

Why does plagiarism happen?

We didn't intend to take someone else's work. It just happened! Here are some common times when we can enter the danger zone and some tips on how to avoid them.

When we are in a hurry

The paper is due, and we just don't have time to go back and check that source. Or we need one more point, and we find something in our notes that fits. It is something we wrote ourselves, right?

How to avoid it: Take careful notes. Always quote exact words. Be sure you put the citation information on your notes with the material. Start entering citations when you do the first draft. Don't tell yourself you will get to them later. You might forget. A little extra time up front can save you from trouble later.

When we doubt our abilities

We find something that says exactly what we want to say. We don't think we can say it any better. Or a friend has written this paper already and is willing to share. We are afraid of a lousy grade and don't trust ourselves.

How to avoid it: Talk to your instructor. Explain your doubts and get clarification. Have someone else read your work and give you suggestions. Bring your rough draft to a tutor and be honest about your doubts. You will learn and gain confidence. (And your grade won't be lousy after all!)

When we are unclear about an assignment

We aren't really sure what was required. We think that we don't need citations. We don't know what to include in a citation or in a research paper.

How to avoid it: Talk to your instructor. Go over the assignment with a tutor. Check your course guidelines and your documentation style guide. Help is available. Don't be afraid to ask!

When we cut and paste

The biggest danger of all! Internet resources and the handy control + c and control + v keys have doomed many an academic career. It is so easy to grab a paragraph here, a paragraph there, and then forget where we got them.

How to avoid it: Take careful notes. When you cut and paste, use quotation marks around that paragraph and indicate where you got the material. Never, never, cut and paste directly into your paper. First, you don't want whole paragraphs of quoted material, and second, you will want to incorporate the ideas into your ideas, not your ideas into someone else's.