

HOW TO PREVENT PLAGIARISM

IN STUDENT WORK



TOMAŠ FOLTÝNEK ET AL.

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A Handbook for Academic Staff

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1 Introduction

Dear colleagues,

pedagogical efforts bring both successes and failures, same as most human endeavours. We wish to experience predominantly those moments when our students' activities bring us joy and incentives for our own development. What we wish to avoid, on the other hand, are situations when we as teachers encounter students' attempts to cheat. This is a phenomenon which affects perhaps all educational systems and levels. In higher education practice, apart from copying during examinations, we also encounter unethical practices in the area of academic writing, the most noticeable of which is plagiarism. If we as supervisors fail to detect plagiarism and the student obtains an academic award, a large portion of the shame is attributable to ourselves. A later exposure of the plagiarism threatens the good name of the university and the specific department; and, the expertise of the particular supervisor is also questioned.

Therefore, we created this handbook, which should provide clear yet sufficiently comprehensive guidelines for situations that may arise in connection with plagiarism in the day-to-day academic routine. The handbook offers the opportunity to consider not only the aspects of originality in student work and how to explain the importance of source referencing to students and forms of plagiarism, but also how to recognise plagiarism and what software tools can be used for this purpose. Further, the handbook describes applying penalties for plagiarism. Finally, we attempt to summarise the fundamental antiplagiarism advice from a teacher's perspective into several practical pieces of advice.

We do not assume that experienced supervisors of final theses are unfamiliar with any of the handbook's contents. The purpose of this handbook is to provide a compact and concise overview of how to present the issue of plagiarism to students in an easily comprehensible way. The handbook will also help you prepare for their questions concerning the issue of plagiarism and academic writing. A different, abridged, but more accessible version is available for students themselves.

We would like to express our thanks to the dozens of our colleagues who read this text and shared their remarks with us. Their feedback led to improved understandability in many parts of the text. Since we want this handbook to be concise, we will not incorporate all the remarks directly, but we will publish additional materials on <http://plagiatorstvi.vse.cz/>. On this website, it will be possible to continue adding comments and suggestions, which will emerge from applying this handbook in everyday practice.

We hope that this handbook will find its place in your library or on your computer, and we wish you as few students as possible who would want to cheat you – and ultimately themselves.

Authors

2 Originality

Each student finds out, usually during their first days at a university, that he or she will be expected to submit various types of written work (reports, seminar and final papers and, as the case may be, also research reports, academic articles or academic texts) and that it is expected that these texts will be original, in other words they will contain the student's own ideas. But he or she may have doubts: **what is an original idea?**

An academic text always requires the author's own ideas

Different levels of personal contribution are expected in different types of academic work

Not every piece of student work must be innovative. However, it must be original. That means that the submitted work was really written by the student and he or she does not claim the work of other authors as his or her own. Even a compilation of work can be original in that the student researched existing ideas, compared them and placed them into context. Different levels of personal contribution are expected in different types of academic work.

The supervisor also carries some responsibility for the originality of student work. The topic of the work should also be original, not repeated each year, so that the student is given an appropriate opportunity for his or her own creative contribution.

Originality is emphasised in student work, but students should not be worried that all of their papers must lead to ground-breaking results. New findings arise in many different ways; perseverance, thoroughness and patience play a more important role than innate genius. In academic texts, original ideas arise, for example, by:

Original ideas are the result of diverse activities

- critically comparing two or more existing views on the same issue,
- supporting, disproving or modifying an existing hypothesis or theory with new arguments,
- empirically verifying an existing hypothesis or theory,
- processing or interpreting existing data with an original method,
- collecting new data,
- formulating and verifying a new hypothesis,
- suggesting a new solution to an existing problem,
- proposing a new research method.

While different methods of creating new findings are usually combined in the works of advanced researchers, students at the beginning of their academic journey normally work on constituent tasks and often manage with a single method. Moreover, it is very common that commentators of other authors' ideas gradually become creators of their own ideas. Authors should never hide from the reader where they found each part of their materials.

