

Commentary Article

## What textual copying does not count as plagiarism? Elaborate examples and problem-solving

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### Abstract

Scientists are motivated to publish original and high-quality articles. The only right way to accomplish that is through a long and daunting academic career. Sometimes illegal shortcuts and tortuous methods are attempted by some people. Bolstered with elaborate examples and problem-solving, this treatise explains the legal ways of textual copying and proper referencing techniques. Moreover, it teaches how to steer away from copyright violations. In addition, it warns off all forms of literary theft and the catastrophic consequences of research misconduct.

**Keywords:** Plagiarism, Common Knowledge, Paraphrasing, Creative Commons, Public Domain, Saudi Arabia

### Background

Authoring a research article is a great experience, though it has obligations. The author and his associates are held accountable for the content and formality of the work they produce [Fig. 1][1]. The content should not only be correct; it has to be original as well. Copyright code is all about originality and intellectual ownership protection. In the age of cyber media, taking part in a research article has become more compelling than it once was. The global momentum of publication among scientists might push unwary writers to cross red lines infringing the copyright code. The demand for publication is on the rise. Students are encouraged to partake in research; postgrad fellows are obliged to bolster their resumes by publications to get decent posts or scholarships. Competition in academic careers is very hectic. Academics thrive on publications. They often deal with deadlines and are compelled to publish the best of their work in time to be promoted or at least to keep the current position. Many biomedical scientists report exerting enormous pressure on them by the hiring agencies to produce numerous research publications, partly because the number of papers published is the main metric in most academic promotion systems [2]. In some cases, this pressure gives way in the form of ethical lapses, such as plagiarism, ghost, gift, guest authorship, or failure to report competing interests [1]. The increased number

of published studies may or may not increase useful knowledge [3]. Furthermore, this might limit exposure to potentially impactful work. Novice searchers might stumble across a large pool of substandard studies and subsequently cite low-evidence studies because high-quality research is hard to find [4]. Some researchers publish modest-quality papers that have never been cited just to fulfill a promotion requirement. Moreover, others tend to eclectically cite their publications to over credit their earlier works [5]. Many researchers commit literary theft, unaware that it is theft. They might think that sharing others' opinions is a form of admiration that justifies copying their work verbatim without permission or proper referencing. Failing to abide by the rules and standards of academic writing is understandable when it comes to junior writers. However, it is not tenable when experienced writers commit research misconduct, though they might be lazy, sloppy, or believe that the odds of being caught are very slim. Research misconduct repercussions could be career-ending or scandalous at best. No one could think about that happening to him until it did. It is undeniable that the authorship profession is long and arduous, a matter that must be lucid to new researchers from the outset. The article's main goal is to increase the writers' awareness and knowledge in the field of copyrights and research publication ethics.

### Illegal Textual Copying

It is unethical to borrow others' published texts without referring to the origin. Violation of copyright code is unacceptable in any form as it undermines the integrity of research and the reputation

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of researchers. However, the following are common forms of literary theft.



Figure 1: The authorship equation [1]

### Plagiarism

It is the act of passing off others' words, works, and any kind of creative production and intellectual property as your own; without referring to the source. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, plagiarism is defined as the act of using another person's words or ideas without giving credit to that person: the act of plagiarizing something [6]. Plagiarism is, perhaps, the most common form of research misconduct. If researchers quote another person's spoken or written words or paraphrase someone else's conclusions, ideas, concepts, summaries, thoughts, arguments, or judgments, they are legally required to cite the source. Likewise, statistics, designs, and graphic materials should be cited when using others' published works.

### Common Types of Plagiarism

There are different types of plagiarism. They are all serious violations of academic honesty. Their common ground is copying words or sentences from the source verbatim with no attribution or using quotation marks.

**Direct plagiarism** is the classical transcription of a section or part of someone else's work. This violation varies from borrowing a section to copying the entire passage. It represents the most flagrant form of plagiarism.

**Self-plagiarism** is a form of redundant publication. It involves (recycling) or reusing content from previously published work without citation. This practice is widespread and could be unintentional. At a lower level, it applies to school or college students submitting a section of their assignments in different classes without obtaining permission from instructors.

**Mosaic plagiarism** is composing a text by assembling patches from different articles while maintaining the same template of the original. The final draft would look patchy and read incoherent.

