

Plagiarism: tips for staff when providing online teaching materials

Brief introduction

This is a short reminder about avoiding plagiarism when writing course guides and other teaching materials for the online, distance learning programmes at the University of London.

Like all HE institutions, the University of London prides itself on its academic excellence and integrity, which follows through into the work and materials we produce. We actively promote to our students the importance of avoiding plagiarism and maintaining academic integrity.

Under the University of London's general regulations (aimed at students) plagiarism is defined as:

the copying and use of someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as if it were the student's own. Another person's work includes any source that is published or unpublished including words, images, diagrams, formulae, audio recordings, computer code, ideas and judgements, discoveries and results.

We know that in the digital age and with so many of us increasingly under conflicting pressures, 'plagiarism' can easily occur without any malicious intent. However, even unintended similarities with other authors' work can leave the University liable to fines and both the University and the author liable to significant reputational damage. This guide is therefore intended to help UoL authors avoid any potential problems when authoring for the online environment.

Classroom vs online teaching

Unlike ordinary classroom teaching where one can improvise and speak freely, online distance teaching has to be planned, thought about and written far in advance. One of the main ways online teaching material is provided is by the guides written by the lead academics. These guides are then published electronically via the virtual learning environment (VLE). Whilst one can gather ideas and information from a variety of sources and verbally/visually present this in a lecture face-to-face with one's students, it becomes a different matter when it is written down, made accessible in print or via the VLE and instantly becomes easier to scrutinise.

In short, classroom and online teaching require very different approaches when providing course materials. The subject guides should be an example to the students of the standards of academic authorship as well as being high quality teaching materials.

Three top tips

1. Obvious, but important: **use your own words**, but if another author has already expressed the concept perfectly, don't try to state it differently: simply direct students to that reading!
2. When in doubt, **cite it!**
3. **Effective note-taking** can really help: put anything you might use into quotations, write down the ideas and information in your own words.

How we can help

The International Programmes' Publications team will be on hand to answer any queries you might have as an author, and an editor will be assigned to work on your guides and will be in touch with you at key stages throughout the process.

In addition to this, all our authors' work is put through Turnitin plagiarism detection software, which can help to highlight any similarities with available online sources so that they can be properly cited and referenced if they have been missed. However, Turnitin is not perfect and doesn't detect similarities to print sources or sources behind paywalls, so do protect yourself, follow the tips above and contact us if you are in any doubt.

I hope this short guide to plagiarism in online teaching materials helps, but if you have any queries on the above, please do not hesitate to contact me:

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