Academic texts are parallel to a conversation in which the author's own ideas create a dialogue with the ideas of other authors – sometimes they agree with them, at other times they compare or develop the ideas, show them from a different perspective, or even rebut them. However, the reader must always be able to distinguish the individual voices in the text. It is assumed that anything that is not referenced is the author's original text or common knowledge.¹

The quality of an academic text is not measured just by its originality

Moreover, the student should not just rewrite other authors' ideas; the vast majority of the writing should be in his or her own words. After all, that is the purpose of an academic text – to create an original work which is based on ideas published earlier. Nevertheless, the fact that the work is original does not necessarily mean that it is good. But that is a different question – one which concerns the academic quality of the work, and which must be assessed by a specialist in the given field.

¹GRAFF, G., BIRKENSTEIN, C. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. 4th ed. W. W. Norton & Company, 2018.

3 Source referencing

It is agreed that by the end of their studies at the latest, students should demonstrate an ability to create an independent academic text, the formal requisites of which ordinarily include referencing any sources used. But where and when should they learn that? This question is often asked by the students whose plagiarism was detected – they argue that they committed the offence precisely because they were never taught how to reference properly. Most Czech universities now dedicate specialised courses to practise this skill, or they incorporate such courses into compulsory university-wide foundation courses. However, in this chapter we assume that one course does not suffice to truly teach this skill, and it is equally illusory to assume that students will be equipped with it from their secondary school studies. On the contrary, it is important that they practise this skill continuously, throughout their entire studies, including in their core courses. This places additional demands on teachers who, apart from their specialist competences, must also have an insight into the logic of student writing and time to reflect upon these ‘formal components’ of student work. What problems does a teacher encounter most frequently in final theses and assignments, and how can these be resolved in the minimum time with the best possible outcomes?

Students are often worried that they will commit plagiarism by accident. They believe that an antiplagiarism check (whether carried out by antiplagiarism software or a teacher) is a random generator of sanctions which may affect anyone – after all, everyone overlooks something

*Plagiarism does
not occur by
accident*

every now and then, or does not manage to add a citation while making final edits and feeling stressed. In reality, the chances that a serious form of plagiarism will result accidentally are very small to zero.² The role of the teacher, therefore, is not only to strengthen the fear of students who might consider cheating intentionally, but also to dispel the worries of students who prepare their work honestly. The fear of unintentional plagiarism might be explained by the fact that it often conflates the understanding of the purpose of referencing and the mastering of its technical execution. It is, therefore, key that students not only learn the correct format of referencing (that is, whether to cite in footnotes or in brackets, what styles are available, that it is necessary to cite consistently, and what tools can provide technical assistance), but crucially that they understand the purpose.

²KOZMANOVÁ, I. Kam až sahá akademická integrita? Nizozemské přemýšlení o dosahu a dělitelnosti. *Dějiny a současnost*, 2019, 8, 13–16.

*The purpose and
format of
references*

It is possible to understand referencing as a form of language through which the author communicates with the reader. With the help of this language, the author explains what helped him or her formulate which idea, which sources he or she relied on, thereby also crediting and giving professional acknowledgement to the cited author. But it is not just about the author of the original idea; the reader also has rights. Firstly, the reader has the right to check at any time whether the author's claims are correct. He or she can check the calculations, replicate an experiment or verify that the author of the text has correctly adopted an idea of a different author (such as that it has not been misrepresented). The reader may also be interested in the wider context of the cited idea, in additional information, or he or she may even be so intrigued by the author's 'promotion' of the cited work that he or she would like to read the entire work. The author of the text is obliged to provide clear information that will enable the fulfilment of such rights. No more, no less.

In order to be able to find the cited source, the reader must be provided with unambiguous information, that is the publication's 'birth certificate number' which identifies it unmistakably. For books, that information consists of the author, title, place and year of publication; for articles, it is the author, title of the article, title of the journal, volume and year, number (if it exists), and page range. Other details may also be added, such as the ISBN, ISSN, DOI, publisher, edition etc., with which we assist the reader further and facilitate the identification or even finding of the source. It is appropriate that students try to create references using concrete examples – find the necessary information in a book that they are holding, in a journal article that they found through an internet search tool, or to create a 'reference' for an image circulated on social media. They will also better understand the purpose of compulsory details in referencing if they are asked to find a publication using a bibliography entry, and they will realise how difficult it is when there are insufficient details.

