

A Middlesex University resource provided by Andrew Roberts

[The ABC Study Guide, University education in plain English alphabetically indexed.](#)

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ABC of quotations and your own words and references versus plagiarism

Universities in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere, but not everywhere) want you to develop and demonstrate your own thinking powers. Tutors look for your analysis of the material you are writing about, as well as clear indication of the sources it is based on. In an essay, your analysis often starts by analysing the title. You can start thinking actively as soon as you have a title.

The good and the bad way to write "in your own words"

There are two ways to write an essay in your own words.

One is bad (and not much different from [plagiarism](#))

The other is frightening - but it works

- Writing an essay by turning the words of a book into words you would use is the **bad way**.
- The **good way** is to use your own mind to construct the issues, instead of following a book, a lecture or your notes. You should build your essay on ideas that you develop yourself, rather than following the pattern of ideas that someone else has provided.

[The best way to do this is to force yourself to write without looking at books or notes.](#) This will get your own ideas flowing. Shutting yourself away in a room with just the question, blank sheets of paper and a pen, and the determination to write the first draft of your essay out of your own mind, may be frightening - but the more frightening it is the more likely it is that you need to do this.

When you sit, terrified, in front of a blank piece of paper, grab the one external support you have: **the essay title**. By analysing this you will make a draft introduction and a structure for the essay. This will get you started and let you move forward with the essay draft a step at a time. Even the most gruesome essay is not quite as frightening when you take its title to bits.

● See [Analysing essay titles](#)

When writing in a language that is new to you - or if you have problems writing clearly in your first language - there are things you can do to make it easier for the reader to understand -
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- When you have the first draft written this way, you can go to your notes for the quotations and references that you need to substantiate your argument and for material that will help you to develop your essay further.

- See [drafting and redrafting](#)

Combining quotes with your own words can be an effective way to write good essays - But do not mix your words with the words of books or copy a book and change the words. Your introduction is an important means of making your own thought clear.

- See [punctuation](#) for quotation and other marks

Quotations:

A quotation reproduces in your work the actual words a writer uses. You should, therefore, take care to copy accurately.

If you copy the actual words a writer uses you should both:

put the words in quotation marks " "

and give a reference.

In this example:

Jack Frost wrote "Summer is not coming in" (Frost, A. 2001 p.9).

"Summer is not coming in" is the quotation.

(Frost, A. 2001 p.9) is the reference.

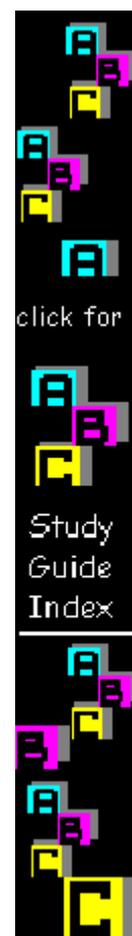
[Remember that a reference needs a bibliography](#)

Short quotations can be included in the text of your [paragraph](#). For example you might refer to a school leaflet that tells you to "give page numbers in your references" (School leaflet p.20). This can be written as I have done. If, however, your quote is longer, you should put the quotation in a separate paragraph, indented from the margin, and with a clear space between it and your main paragraph. Like this:

"When you take notes as you are reading, it is very important to keep a clear record of the sources as you go along (name of author, title of work, date of publication, publisher, page reference for quotations)" (School leaflet p.1)

[Remember that a reference needs a bibliography](#)

Notice that I used quotation marks, even though I indented. The indentation makes the quotation stand out. The quotation marks identify it as a quotation. Some people say you can omit quotation marks when you indent. This is sometimes done in books, but, if you do it in college work, you risk being accused of [academic dishonesty](#).



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Some people do not leave a space between their paragraphs, but just rely on the indentation. This is not very clear on work that is printed to paper. When work is transmitted electronically, using copy and paste, the paragraphing can be lost completely. The clear space is important.

Bibliography

Frost, A. 2001 *A Diary of Seasonal Meltdown* Seasonal Publishers

School leaflet *How to write essays* Surlington School English Department.

See [Plagiarism and references](#)

[For full guidance on referencing, see The ABC Guide to Referencing](#)

[Notice that, whilst all quotations must be referenced, there is a lot more in your essay that will need referencing](#)

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own.

