circumstances as exceptions to a general practice of avoiding reuse.

Samuelson states she has relied on the "different audience" rationale when attempting to bridge interdisciplinary communities. She refers to writing for different legal and technical communities, saying: "there are often paragraphs or sequences of paragraphs that can be bodily lifted from one article to the other. And, in truth, I lift them." She refers to her own practice of converting "a technical article into a law review article with relatively few changes--adding footnotes and one substantive section" for a different audience.<sup>[12]</sup>

Samuelson describes misrepresentation as the basis of self-plagiarism. She seems less concerned about reuse of descriptive materials than ideas and analytical content.<sup>[12]</sup> She also states "Although it seems not to have been raised in any of the self-plagiarism cases, copyrights law's fair use defense would likely provide a shield against many potential publisher claims of copyright infringement against authors who reused portions of their previous works."<sup>[12]</sup>

### Acceptance of reuse in some disciplines

In some academic disciplines, verbatim reuse of previously published material is generally avoided but is accepted practice under certain circumstances. Conference papers that receive limited distribution are often converted into journal articles or chapters in books, and journal articles are often recycled into chapters in books. Ideas in one journal article are often developed further in subsequent articles by the same author. Doctoral dissertations are frequently republished as books after revision. Material in one book is often reused in another book by the same author, often with different publishers. Legitimate exceptions to the general norm are numerous, based on the purposes of development and dissemination of knowledge. It is especially important where public safety may be at risk if a single paper is not reaching a wide enough audience, for example in [product liability](#).

The American Political Science Association (APSA) has published a code of ethics which describes plagiarism as "deliberate appropriation of the works of others represented as one's own." It does not make any reference to self-plagiarism. It does say that when a doctoral dissertation is published as a book, the author is "not ordinarily under an ethical obligation to acknowledge its origins."<sup>[14]</sup> This indicates that some reuse of one's previous published work is accepted practice in the discipline of Political Science, and does not automatically raise ethical questions.

The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) has published a code of ethics which says its members are committed to: "Ensure that others receive credit for their work and contributions," but it does not make any reference to self-plagiarism.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Examples



Thus, any claim there is a single, agreed standard concerning self-plagiarism across disciplines is specious. Even within a single discipline, different norms are commonplace. The experiences of two notable political scientists, [David Easton](#) and [Irving Louis Horowitz](#) provide illustrative examples.

In the preface to *The Political System*<sup>[16]</sup> Easton noted: "Parts of this book are borrowed and adapted without benefit of quotation from my previously published articles" in *Journal of Politics* in 1950 and 1951. He also said Chapters 6, 7 and 8 were published previously in *International Social Science Bulletin* (1952). He did not say they were republished with permission, and clearly did not feel any ethical pangs about reusing them.

In the preface to *A Framework for Political Analysis*<sup>[17]</sup> Easton said: "a brief outline of the central concepts of the present volume" was previously published in the journal *World Politics* in 1957, which was itself previously republished in "a number of collections of readings in political science and sociology and was reproduced for consumption abroad in *Americana* (1956-7)." Apparently he considered this book to be an elaboration or further development of concepts he had previously published.

Although he briefly acknowledged in this manner republication of previously published words and ideas, Easton provided only three or four references to his previous publications in *A Framework for Political Analysis*. Easton did not reference every instance of reuse in the text, perhaps because it was so frequent and substantial. He also acknowledged in the flyleaf of this book that Chapter 1 was previously published as a chapter in an anthology published by the American Academy of Political and Social Science in 1962.

Comparing the books, it is evident that although some sentences and paragraphs were rearranged, many changes were either cosmetic or refinements in the development of his thinking, while others were virtually verbatim. The sequence of treatment was somewhat rearranged, but the ideas and many of the words, phrases and sentences were the same from one book to the next.

For example, compare Easton: "...it is useful to interpret the influences associated with the behavior of persons in the environment or from other conditions there as *exchanges or transactions* that cross the boundaries of the political system," to Easton "...it is useful to treat the disturbances or influences occurring from behavior in the environmental systems as *exchanges or transactions* that cross the boundaries of the political system" [emphases in original].<sup>[17]</sup> The words are slightly different, but the meanings are identical.