*The birth
certificate
number of the
publication*

*The referencing style
is determined by
identifying for
whom the text is
written*

The collection of formal rules for acknowledging individual items is called a referencing style. The style determines how citations (directing the reader to the source within the text) and bibliography entries (index of all sources used in citations in their full wording, usually at the end of the text) should look. The specific referencing style is always determined by identifying for whom the text is written – the publisher or the editors in the case of academic publications, the university in the case of final theses, and the teacher in the case of seminar papers.

The plurality of referencing styles reflects the conventions for different disciplines, customs of different publishing houses or universities, historical developments, or cultural norms. In order to master the principles of referencing, it is useful for students to compare different referencing styles using practical examples – this will help them understand that the format may differ significantly, but the content always remains the same.

Nevertheless, the style of referencing must stay consistent throughout each text. Students often fail to reference consistently not only due to lack of attention but also due to hyper-correctness. Many online publications now contain information on how they wish to be referenced, and students copy these references into their work in good faith. It is necessary to explain to students that this information is binding in terms of its content (that is who should be stated as the first author, which of the titles is considered to be the name of the publication, etc.), but its format may (and even must) be adapted to the referencing style that they are using in their work.

At the start of their academic writing, students often find manuals very helpful for observing referencing styles and recording unusual entries. It is appropriate, therefore, to provide them e.g., with a manual of a prestigious journal in the given field, or with the university's house style for referencing, if it exist. Alternatively, they can be asked to look up the style themselves. If possible within the course, it is also desirable to encourage them to try to cite and create a reference for sources that are not typical (online articles without an author or date of publication; specialist literature issued by an institution; sources in foreign languages; oral sources) – this will help them not only to learn how to use the manual, but also to think about the logic of creating the reference.

*Practical
help*

The so-called referencing management software (also 'citation software' or 'referencing manager') is a useful technical tool for referencing. This software allows users to save and manage their bibliography entries (such as to import them from databases and library catalogues, or to create their own entries) and then to automatically insert them into the text. The particular advantage of such tools is that they maintain a consistent referencing style throughout the text that can easily be changed; for example, if the student wishes to rework the text into an academic article and the publisher requires a different style than the university. However, referencing management software cannot replace the understanding of what purpose citations serve and how they should be used. It is, therefore, better suited for more advanced users; students starting academic writing should first learn to cite 'manually'. Also, it is important to realise that a citation created by software might not be correct if it derives from incorrect data. Accordingly, it is always necessary to check the citations and bibliography entries generated.

The market for referencing management software is currently very diverse and offers a wide range of paid as well as free options. The majority of programmes also offer various additional functionalities apart from the basic management of bibliography entries (notes management, saving of files, elements of social network) – when selecting, it is, therefore, necessary to carefully consider what product will be most suitable for the given purposes. A teacher can help students by explaining to them which referencing managers are most often used in their field, informing them for which software the university owns a licence or whether it even allows students to access the software tools after graduation. It is also appropriate to strive for compatibility within a workplace of student teams – some software tools allow teams to work on common projects, share bibliographies, etc.

Referencing a database is not required

Students often lack an understanding of the ‘obligations’ to readers and as a result, they rather cite ‘hyper-correctly’. They state extensive hyperlinks leading to a database in which an article is stored, or they cite other repositories such as JSTOR or Google Books. However, they do not need to make the reader’s way to finding the text source this easy. It is necessary to explain to them that as long as they clearly identify the source (see above) they do not have an obligation to further facilitate the reader’s way to it – the reader himself or herself should be able to find the article and procure it (and perhaps even pay for the access to the database, journey to a library abroad, etc.).