**Accidental plagiarism** is considered when copying and pasting occur unintentionally. Proving the wrongdoer oblivious does not absolve the full responsibility for plagiarism, yet, he is probably entitled to a reduced penalty [7].

What also counts as plagiarism is **translating an article or part of it** to a different language without attribution to its author [8]. Most cases of plagiarism can be detected by using plagiarism checkers and avoided by making proper referencing. Referring to a data source depends wholly on the publishing journal's citation style that is readily available at the authors' corner or by using the (live chat) service. Borrowing images, videos, or music is beyond the scope of this article.

### Falsification

It is the manipulation or omission of research data to support the researchers' claims or hypotheses. Falsification can include rounding up or down primary figures to multiply fractions to whole numbers after processing several calculations. It also involves manipulating images, graphics, or tables to distort the true data. Falsification could extend to tampering with research instrumentation, materials, or processes. A professional, though a malign way of falsification on experimenting is by choosing the inappropriate controls; or not considering the proper reference population for statistical analysis in intent to over or underestimate the prevalence of a disease. Such a deceiving study design generates misleading conclusions. Likewise, in qualitative research, picking a non-representative sample to interview is premeditated dishonesty to produce wishful outcomes.

### Fabrication

It is also known as (Dry-Labbing). Fabrication is probably the most heinous form of research misconduct. It is a blatant way of research data forgery, where perpetrators depend entirely on their wits to manufacture data and report conclusions. As falsification involves fiddling with existing data, fabrication, in turn, is creating new data out of nothing. Fabrication could be in the form of making up data, faking scenarios, observations, or characterizations that never occurred in real life. Although fabricated data are fictional, they are made plausible. Perpetrators typically avoid outliers and surprising outcomes. The reported conclusions are carefully guesstimated or copied from other works in many instances. Some forms of unintentional academic incompetence and malpractice can be difficult to distinguish from intentional fabrication. Examples of this include the failure to account for measurement error or the failure to control experiments for any parameters being measured adequately. Deep inspection of the researcher's background, his mentor's history, and the institution's reputation could help judge the case.

### Consequences of Research Misconduct

The consequences of research misconduct are serious and potentially disastrous [9]. In modern science, infringing copyrights is an offense that should be treated sternly. Penalties for plagiarism vary considerably among universities and institutions around the world. From iThenticate.com:

*"Most cases of plagiarism are considered misdemeanors, punishable by fines of anywhere between \$100 and \$50,000 — and up to one year in jail. Plagiarism can also be considered a felony under certain state and federal laws. For example, if a plagiarist copies and earns more than \$2,500 from copyrighted material, he or she may face up to \$250,000 in fines and up to ten years in jail"* (Robert Creutz, 2010) [10].

When undergrad students plagiarize, falsify, or fabricate a laboratory or homework assignment, it is considered cheating and usually handled within the institution. Cheating is a mild term that describes students' misdemeanor. Penalties are naturally lighter than court sentences [11]. Research misconduct can haunt a scientist's reputation, even ten years later. Moreover, he could be dishonorably discharged from service and typically face the end of his career. However, depending on the type and severity of the allegation, the issue will be handled. It is also exceedingly important for postgrad fellows to understand that the

aftermath of engaging in plagiarism affects a wide range of bodies. Misconduct can irreparably erode trust among colleagues. Its deleterious effect might extend to the public, who might lose confidence in the ability and integrity of researchers. The fault of illegal text copying could cast a negative shadow on overall levels of affiliation and might go far beyond the wildest imaginations. It could stigmatize the school, college, or university. A vicious chain of events might follow. Ruining the university's reputation could lower its national and international rankings. Repercussions might extend further to impact the city or state economy. It can undermine trust between researchers and funding agencies, making it harder for colleagues at the same institution to receive grants. From a different perspective, research misconduct of any kind devalues the degree held by students and discounts alumni; therefore, they might be paid less for their degree or not employed at all. The value of research, journals, and scientific materials released by the institute under question would be worthless. Students' enrolment at the degree-providing institute would decrease, and tuition fees would drop. The entire academic industry could fall apart [12].