It shades into [derivative work](#), which includes following the [argument](#) of a book or article too closely.

"If someone *plagiarizes* another person's ideas or work, they use it or copy it, claiming it as their own. You say someone who does this is a *plagiarist* or guilty of *plagiarism*" ([Collins Plain English Dictionary](#))

In practice:

[Essays](#) with passages, apart from [quotations](#), which are the same as (or almost the same as) passages in books or journals are taken to indicate plagiarism.

Essays from two students with common, or very similar, passages are also taken to indicate plagiarism.

[Read about the rewards and dangers of working together on essays](#)

See what the [Marking Guide](#) says about Plagiarism.

How to avoid the crime of Plagiarism

In some countries copying is the right thing to do. Teachers want students to repeat what is in text books. In Britain this is called "plagiarism" and is the wrong thing to do.

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own - which is what you do when you copy.

Plagiarism shades into **derivative work**, which includes following the argument of a book or article too closely. [Something you will do if you make too much of your essay a [paraphrase](#) of books, or use a book or lecture outline rather than [focusing on the title](#) of an essay]

Derivative work gets a very poor mark, but plagiarism is counted as cheating.

Another term for cheating is "Academic Dishonesty". Cheating implies that you intend to do something wrong. But, although this may not be the case, you may find it taken for granted that if you copied someone else's work, you intended to cheat. It is important to learn how to [write in your own words](#) and avoid the crime of plagiarism.



Click [here](#) for information about how Plagiarism is dealt with at Middlesex University.

- Some people copy deliberately to deceive. However desperate you are, this is a stupid thing to do.
- Others do not realise what they are doing, or that what they are doing is wrong! For example, they may write their essays from "notes". If the notes were copied from a book, another student's essay, a handout or a lecture, they can be accused of academic dishonesty.

We often find that students who copy ([intentionally or not](#)) write their essays with notes or books in front of them, and just alter the words.

If this is what you do: Stop doing it! Next time you draft an essay, put all books and notes out of sight and write your first draft "out of your head".

Then, when you have written the ideas that you have in your head, go to your books and notes for quotations and material to give more substance to the essay.

[Read about good ways to write in your own words](#)

Plagiarism and references

The way that you reference and present your work can avoid accusations of academic dishonesty.

If you use words directly from a book or any other source, they should be enclosed in quotation marks and the source identified in a reference. If you rewrite someone else's ideas in your own words, you should identify this with a reference.

A good way to present quotations is indented, like this:

"When you take notes as you are reading, it is very important to keep a clear record of the sources as you go along (name of author, title of work, date of publication, publisher, page reference for quotations)"
(Sociology leaflet)

Notice that I used quotation marks, even though I indented. The indentation makes the quotation stand out. The quotation marks identify it as a quotation. Some people say you can omit quotation marks when you indent. This is sometimes done in books, but, if you do it in college work, you risk being accused of academic dishonesty.

[ABC Referencing shows you how](#)

Paraphrase and Précis

A [paraphrase](#) explains a piece of writing in another way. Often it is a fuller statement, meant to make the original clearer to the reader. A [précis](#) summarises a passage, that is it gives the main points of the original in a shorter space.

Often you will need to précis or paraphrase your own work. You will want a [summary](#) of your essay in the [introduction](#), for example. You may find that you have written the main part of the essay to concisely, without explaining everything, you will therefore paraphrase it.

If you paraphrase or précis someone else's work as part of your text, then you must reference it - but you will not put it into quotation marks.

Copying someone else's work into your own essay and altering the words is not paraphrasing, it is [plagiarism](#).

Paraphrasing someone else's work as your essay (even with referencing) is [derivative work](#). Often you will want a paraphrase or précis of someone else's work as part of your essay - but the essay as a whole should be your own construction. To avoid plagiarism or derivative work, use the [essay writing strategy](#) and adopt the techniques for [writing in your own words](#).

Other Resources on plagiarism and cheating.

Jude Carroll's *Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education* Support Page at:

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/4_resource/plagiarism.html
Has a good collection of links - including a collection of cheat sites

"Guilty in Whose Eyes? University students' perceptions of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment."

Peter Ashworth, Philip Bannister and Pauline Thorne.
Studies in Higher Education, Volume 22, No. 2,
Society for Research into Higher Education, 1997