Understanding the logic of referencing will help eliminate another common mistake – perceiving ‘internet sources’ as a separate genre of academic publications. Students should be carefully reminded that internet is just a ‘carrier’. It is the same as referencing ‘paper sources’ in the bibliography. The decision as to what type of source it is and how we will treat it should be made according to the content criteria. The fact that e.g., an academic article is only published online does not free the student of the obligation to identify it in the reference as clearly as if it was published ‘on paper’ – if possible, he or she should state its author, title of the article, publication platform, date of publication and, in this case, also an accurate website link. An additional compulsory detail when it comes to online publications is the date of access – by including it, the student fulfils his or her obligation to the reader to clearly identify the source, but at the same time the student is protected against a situation where the internet link is not available after that date, or its content changes.

Internet versus paper sources

What can I reference?

This is a common question that supervisors of an assignment or final theses encounter. Students are often unsure about the rules that govern what they can include among their sources.

The easiest rule is: whatever you held 'in your hands', and for online sources it can be adapted: whatever you had open on your screen. This rule should prevent students from making a common mistake caused by ignorance: while researching literature, students find a number of sources which they are unable to access 'physically', for example because they are protected by a paywall and students cannot access the database, or because the book is not available in the Czech Republic. Students would like to refer to these sources because they are worried that by excluding them, they will have not covered the topic sufficiently. It is necessary to explain to the students that, on the contrary, by referencing a source that they have not 'read', they would commit a serious transgression since only sources that the author has worked with personally may be referenced in the work. It is equally unacceptable to copy references from someone else's bibliography if the student has not actively accessed the sources.

On the other hand, the rule of the hands (screen) does not mean that the student must read the cited books from the beginning to the end. It is entirely legitimate to cite just from those segments that the student found relevant when reading, and that he or she is using for his or her topic. However, if the student is commenting on the whole book in the work, he or she should be familiar with all of it. A complicated question arises from the possibility of citing sources that are not available in their entirety – for example, Google Books protects the copyright of certain books by leaving some pages blank. It is up to the author's judgement, perhaps after consultation with a supervisor if necessary. If the available passage is relevant and appropriate to the topic of the work, it is possible to cite the source as if we held the physical book in our hands.

The rule of the hands (screen) can also be used when students wish to cite the idea of someone whose work they did not read directly, but they know indirectly. If the idea is crucial for the work, that is, for example, the main argumentation is dependent on it, the teacher should remind the student of the necessity to find the primary source directly. If that is not possible, or the idea is not crucial for the work, it is possible to utilise a so-called secondary citation. In a secondary citation, the student refers to the source of the original idea but he or she only references a publication where it was actually found. In the reference, this fact is communicated to the reader by using the expression 'as cited in'.

Primary and secondary citation

Only sources that the author had direct access to may be referenced.

Share uncertainties with a supervisor or in footnotes

The referencing system guidance can never cover everything that the author needs to communicate to the reader. Remind the students that if they are unsure about how to reference something

or about the form of the citation, they can always consult academic literature, websites helping with academic writing, the supervisor or teacher. As a last resort, they can use footnotes for direct communication with the reader, in which they expressly state their uncertainty or additional information. In this way, they can resolve problems such as accessing a work from an archive that they did not visit because they could not travel (but they asked someone who could photograph the materials), referring to information from oral lectures (which, in most cases, should not be used) or using a translator for adapting sources in a language that the author does not have a command of – without additional information, all of these cases could be considered as cheating.

A serious mistake that students make, due to ignorance or even in good faith, is confusing the bibliography list with a list of research literature. They believe that they should include all relevant literature which deals with their topic, and they consider bibliography as ‘recommendations for further reading’ to readers. Sometimes they justify including items that they did not refer to in the text to avoid the criticism of an opponent, who might object that they have not considered a certain work. It is necessary to emphasise that a bibliography should only include literature which was referenced from the text. The final bibliography must always be a list of references for all citations to sources used in the text – a precise mirror list. Every source appearing as a citation in the text must be traceable back to the bibliography, and every entry in the bibliography must have at least one citation in the text.

Bibliography is not a list of research literature

4 Forms of plagiarism

We can find many definitions of plagiarism in academic literature. Some consider plagiarism as theft, and accordingly these mainly emphasise the use of another person's work. Other definitions presume intention, or they define the extent of the reused content to trigger the term plagiarism.

