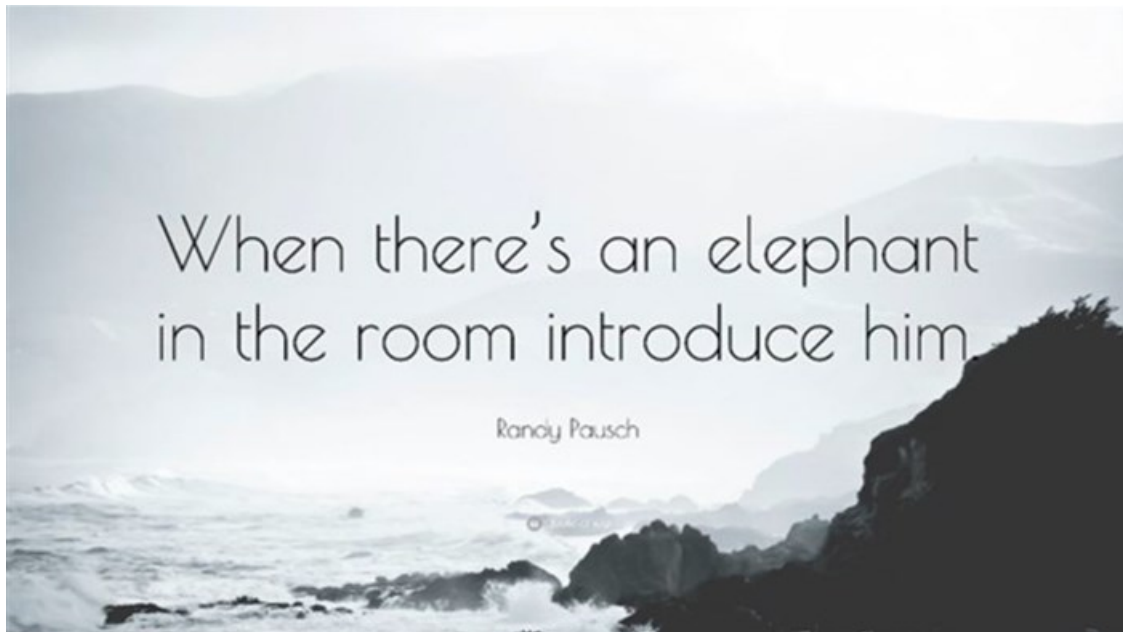


Plagiarism - do we have an elephant in the room?

By [Larysa Botha](#), issued by [Milpark Education](#)

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The Cambridge dictionary defines the meaning of "an elephant in the room" idiom as such where there is a difficult situation or an obvious problem, but people avoid talking about it. Let's be honest. The topic of plagiarism is like that elephant in the room for many of us. No matter how long we delay facing the plagiarism issue, it will not go away. I want to briefly share with you a few ideas which I hope will help you to meet and greet the mysterious elephant.



In the last few decades, the issue of plagiarism in research publications has reached "epidemic proportions" (Shashok, 2011, p. 303). Childers and Burton (2016) indicate that students' academic dishonesty in higher education institutions is also on the rise. With the internet becoming more available to its users, easy access to a vast amount of knowledge resources can explain the increase of plagiarising detected in students' assignments (Childers & Bruton, 2016). Online distance learning (ODL) institutions, such as Milpark Education, are under continuous pressure to come up with viable solutions to detect and prevent instances of plagiarism among ODL students.

Whatever you need to produce in a written form during your postgraduate studies, it needs to tie in with academic requirements. Besides mastering the intricacies of academic writing, you are also required to be original, ethical and academically honest. By this I mean that every idea that is not yours, but which you found relevant to your topic of interest and you wish to incorporate into your academic piece of work, must be properly cited, acknowledged and referenced.

What is plagiarism? To date, one of the most cited and comprehensive definitions of plagiarism is by Fishman (2009). Fishman (2009:5) suggests that plagiarism consists of a few distinct interrelated elements, all together referred to as plagiarism, which occurs when someone "uses words, ideas, or work product attributable to another identifiable person or source without attributing the work to the source from which it was obtained in a situation in which there is a legitimate expectation of original authorship in order to obtain some benefit, credit, or gain which need not be monetary". Said in many words, but simply put, plagiarism happens when you copy and paste or adopt another person's work, intentionally or unintentionally, without properly acknowledging it.

Be it intentional or unintentional, plagiarism remains an academic crime. When detected, it may have devastating consequences for your future education or career. As prevention is better than cure, preventing plagiarising in the first place is easier than to mend the damages after it has happened.

Dr Harris Cooper in his recent post (APA Style Blog, 2016) shares three strategies of avoiding plagiarism. Firstly, he suggests to stop “intellectual theft” by avoiding stealing ideas of others. If you mention an idea you heard of before, refer to its original author’s name. When you copy and paste words directly from the source, protect yourself by using quotation marks. Here you must be very accurate in terms of spelling, and dates and pages in the referencing, as direct citations are easily detectable and comparable with their original sources.

Your second strategy is citing and rephrasing. Cooper warns about the possibility of laziness creeping in, where you may cite without quotation marks, and could experience difficulty in rephrasing ideas, which original authors articulated so well. When you want to rephrase someone’s idea, think of your own “voice”. How would you say the same in your own style and words? You may choose to shorten or summarise the text that you found valuable.

Finally, Cooper suggests using plagiarism-detection software tools. Once your work is assessed with this software, you will receive two valuable sources of information: 1) a report indicating all the sources of the shared material, and 2) all the phrases and paragraphs are highlighted in the original documents which match your written text. Milpark Education utilises the Turnitin (TII) plagiarism-detection software. Your academic work will be checked for plagiarism via TII. Therefore, before you submit your work for marking, do the initial check yourself and insert missing citations and references.

The learning journey is not easy. It challenges your ability and desire to learn, but most importantly, it challenges your character. Stand tall and proud, be the model of academic integrity, as this sought-after graduate’s attribute will serve you well in many years to come.

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