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## WHY IS PLAGIARISM SO WRONG?

### *Other Handouts:*

- Avoiding Plagiarism
- Principles of Referencing
- Quoting & Referencing
- Paraphrasing & Referencing
- Writing from Sources

### Defining the problem

Let me begin with a clear definition of plagiarism. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* plagiarism comes from the Latin, *plagiarius* "kidnapper, seducer, plunderer," used in the sense of 'literary thief'. If I check the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* the definition is to: "take and use the thoughts, writings, inventions, etc (of another person) as one's own" and/or to "pass off the thoughts etc of (another person) as one's own"(p.864).

### Making distinctions

Reflecting on these definitions I recognise a small but important distinction. The distinction is between being a 'plunderer or kidnapper' by using another person's words and pretending they are my own, and the idea of 'passing off another person's thoughts as my own' which implies that I either have no thoughts of my own or that they are of less worth than other peoples ideas. To do the first is to rob others and to do the second is to rob myself!

### Plagiarism as plundering

Within the academic community a level of respect for each other's words is necessary in order to allow space for creativity and growth as scholars. Within a community of people who treasure and care about words, ideas, concepts and their application it is immoral to steal these 'things'. To do so is to cut against the grain of that community and to rend it untrustworthy and unsafe. How can I (as a member of the university community, either academic or student) send my words out safely if there are robbers lurking within the boundaries of our community?

When you enter the university as a student you are being invited to join a community of knowledge which extends back for thousands of years in Western culture and as a member of this community it is important that you share this moral principle of respect for other people's words and ideas.

### Plagiarism as loss of personal integrity

There is another reason why plagiarism is so wrong and that is because to, "pass off the thoughts etc of (another person) as one's own," the (*Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*,1992 p.864) is to assume that I do not have any thoughts, or that my thoughts are of less value than someone else's. This is a model of a student who is an automaton without a single thought in their head, without an idea, a position or an opinion and who simply repeats what they have been told.

To plagiarise by pretending other's thoughts are my own is to subjugate my sense of self to others and is therefore an act of self-harm. When plagiarism is understood in this way then it is recognised as an act of violation of my own integrity.

Thinking about plagiarism in this manner I recognise that to use other people's ideas as a way to try to cheat to receive a good mark will mean I have lost an opportunity to learn and to think and speak my own thoughts. I have thrown away the very thing that I came to university to develop: my capacity to think for myself!

**References:**

*Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved December, 2006, from: [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)  
*The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*. (1992). Melbourne: Oxford University Press