Definition of plagiarism

Norm ČSN ISO 5127 defines plagiarism as “presentation of an intellectual work of another author, in whole or in part, as one's own.”³ Plagiarism is even more precisely defined by the Czech Terminology Database of Library and Information Sciences (TDKIV) as “unauthorised imitation (exact or partial) of an artistic or scientific work of another person, which does not refer to the original.”⁴

However, the phenomenon of plagiarism is wider and it also includes self-plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism or plagiarism with the consent of the original author.⁵

To cover plagiarism in its entirety, we define it as the use (of ideas, content or structures) of another work without appropriately acknowledging the source to benefit in a setting where originality is expected.

After an intensive debate and consideration of various definitions available in academic literature, the project team of CDP “Strengthening the prevention of plagiarism in student work” has deemed the following definition⁵ most fitting: “**The use of ideas, content, or structures without appropriately acknowledging the source to benefit in a setting where originality is expected.**” This definition is developed from definitions published earlier.^{6,7} It includes any form of content, that is text, images, tables, mathematical formulae, etc. By ‘structures’, in the definition we mean the structures of the work (for example titles and chapter arrangement), methods of argumentation or thought structure. Structures, therefore, do not refer directly to the content of the work, but to the way the work is constructed.

³ ČSN ISO 5127 (010162) *Informace a dokumentace – Slovník*. Praha: Český normalizační institut, 2003. Česká technická norma.

⁴ CELBOVÁ, I. Plagiát [heslo]. In: *KTD: Česká terminologická databáze knihovnictví a informační vědy (TDKIV)* [online]. Praha: Národní knihovna ČR, 2003– [cit. 2020-10-29]. Dostupné z: https://aleph.nkp.cz/F/?func=direct&doc_number=000002675&local_base=KTD.

⁵ FOLTÝNEK, T., MEUSCHKE, N., GIPP, B. Academic Plagiarism Detection: A Systematic Literature Review. *ACM Comput. Surv.*, 2019, 52 (6), 112:1–112:42. DOI: 10.1145/3345317.

⁶ MEUSCHKE, N., GIPP, B. State-of-the-art in detecting academic plagiarism. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 2013, 9 (1), 50–57.

⁷ FISHMAN, T. ‘We Know It When We See It’ Is Not Good Enough: Toward a Standard Definition of Plagiarism That Transcends Theft, Fraud, and Copyright. In *Proceedings of the 4th Asia Pacific Conference on Educational Integrity (4APCEI)*, 2009.

Distinguish other people's ideas from your own

Academic texts typically combine ideas originating from other sources with the author's or authors' own ideas and conclusions. Drawing from other works or being inspired by another work is, naturally, perfectly in order. Without using what was developed earlier, progress would not be possible. Accordingly, the problem is not using another work, but rather not acknowledging the use. The reader is then justifiably under the impression that he or she is reading original (that is so far unpublished) ideas of the author or authors of the given work.

It is always necessary to clearly distinguish the original from the adopted, and correctly refer to the source used.

In this case, the term 'correctly' means that **the source can be unambiguously identified and found based on the stated reference**. The formal requirements of correct source referencing are determined by the specific citation norm (for detail see chapter 3). With an extremely formalistic interpretation of the definition, we could consider even formal errors in bibliography to be plagiarism. However, if such mistakes do not decrease the possibility of finding the original work, a material fulfilment of the definition of plagiarism is not established.

The condition “**to benefit in a setting where originality is expected**” is also important. In academic texts, originality is almost always expected (see chapter 2) and the resulting benefit is in the form of credits, grades, academic award, financial gain, recognition by the academic community, etc. There are, however, situations, where originality is not expected, or different rules may apply to source referencing. These include the production of notes for personal use or learning through reproduction of other authors' works, during which we acquire the necessary skills but a creation of an original work is not expected.

4.1 Typical forms of plagiarism

Plagiarism typically includes:

- the use of someone else's findings and their presentation as the author's own findings,
- translation or paraphrase of another work and its presentation as an original work,
- undeclared use of own, formerly published work (self-plagiarism),
- incorrect citations and source referencing,
- undeclared contributions to the work presented,
- undeclared authorship of another person (contract cheating).

