

VSU Biology Department Policy on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a broad term used to describe many forms of cheating that involve taking credit for someone else's work. The most blatant type of plagiarism is copying from another source without giving credit to the author. Anytime the original ideas of someone else are used, appropriate citations must reference the source. The failure to acknowledge the use of someone else's ideas, even when they are paraphrased, (whether intentional or not), constitutes plagiarism. Using a paper written by someone else is obviously plagiarism. In addition, the improper citation of references can fall under this spectrum of offences. Plagiarism is equivalent to looking at someone's test and copying down their answers. It is the theft of intellectual property. The simplest way to avoid plagiarism is to give credit where credit is due! This document has been developed by the biology department faculty to explain plagiarism by clarifying appropriate academic behavior, identifying common mistakes or violations, and warning students of the serious consequences for academic misconduct relating to the misrepresentation of original work.

Recognition of and respect for the ownership of property is one of the distinguishing features of civilization. Ideas come from individuals and are effectively owned by their originators; thus they are intellectual property. In the academic sphere, the ideas of others are often encountered, most often in published form. As with tangible property, intellectual property is subject to ownership and protection. Moreover, publication establishes ownership of intellectual property. It is essential to respect the ideas and writing of others by scrupulously citing the sources of any and all ideas that are taken from other people's work.

Writing assignments are a very important way for students to demonstrate the ability to assimilate information and express personal knowledge in a coherent manner. The writing process is an active learning experience involving the demonstration of academic skills such as analysis, inference, and appropriate presentation. Assessment of student writing allows faculty members to evaluate not only an individual's understanding of course material, but also the mastery of processes that are considered an important part of biological education. Therefore, it is extremely important that any written work submitted represents a student's personal synthesis **displayed in sentences completely constructed by the student.**

The Writing Tutorial Services website at Indiana University (<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>) gives the following guidelines for avoiding plagiarism. You must give credit whenever you use:

- another person's idea, opinion, or theory;
- any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge;*
- quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or
- paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

*In the sciences there is one important clarification to these rules. Any information, even if it is a theory or original idea, that has become widely circulated enough to be found in textbooks is defined as common knowledge. For example, Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace do not need to be cited every time "natural selection" is mentioned.

There are a variety of ways to obtain assistance on writing assignments. Your professor can clarify expectations in class, help individually in an office conversation, or elaborate instructions by email. The new VSU Student Success Center will provide personal tutoring. There are a plethora of websites devoted to providing writing tutorials. By default, the biology department expects students to use the style recommended by the Council of Science Editors (CSE, formerly and still known as CBE), and succinct directions on how to use this format for citations and references is available on various websites such as: <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocCSE.html>. Specific examples of citation styles may be given to you by your professor that will supersede the CSE/CBE Style.

Quotations

Sometimes students get a little carried away with the use of quotations. Copying large volumes of material, placing it in quotes and citing the author is not plagiarism, but neither is it evidence of your ability to write a paper. So, you may receive a failing grade for excessive quotations because you failed to actually *write* the paper (see paragraph 3 above). There is a huge difference between transcribing a paper (quoting) and writing a paper (using your own words). You should use quotations judiciously when writing science papers. This style may differ from what instructors in other disciplines are telling you to do, so remember that science papers rarely use quotes of any kind. Generally, no more than five-ten words should be used in a single quote, and not more than one or two quotes per ten-page paper. If you do more than this then you must discuss it with your professor before you turn in your paper for grading.

Punishment for Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in the biology department. Any student caught plagiarizing will receive a failing grade on the assignment and depending on the situation may automatically fail the course. Ask before making mistakes and do not assume that we are too lazy to check or too stupid to catch cheaters. Ignorance is no excuse and do not expect sympathy for academic misconduct.

Lab Reports

Students will frequently work in groups during the laboratories. However, lab reports are **never** group projects unless specific instructions to the contrary have been given by the instructor **in writing**. When lab groups work together on projects, each person is expected to do their own analysis of the results. Never use another person's graphs, tables, or words in a report that is supposed to have been written independently. In other words, each student must prepare their own tables and graphs in addition to written descriptions within the report. If lab reports are plagiarized in whole or in part then **all reports in question will be penalized**, not just the reports that were plagiarized. Therefore, **never** give your reports to a classmate to copy.

Long-Term Consequences for Cheating

If I decide to take punitive action on a student's plagiarism incident then, depending on the situation, the incident will be reported as a letter of concern to the College of Education and also may be reported to the Dean of Students where it will be entered into the student's disciplinary record. If you send an application to a professional program such as Medical School or Law School, those schools will contact Academic Affairs at VSU and ask them for your Disciplinary Record. **The cheating incident will then be reported to the schools to which you have applied**. So, you can see that there can be terrible long-term consequences for plagiarism.