

Plagiarism and academic honesty: a guide for centres

For assessment to be fair and accurate, centres and candidates must make sure that work submitted meets standards of **academic honesty**. This includes avoiding plagiarism (the attempt to pass off another's work as the candidate's own). Plagiarism takes various forms, and can even happen unintentionally. The **candidate and centre both remain responsible for detecting** and preventing it. This brief guide highlights the major ways in which plagiarism affects candidates' work and suggests how it can be avoided.

Referencing and citations

Successful research draws critically on the work of others, and academic honesty requires crediting that work in appropriate ways. For candidates, this means citing and referencing the sources so that a reader can trace the material consulted to its source.

Many academic citation and referencing systems exist, and Cambridge Assessment International Examinations do not mandate the use of one particular system among these. We do require each candidate to adopt a clear and consistent system appropriate to the research area. This involves recording for each source, at a minimum, the author, title, date and place of publication (where stated), and (for electronic resources) a URL.

It's good practice to use one of the well-known academic referencing systems, such as APA, Turabian, Chicago or MLA style (see Resources listed below), depending on the subject area chosen. Using one of these systems will help candidates prepare for research at higher levels, where these are often mandatory. But any system that allows a reader to trace unambiguously the origin of the material used is acceptable. See Palmquist's (2012) Bedford Researcher guide for further advice on thorough referencing and choosing an appropriate system.

Quoting, paraphrasing or otherwise relying on others' work without credit can amount to plagiarism.

How do citations and referencing break down?

Candidates can easily plagiarise without meaning to by failing to keep good records of sources used when preparing their work, and then reproducing material from those sources without attribution. To avoid this, candidates should be encouraged to record details of each work they consult as they gather their research notes (some may wish to use reference management software; see Resources listed below). Candidates must also use quotation marks diligently when transcribing material from sources. This helps to ensure the candidate will not later mistake such material for his/her own ideas and reproduce it without appropriate attribution.

Some candidates wrongly assume that they can reproduce verbatim material from a source listed in the reference section without direct in-text attribution. For instance, a candidate might copy a sentence or paragraph from an online article into an essay submitted for assessment, then include the article in a reference list at the end. This is **not** acceptable. To avoid plagiarism, the reproduced material in the essay must be identified **clearly and immediately** as another's work, e.g. by enclosing it in quotation marks and including a footnote, endnote or parenthetical citation. Closely paraphrased material should be cited too, as below.

Unacceptable: unattributed reproduced material	Acceptable: attributed verbatim quote with footnote	Acceptable: paraphrase with parenthetical citation
<p>Some argue that the only practical response to droughts and flooding is to allow people to migrate to less affected areas. Governments should be harnessing, rather than preventing, the use of migration as a climate adaptation strategy. Governments must begin to understand that allowing this to happen, making it legal and facilitating it is their best option. The alternative is trying to prevent it and creating a crisis. Refugee populations will not simply disappear, so governments need to find realistic and constructive ways to deal with them. (...)</p> <p>References Randall, Alex. (2018). 'Migration is a successful climate adaptation strategy.' <i>Al Jazeera</i>, 11 March. Online. https://bit.ly/2Hqmt3i (accessed 23/3/18).</p>	<p>Some argue that the only practical response to droughts and flooding is to allow people to migrate to less affected areas. As Alex Randall argues in an opinion piece for <i>Al Jazeera</i>, 'Governments should be harnessing, rather than preventing, the use of migration as a climate adaptation strategy. Governments must begin to understand that allowing this to happen, making it legal and facilitating it is their best option. The alternative is trying to prevent it and creating a crisis'.¹ Refugee populations will not simply disappear, so governments need to find realistic and constructive ways to deal with them.</p> <hr/> <p>¹ Randall, Alex. (2018). 'Migration is a successful climate adaptation strategy.' <i>Al Jazeera</i>, 11 March. Online. https://bit.ly/2Hqmt3i (accessed 23/3/18).</p>	<p>Some argue that the only practical response to droughts and flooding is to allow people to migrate to less affected areas. Governments might even be able to benefit from the arrival of climate refugees – in any case, they cannot prevent them from arriving without causing a humanitarian disaster (Randall, 2018). Refugee populations will not simply disappear, so governments need to find realistic and constructive ways to deal with them. (...)</p> <p>References Randall, Alex. (2018). 'Migration is a successful climate adaptation strategy.' <i>Al Jazeera</i>, 11 March. Online. https://bit.ly/2Hqmt3i (accessed 23/3/18).</p>

Candidates should note too that simply quoting others' material at length without commentary or discussion, while not necessarily plagiarism if the source is clearly cited, is also unlikely to achieve high marks. This is because this material cannot be credited as the candidate's own original work.

Off-the-shelf essays

Candidates may commit deliberate misconduct by submitting work written by someone else. Such attempts are often detected after submission by antiplagiarism software, but centres are also responsible for verifying work as a candidate's own. Centres can detect misconduct of this type by comparing the material to work that is verifiably the candidate's own (e.g. work produced in class). Look out for obvious deviations in fluency or style from the candidate's other work.

'Spinning'

Some candidates attempting to pass off others' work as their own use so-called 'article spinners'. These are web-based tools that disguise copied material by replacing key words with their synonyms,

producing material that is structurally identical to the original but features subtly different terms. The prose generated is often superficially impressive, but on closer inspection its meaning may break down:

Source text from Wikipedia, 'Euthanasia'	'Spun' text produced at Spinbot.com
Euthanasia is the practice of intentionally ending a life to relieve pain and suffering. There are different euthanasia laws in each country. The British House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics defines euthanasia as 'a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, to relieve intractable suffering'. ¹	Wilful extermination is the act of purposefully finishing an existence to assuage agony and enduring. There are distinctive wilful extermination laws in every nation. The English Place of Rulers Select Advisory group on Restorative Morals characterizes wilful extermination as 'a think mediation attempted with the express expectation of closure an existence, to alleviate unmanageable suffering'. ²

Look out for candidate work that displays unusually grandiose vocabulary ('assuage agony and enduring'), especially alongside awkward or faulty phrasing ("expectation of closure an existence", 'a think mediation'). 'Spun' text of this type still constitutes plagiarism: the use of spinning is not acceptable in material submitted for assessment, and assessment specialists check for it. Centres must again rely on their familiarity with candidates' other work when verifying material for assessment: pay close attention to inconsistencies in style (especially the combination of 'purple prose' and faulty syntax).

Resources

- Palmquist, Mike. (2012). *The Bedford Researcher*. 4th edn. Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's. (A practical guide to student research writing.)
- Purdue University. (2018). 'The Purdue Online Writing Lab.' <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> (accessed 23 March 2018). (This site offers easy guides to using the major academic citation systems.)

Notes

¹ Adapted from "Euthanasia". From the English Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthanasia> (accessed 23 March 2018; CC-BY-SA).

² Generated using SpinBot, <https://spinbot.com/> (accessed 23 March 2018).

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