Apart from the clear scenario when the author copies someone else's entire text without stating the source, plagiarism also includes adopting individual components of another work without making a reference to the original source of the idea, or stating it in a manner that makes it impossible to assess the extent of the adopted components. If, for example, a student copies several paragraphs word-for-word without quotation marks and he or she cites the source at the end of the copied passage, the extent of the adopted text is unclear. A similar problem arises if the citation is stated just at the beginning of a chapter although the given chapter draws on this source in several places. A further form of plagiarism is so-called mosaic plagiarism, which consists of the compilation of short text passages adopted from various sources (see image 1). Unless the student includes a citation for each adopted passage, this is plagiarism, even if all used sources are stated in the bibliography.⁸

*Verbatim and
mosaic
plagiarism*

Mosaic plagiarism led to the resignation of many politicians. The dissertation thesis of the former German Minister of Defence contained over 80 copied passages in more than one hundred pages. The most serious offence was a two-page-long similarity between the work and two other sources, neither of which was included in a footnote or in the bibliography. The second category of transgression of referencing integrity included text passages adopted verbatim or slightly amended, which were stated in the bibliography, but the source was not cited in the text itself. The last category was formed by passages adopted verbatim, the origin of which was stated within the text in a footnote, but they were not marked as direct quotations.

I'm a sentence from source X. I'm from source Y. My origin is in source Z, for a change. I'm again from the source X. I was found in the source Z. And I'm a sentence which was originally found in the source Y.

Figure 1: Mosaic plagiarism

⁸For a more detailed description of individual forms of plagiarism, we recommend this publication: WALKER, J. Student Plagiarism in Universities: What are we Doing About it? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1998, 17 (1), 89–106. DOI: 10.1080/0729436980170105.

In the master's thesis of a former Czech Minister of Justice, 16 pages (from a total of 48) were adopted from a work defended at the same university 2 years earlier. Entire pages were identical in the theoretical parts of the theses, including grammatical errors, formatting and typos.

Paraphrasing or translation without referring to the original source of the idea

The requirement to acknowledge the origin of a text remains if the student **changes the presentation of the idea adopted**, for example by paraphrasing it or translating it into a different language. While the new and the original source do not show any textual similarity (and, as such, the similarity is practically undetectable by the current software tools supporting the detection of plagiarism), that does not change the fact that **an idea was used from other work**. If the student does not reference this work, he or she commits plagiarism. A common mistake of students is that they translate a text word-for-word, or perhaps replace some words with synonyms, and they consider the result to be a paraphrase. However, only two methods are permissible in academic writing: either we directly use the original text in quotation marks, or we express the adopted idea in our own words. But to take an original text, change some words and remove the quotation marks is certainly not appropriate.

As we have already stated, students can also commit plagiarism if they reuse their own work without acknowledgement. The definition of plagiarism above covers this by accentuating gaining a benefit. So, if someone reuses his or her own work, does not refer to it correctly and gains a benefit by it, that constitutes (self-) plagiarism. In terms of student work, that means, for example, that if a student wrote a seminar paper, submitted it for a certain course and received a grade for it, he or she cannot submit the same paper (or a part of it) as new in a different course and expect to receive another grade. The student would be assessed twice for the same paper, which is unfair.

Self-plagiarism

But what if the student really needs to use his or her work twice? This might happen in a situation where the student published the principal part of his or her thesis as an academic article prior to submitting the thesis. This is, of course, more than desirable. The published part cannot be omitted from the thesis, and at the same time the student wishes to reuse the text. How to avoid committing plagiarism in this case? The student may use the article in the thesis, but he or she must state that the given text has already been published, and refer to the article correctly. You as the supervisor should be able to advise students how to proceed in specific cases, and clarify how they can avoid potential problems with the publisher's copyright.

A similar situation occurs when a student writing a master's thesis follows on from his or her bachelor's thesis. This is, naturally, allowed and often desirable, but two conditions must be fulfilled: First, it must be clear when reading the master's thesis what has been adopted from the bachelor's thesis and what is new. And second, the student's contribution to the master's thesis must be significant enough to render the paper defensible.