Identical tables appear in the two books published in 1965. Text associated with each table contains the same ideas, and many of the same words and phrases from one book to the other--and they were published in the same year by different publishers.

Another example can be found in the experience of Horowitz, who was famously criticized by a grumpy librarian<sup>[18]</sup> for republishing all of the chapters in the 1986 edition of a book virtually unchanged, adding a few new ones.<sup>[19]</sup> Of twenty-four chapters in the 1991 edition, two-thirds previously appeared in the 1986 edition, only eight being added, four of which had also been published elsewhere.

Minor editorial changes were made in some of the older chapters, and several of the newer ones were substantial revisions and recombinations of other publications including book

reviews, but not much new was added. In one chapter, Horowitz articulated the view that republication is necessary in the social sciences to disseminate research results and make them useful to society.<sup>[19]</sup> This view is consistent with theories of technology diffusion and the dissemination of knowledge advanced by others.<sup>[20]</sup>

Although the Horowitz book was reviewed critically, until recently there was a grant program with his name on it advertised on the home page of the American Political Science Association, and a link to his foundation may still be found there.<sup>[21]</sup> This is evidence the discipline of political science did not disapprove of his reuse of his own previous works. Professional associations usually do not promote the names or foundations of individuals they consider unethical.

Neither Easton nor Horowitz was ever censured either by their home universities or by the American Political Science Association. Horowitz continued at Rutgers for many years after the criticism of his 1991 book before he retired. Easton was elected President of the American Political Science Association and Vice President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

If one desires a truly coherent research agenda, one must expect some repetition of basic facts, in addition to development of new ideas, conceptual treatments, and knowledge in subsequent publications.

## As a practical issue

In addition to legal and ethical concerns, plagiarism is frequently also a practical issue, in that it is frequently useful to consult the sources used by an author, and plagiarism makes this more difficult. There are a number of reasons why this is useful:

- An author may commit an error in how they interpret or use a source, and consulting the original source allows these errors to be detected.
- Authors generally only supply the portions of prior works that are directly relevant to the work at hand. Other portions of their sources are likely to be relevant to later extensions and generalizations of their work.
- As modern automated indexing methods become prevalent, references between works provide valuable information about their authoritativeness and how closely works are related; this helps to locate relevant works.

## Organizational publications

Plagiarism is presumably not an issue when organizations issue collective unsigned works since they do not assign credit for originality to particular people. For example, the [American Historical Association](#)'s "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct" (2005) regarding textbooks and reference books states that there is no question about taking credit for someone else's ideas. Since textbooks and encyclopedias are summaries of other scholars' work, they are not bound by the same exacting standards of attribution as original research. However, even such a book does not make use of words, phrases, or paragraphs from another text or follow too closely the other text's arrangement and organization.

Within an organization, in its own working documents, standards are looser but not non-existent. If someone helped with a report, they may expect to be credited. If a paragraph comes from a law report, a citation is expected to be written down. Technical manuals routinely copy facts from other manuals without attribution, because they assume a common spirit of scientific endeavor (as evidenced, for example, in [free](#) and [open source](#) software projects) in which scientists freely share their work.

The *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications* Third Edition (2003) by Microsoft does not even mention plagiarism, nor does *Science and Technical Writing: A Manual of Style*, Second Edition (2000) by Philip Rubens. The line between permissible literary and impermissible source code plagiarism, though, is apparently quite fine. As with any technical field, computer programming makes use of what others have contributed to the general knowledge.

It is common for university researchers to rephrase and republish their own work, tailoring it for different academic journals and newspaper articles, to disseminate their work to the widest possible interested public. However, it must be borne in mind that these researchers also obey limits: If half an article is the same as a previous one, it will usually be rejected. One of the functions of the process of [peer review](#) in academic writing is to prevent this type of "recycling".

Public figures commonly use anonymous speech writers. If a speech uses plagiarized material, however, it is the public figure who may be cast in a bad light. For instance, [Vice President-elect](#), then [Delaware Senator Joe Biden](#) was forced out of the [1988 U.S. Presidential race](#) (but remained in the U.S. Senate) when it was discovered that parts of his campaign speeches followed closely speeches by British Labour party leader [Neil Kinnock](#) and [Robert Kennedy](#).