### Salami Publishing

Salami Publishing (SP) is an independent, unethical publication practice. In other words, it has nothing to do with textual copying. It is, in fact, the practice of slicing research into several independent paragraphs known as the least publishable units or "publon" and publishing them in multiple papers. In other words, it is a publication of numerous articles derived from a single study. In academic publishing, the publon is the smallest piece of information that can stand on its own in a peer-review process [13]. Authors turn to this practice, often to get more recognition, increase their number of publications, and receive more funding. SP is unethical as a single study might count double or multiple in systematic review and meta-analysis, therefore, giving a deleterious impact on clinical practice. The intricate part of SP is that no algorithm or software application could objectively detect it, as there is no clear text similarity among the first and subsequent publications. That poses a serious threat to publication ethics. However, honesty in confirming the originality of the work submitted to a journal is the major touchstone [14]. Cunning malpractice that could lead to SP is using the same primary datasheet or control group in more than one study. These publications could be simultaneous or years later, in the same language or translated to different languages. Failure to cite prior publications and make proper cross-referencing is unethical. Publishing a work more than once could artificially inflate the author's and journal's citation records and the scientific literature at large. It might displace the work of others waste the time and resources of editors and reviewers by going through the bogus quantity of research. It also could add clutter exaggerate the significance of findings. Moreover, SP could interfere with the statistical methods used to generate evidence-based recommendations. In addition, it could distort the academic reward systems [15].

### Premature Public Statement

For unwary speakers, making a statement in public about research results before peer-review and legal publication is not uncommon in the scientific community. It entails presenting research results in whole or in part in teaching venues, social

gatherings, or closed circles. This practice subjects the research idea, protocol, or results to theft, especially if the legal publication was denied or deferred for unexpected reasons. Researchers have to exercise self-control in public to avoid slip-ups that might spoil the research project before it is legally tied to them. Recommended steps to protect your intellectual rights before publication are listed in [tab. 1]. The main issue of the pre-print version of a manuscript is that it is not attributed to an author yet, and did not underwent to peer-review making them invalid for citation and liable to foul plays.

**Tab. 1:** Tips on protecting your unpublished manuscript?

- Never share your work or talk about it or give hints in public.
- Register your work at a copy-right protection authority.
- Keep a dated physical record especially the first draft in a secure place.
- Email a copy of your work to yourself.
- Send it to a journal chief editor as a short communication (brief correspondence) for publication.
- Save a true copy at a solicitor or deposit it in a bank safe.
- Always mark your work with the© symbol followed by your name and date.

### Legal Textual Copying

#### Quoting

It is a common experience for academic writers to feel the need to include others' wordings into their writing. It happened when the original author wrote something unique worth highlighting word for word and litter for litter; or when quoting from the holy book, or providing a precise definition of a phenomenon, quoting someone's testimony, definition, opinion view, insult, or threat. Furthermore, a quoted text could be a piece of evidence to prove someone's claims false. In addition, you might quote to focus on a dialect or a language for educational and teaching purposes.

In-text citation of a quote depends largely on the journal's citation style. Whatever style you use, you must avoid plagiarism by correctly citing the true author, typing the original text precisely, and enclosing the quoted text in quotation marks. Quoting a short text, fewer than 40 words, should be in quotation marks followed by the author's name and year in parenthesis [16]. For example, "*Better three hours too soon than a minute too late*" (William Shakespeare, 1603); and "*Yes, we can*" (Barack Obama, 2008). A block quote is used in the case of longer texts. Block quoting is formatted in a separate block text set after an indented line. For example:

*"Bottom line is, I did not return to Apple to make a fortune. I have been very lucky in my life and already have one. When I was 25, my net worth was \$100 million or so. I decided then that I was not going to let it ruin my life. There is no way you could ever spend it all, and I do not view wealth as something that validates my intelligence"* (Steve Jobs, 1997). [17]

Despite there being no official limits to quotation frequency or length, conventionally, a percentage ranging from 0 to 5 is considered acceptable by many institutions. Academics argue that any type of work must include some words that are similar to different sources. Therefore, a (similarity report) called also (originality score) with less than 15% matching text can represent plagiarism-free work [18]. Quoting could support your view by verses of the holy book or famous poem or song or words said or written by eminent figures in the field. On the other hand, excessive quoting reflects the writer's inability to digest the

subject at hand. Paraphrasing, in other respects, demonstrates a better comprehension of the subject and personalizes your work.

### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means formulating someone else's ideas in your own words. To paraphrase a source, you have to rewrite a passage without changing the original text's meaning [19]. For paraphrasing to be legal, the paraphrased sentence must be cited. In other words, paraphrasing without a citation is plagiarism [20]. Paraphrasing is encouraged in the scientific context when data are abstracted from different sources in different styles. Paraphrasing in this situation helps streamline the flow of knowledge seamlessly. For the writer to keep his voice prevailing throughout the paper, he or she has to paraphrase. The following is an example of effective paraphrasing. The original passage: "*If you want to try a new career, come on and hand in your papers as the displayed openings differ from your current work area*" (Atif Katib, 2021). The paraphrased version is: "*The job opportunities we are offering do not exactly match your field of specialization. If you are looking for a change, step forward and submit your documents*". On close looking, the techniques used to paraphrase the original passage encompassed breaking the original sentence down into two phrases and getting into the speech from a different point of the original sentence. Using formal vocabularies such as "*field of specialization*" instead of "*area of work*"; and "*step forward*" instead of "*come on*". Changing the sentence voice from passive to active such as "*displayed openings*" changed to "*the job opportunities we are offering*". Replacing phrasal verbs with regular verbs "*hand in*" changed to "*submit*". Using synonyms is probably the simplest way to paraphrase a given sentence, like "openings" and "job opportunities", "papers" and "documents".

### Common Knowledge

Virtually, not all textual copying is an offense; and therefore, counts as plagiarism. Common Knowledge (CK) is information that many or most people know [21]. Publishing commonly known information does not require referencing. Examples of CK are electrons that revolve around the nucleus; no one has yet discovered a cure to cancer; water boils at 100 degrees Celsius, and innumerable other examples. Some information that is believed to be true within specific circles of scientists or artists is similarly considered CK. Examples of common knowledge in the scientific community, taking the audience background into account, everyone knows that testosterone is the hormone of masculinity, and the testes release it. To narrow the circle further, it is undisputable amongst urologists that *Escherichia Coli* is the commonest bacterium that causes urinary tract infection; and that prostate-specific antigen is the most reliable tumor marker for detecting prostate cancers. When verifying a given statement across multiple sources yields the same information, it is probably CK. Whenever experts question a statement, comprehend it in different ways, or they might have to look deeper for its accuracy, it is not CK. Information is deemed CK when it is undisputed. However, whenever you are in doubt, provide a citation.

### General Knowledge

General Knowledge (GK) is defined as the knowledge available to anyone [22]. GK is the information that has been accumulated

over time through various media and sources like the radio, television, newspapers, encyclopedias, and the internet. It does not include diploma-based information or acquired from formal teaching. Examples of GK are that global warming might lead to the extinction of polar bears; the tallest building on Earth is Burj Khalifa in Dubai; Viagra helps men get a harder erection and uncountable more examples.

**Fair use and Transformative use of Protected Copyrights** The above-mentioned concept grants a legal ruse for writers to use a small portion of protected copyrights in specific situations. Examples of contexts that fair use might apply are teaching, criticism, comments, news reporting, and non-commercial purposes. Considering such activities, fair use is a court judgment. In other words, there is no statute or solid criteria that determine a percentage or number of words, pages, or images to be used without permission. Therefore, specialized courts judge fair use claims case-by-case [23]. An example of fair use is when authors make the abstract or a certain number of pages of their protected articles free to copy. A kind of fair use is transformative use which is legitimate likewise. The latter does not replace the original work, but it transforms it by adding new expression or meaning to create new information, aesthetics, insights, or different understanding. For instance, making the Mona Lisa painting frowning or adding a mustache to it for sarcastic or symbolic purposes. Harnessing fair and transformative uses should be low-key and non-profit. However, respect the creator's rights and use your material [24].

### Public Domain

The public domain (PD) refers to intellectual properties not protected by a copyright term. PD includes works produced before January 1923, works intentionally placed by the creator in the PD known as dedication, or when copyright law does not protect this particular type of work and works that have never been protected. Some materials had once held the copyright, but that has expired; therefore, they are no longer protected and are in the public domain. In some cases, the copyright owner fails to follow copyright renewal rules, rendering his work to land in the PD [25]. Public domain materials are free to use without permission, but no one can ever own them. Moreover, you can mix, add on, adapt, and alter the original work legitimately. For example, Shakespeare's (*Romeo and Juliet*) may be in the public domain, but a new version with annotations or illustrations may have copyright protection in these new parts of the work. For this reason, authors should be aware that materials not protected by copyright could be covered by other legal protections such as patent or trademark laws. Examples of what trademark laws cover are logos, pseudonyms, and trade dress [26]. Rights depend on registrations and therefore vary by country and jurisdiction. That explains, in part, why claims are handled case by case, taking bylaws into account. In some countries, works enter the public domain 50 or 70 years after the creator's death, whereas in others, copyright protection lasts the whole author's life plus 95 years (Mickey Mouse Law). To detail further, the Walt Disney entertainment company enjoys several layers of legal protection for major characters like Mickey Mouse. It owns the copyright to the original character.