*Incorrect
source
referencing*

Students may commit some forms of plagiarism unintentionally. Omitting a citation or another mistake might cause the reader to be unable to distinguish between ideas that have been adopted and the author's original ideas, thus meeting the definition of plagiarism. When deciding on penalties for plagiarism, the extent of the transgression as well as intention are considered. Unintentional omission will likely carry less serious consequences than intentionally misleading the reader by citing sources that do not contain the given idea, or which do not exist at all.

Problems may arise when several people are involved in producing a work. **Other people's contributions to content creation is generally not a problem**, but they must always be declared. By content creation, we do not mean

*Undeclared
co-authorship*

copyediting which does not change the ideas of the work, text formatting, typographical, language or stylistic adjustment and similar. An acknowledgement to the supervisor tells us that the supervisor guided the student methodically, but he or she was not involved in producing the text. If an individual piece of work is an output from a team project, again it is necessary to distinguish which parts are the result of teamwork and which parts can be attributed to the author. Sometimes, it is impossible to avoid copying even several pages of text, for example from a common article. Typically, when a student performs measurements in a laboratory according to a previously published methodology created within a team, it is not wrong for them to copy that methodology or part of it into his or her own work. If they do not do that, the work might not make sense. If the student tried to rewrite the methodology in his or her own words mistakes and inaccuracies may be introduced. In any case, it is necessary to clearly state **which parts of the text have been copied, and provide the source.**

Adopting work that is publicly available or that we have consent to use (e.g., under a Creative Commons licence, which grants a universal right to use the work) does not affect the fulfilment of the definition of plagiarism. It is a common error to think that referencing Wikipedia is not required since its content is publicly owned. This fact plays no role when it comes to the definition of plagiarism. It is someone else's work, and if a student uses it, he or she must provide an appropriate

reference to it. Moreover, it is necessary to warn students, especially in the early phases of their studies, that Wikipedia is useful for an initial familiarisation with the issue and for finding academic articles, but it is rarely a suitable source for citing.

In general, it is recommended that group projects are dealt with according to the practice common in many journals. In the case of a co-authored work, it is clearly stated who contributed and in what ways, that is who brought the main idea, who conducted the literature review, who processed data, who wrote up the body of the article, etc. In this way, the reader can have a clear idea about the contribution of each individual author.

It is, naturally, an exclusive right of the original author to grant consent for the use of his or her work without the obligation that he or she be stated as the author. That, however, does not change the fact that if we present such work as our own, we commit plagiarism. An example is so-called contract cheating (or academic ghostwriting), where a student commissions a work to be written by someone else, typically for remuneration, and the original author consents that his or her name will not be stated in the work. The student who puts his or her name to that work commits plagiarism. As such, contract cheating is a form of plagiarism which does not breach the Copyright Act, nevertheless it breaches good morals and academic integrity, and, according to the Higher Education Act, this conduct constitutes a potential reason for expulsion from the study programme or removal of an existing academic award. A great risk associated with contract cheating is also the fact that the plagiarist can easily be subsequently blackmailed by the actual author of the text, the intermediary company or a different entity familiar with the fraud.

Commissioned papers

4.2 What is not considered to be plagiarism

Using common knowledge

The definition of plagiarism refers to ideas adopted from another work. For many ideas, however, it is not possible to identify what work they come from. This concerns so-called **common knowledge**. Facts that are universally known may be stated without a source reference. Nevertheless, it should be recommended to students to use common knowledge sparingly. That is because it does not increase the information value of the work. Its use is reasonable in the introduction, discussion or conclusion sections of the work as a prelude to other (own or adopted) ideas. The definition of common knowledge

may change according to the field and the reader's expected familiarity with the topic. Accordingly, that which is **known by the vast majority of the presumed readers** can be considered to be common knowledge. If a student is uncertain as to whether a given information is common knowledge or not, and he or she does not have the chance to consult the specific instance with a teacher, he or she should include a reference. It is also necessary to be prepared for the situation where a student who committed plagiarism defends himself or herself by arguing that the copied information is common knowledge.

