



How to avoid plagiarism

Tips for graduates

As outlined in the “Guide to writing a diploma thesis”, no work can be “be limited to the simple reproduction of something that has already been written by someone else.”¹ Being conscious of the fact that it is necessary to present your own topic providing at least a minimum degree of originality, include your own independent thoughts, demonstrate adequate academic competences – are the key conditions for avoiding plagiarism in the diploma thesis. A list of tips including other conditions and principles has been set out below:

1. You need to have proper **UNDERSTANDING** of what is considered plagiarism in the academic practice, and what **must not be done** (in the order from the most to the least drastic forms):
 - a. **cheating involving purchasing a complete diploma thesis** from “firms” that resort to such practices (regardless of whether this is done in person or online) or **appropriation of someone’s work** (especially one defended earlier at another university);
 - b. **copying whole or large parts of several texts** written by other authors and signing them with your own name;
 - c. submitting a thesis composed of parts downloaded from the Internet or taken from printed materials (books, articles, press, etc.) **using the “copy-paste” method**, also when they are supplemented with graduate’s own comments, or if they come from “open access” publications;
 - d. **using other authors’ texts without appropriately acknowledging the source**, even if the texts have been modified and shortened (the more so if it done in an attempt to conceal such borrowings);
 - e. **using other authors’ ideas, research findings, concepts of the thesis layout, bibliography, etc.** – generally, using any **results of someone’s work** without attributing them explicitly to the source from which they were obtained (this also applies to videos watched on YouTube, posts from social media, blog posts and forums etc.);
 - f. **using texts translated** from another language **without disclosing this fact**, including the use of computer and internet programs for automatic translation;
 - g. **using quotes or bibliographical footnotes found in other authors’ texts**, without reading the sources or without providing appropriate citations.
2. It is necessary to work **INDEPENDENTLY** on defining the goals of the thesis and developing its plan. Each thesis should begin with a clear statement of research questions and consist in answering them in a consistent manner. This means that, apart from the first, introductory part of the work in

¹ *Guide to writing a diploma thesis. General requirements standard*, Vistula Group of Universities, Warsaw 2017, p. 10.



which the author consciously refers to the views of other researchers (accepted definitions of terms, state of knowledge on a given subject, existing materials and opinions), the following chapters shall contain the author's own thoughts and comments, their own research findings, e.g. analysis of collected statistical data or conducted surveys. Such an attitude determines the **choice and use of sources** – the author looks for them and analyses their content, not to increase the volume of the thesis, which automatically creates a temptation to appropriate (copy) as much as possible of complete texts, but to support their own reasoning and justify their own arguments. In other words, the author reaches to outside sources to refer to carefully selected passages, **paraphrasing, summarizing or quoting them**.

3. It is thus necessary to master the following **TECHNIQUES** and use them consciously:
 - a. **paraphrasing**, i.e., rewriting information contained in someone's text **in your own words**. A paraphrase may be about the same length as the original, but it must be based on understanding what the author wanted to convey and on expressing this message in your own way. In practice, this means rejecting the "copy-paste" method in any form and **using your own notes**: carefully reading a selected text and writing down the necessary information using synonyms and phrases consistent with the style of your own work. You should also pay attention to the necessary changes regarding time reference and grammar (e.g. "**in such and such a year** the author stated that ...", and not "**it is now** believed that ...");
 - b. **summarizing** consists in selecting the key passages from an outside source, the assumption is, that a summary is much shorter than the original text, but it must also be written in **your own words** and contain only those facts which are relevant for your own argumentation. Thus, it is even more advisable in this case to use properly taken **notes**, and not just to mark (e.g. highlight) passages in the original text. In order to avoid plagiarism, it is better to read the text several times, put it away and write down the most important points;
 - c. **quoting** consists in providing **literal citations of selected brief excerpts** from outside sources and indicating them with quotation marks (""). There are no clearly defined quoting limits as to the number or length of quotes that a given thesis may contain. Instead, the author should be guided by the principle of using quotes if, and only if, the quoted sentences are so accurate, concise or specific that writing them in other words would deprive them of meaning, or if it necessary to illustrate the characteristic features of a given author's style;
 - d. **NOTE:** in each of the three abovementioned cases, it is absolutely necessary to **provide the source** of the quoted work, i.e. to include properly written footnotes in the thesis;



- e. it is also a good practice to **keep the notes and reading lists** (printed materials and websites) as they may be useful in a possible discussion with the supervisor, if they want to check whether the work does not bear the character of plagiarism or if the footnote to the text is improperly written, or even omitted (forgotten), as well as to prepare the bibliography necessary in every work.
4. Finally, it is necessary to **learn how to make footnotes** (references to source materials):
 - a. they should contain all necessary information allowing the reader to reach the indicated source;
 - b. they must comply with the instructions contained in the "Guide";
 - c. they must be used in such a number and in such a way as to make it absolutely clear which parts of the thesis were written by the author, and which, in one way or another, are based on the work of other authors.