Moreover, it owns the copyrights to subsequent versions of the character, which tend to be better known to modern

audiences. In addition, it owns trademark rights. The copyright for the original version of Mickey Mouse is scheduled to expire on January 1, 2024, whereas the other rights associated with Mickey Mouse will remain in place for longer [27].

### Creative Commons

Creative Commons (CC) is intellectual property licensure under which a given work would be liable for free usage without permission under a few conditions. Marking your work as CC implies granting others the right to reuse, edit, and distribute your work for free. CC provides several core licenses, each of which allows anyone to use the material differently. While there are different CC licenses, all CC licenses include certain obligations. The conventional obligations are to attribute the work to its creator, use it precisely as it is, and not use it for commercial purposes or monetary gain. CC users must understand that any new work produced out of this material must be permissible under the same license as the original work. In addition, whenever you make changes to the work, you must acknowledge the original work and indicate that changes have been made [28]. Reasonable applications of CC license embody educational purposes, as teachers and students are allowed to copy and edit an entire work, keeping an eye on exceptions if there are. For example, TED Talks materials, which are videos created from presentations on any topic at the domain TED (technology, entertainment, design); are allowed to be shared under Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International), which means you have to include an attribution to TED as the owner of the TED Talk and include a link to the talk. Furthermore, you can use TED Talks for personal use only, away from any profitable or commercial context. In addition, no derivative works are permitted, so you cannot edit, remix, create, modify or alter the form of the TED Talks in any way [29]. Attempting to use material out of the CC scope of usage mandates legal permission.

### Example Problems

#### Query 1:

A scientist develops data while working at the Arabian Gulf College. He then moves to Al-Andalus University, where he publishes an article in the *Journal of New Data*, using the original data.

#### Who owns the data?

Answer: The Arabian Gulf academy. According to guidelines established by Harvard University in 1988 and subsequently adopted by other institutions, data developed by employees of academic institutions are owned by the institutions [26].

#### Query 2:

George and Shari are classmates attending the final semester in medical physics. While studying in a group, George is appalled to discover that the dissertation he had purchased from an academic services shop near the university campus is eerily similar to Shari's. On closer look, he finds the two papers are carefully paraphrased except for the conclusion section, which is an identical word for word. In a hunch, he copies and pasts a conclusion paragraph from a previous paper he wrote. After submitting the dissertations to the instructor, she reports on them for suspicion of foul play, as

the two papers share the exact graphics and reference lists.

Investigations reveal that the students and the shop manager are guilty. The latter has been selling ready-made treatises for a decade long; therefore, he has been sentenced to 5-year in prison and is punishable by fines of \$20,000. The students violate the student conduct code and have been sentenced to a two-quarter delay in the conferral of the degree and 40 hours of community service.

#### What are the violations committed?

Answer: The shop owner is criminally cheating on the community and deserves the harsh penalty under civil law. Shari is a scammer, committing more than plagiarism. She did not only submit what she did not write, but she also paid money for that, rebutting the premise that the act was unintentional. George is a master scammer and twice plagiarist, as he committed direct and self-plagiarism. The unlawful payment he made is an aggravated offense. The students should receive heavier penalties.

### Conclusion

Textual copying, when duly quoted or properly referenced, is legal. Creative commons, general and common knowledge, fair use, public domain are legislations that legalize textual copying under certain conditions.

#### Abbreviation

SP: Salami Publishing; CK: Common Knowledge; GK: General Knowledge; PD: Public Domain; CC: Creative Commons; TED: Technology, Entertainment, Design;

#### Declaration

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Data will be available by emailing [atifikatib@gmail.com](mailto:atifikatib@gmail.com)

#### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally in the designing and writing the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

We conducted the research following the Declaration of Helsinki. However, Commentary Articles need no ethics committee approval.

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#### Consent for publication

Not applicable

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The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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