If the external contribution to the work does not affect its ideas, we do not consider it to be plagiarism. This includes, for example, as already mentioned, copyediting or typographical adjustments. In the case of translations, the author of the work remains the same. It is appropriate to acknowledge the contribution of the translator, but in no case may the translator be stated as the author of the text.

*Proofreading,
copyediting,
translation*

Summary

Plagiarism may appear in many forms and arise in many ways. The common sign of plagiarism is always the adoption of someone else's work or part of it, and not declaring the original source (whether the text or the idea is adopted verbatim, paraphrased or translated from a text in a foreign language). Students should not be afraid to use sources in their texts; on the contrary, their use is desirable. However, students must be guided to always clearly mark any adopted passages and their source so that the reader can distinguish between their own contribution and the contribution of work by different authors.

5 Detecting plagiarised work

The work of an academic entails not only research and teaching, but also the prevention and detection of unethical conduct, including plagiarism. This is certainly not an easy task. Without doubt, no academic takes pleasure in discovering such practices by his or her colleagues or students. Research shows that teachers and students often disagree as to the interpretation of the motivation for cheating. This can then affect our practical handling of plagiarism.⁹

The role of the academic who will thoroughly read the work is key

In an age of widely available information sources, a fundamental problem arises: how to effectively and correctly detect plagiarised work, and how to subsequently respond. This gave rise to a range of software tools aimed at aiding the detection of plagiarism. Universities also adopt various preventative measures. No measures can function, however, without a sufficient erudition of academics, who must understand the issue of plagiarism and its forms, and who should be thoroughly trained in the methods of detection and subsequent resolution of dishonest practices.

The expert opinion of the supervisor and opponent (or opponents) is key. A part of the evaluation is not only the technical aspect of the work, but also the ethical aspect. The complexity of evaluating the originality of work results from the fact that the sources used in final thesis have varying levels of validity and availability. It is, therefore, important that the evaluator is an expert in the field. Both the supervisor and opponent must verify that all sources can be traced back, and in their review, they must certify that all rules of integrity in academic writing have been complied with.

Plagiarism can be easily avoided if students regularly consult and present their text to their supervisors. If the supervisors do their jobs well, they draw their students' attention to any potential shortcomings in the text and help their students to correct them. Final theses are, nevertheless, created by students, and students are responsible not only for the technical quality but also for ethical aspects. It is clear that not all students accept their supervisors' recommendations, or they do not implement them with sufficient care. Despite the efforts of the supervisors, the thesis still can contain defects which are impossible to resolve.

⁹FOLTÝNEK, T. Vědecký smrtelný hřích. Plagiátorství: příčiny, důsledky, prevence. *Dějiny a současnost*, 2019, 8, 10–12.

*Antiplagiarism
systems*

The antiplagiarism system itself cannot make this decision – identifying a correct citation, random similarities due to common phrases or a correct use of the author's own text always depends on the judgement of an academic.

There is a wide variety of antiplagiarism systems available on the market – ranging from robust tools developed by commercial companies or universities, to freely available software which, however, may be of questionable quality. Some systems also provide tools for further communication between a teacher and a student for the purposes of teaching academic writing. Most of these systems currently work with text and focus on finding text similarities. This type of plagiarism is also the most relevant for this handbook, and for that reason we will now focus only on systems for detecting text similarities.

The antiplagiarism system first transforms the uploaded document into plain text, from which it deletes any function words (e.g., prepositions and conjunctions), sometimes even numbers. Some systems can also deal with text uploaded in the form of an image due to optical character recognition. This is followed by a so-called lemmatisation phase, during which words are transformed into their basic form – as a result, the system can detect similarity between differently declined nouns or conjugated verbs.

The system then compares the text in this form with a database. The extent of the database and the range of available sources have a significant influence on the successful detection of similarities. Some systems search not only through their own database of uploaded documents, but also through sources available on the internet and negotiated closed sources (e.g., publishers' databases). However, there may be considerable differences even between systems that work online – they may not search through all available websites, but only through their indexed sources. This phase is time-consuming and computationally demanding, which is why it takes a relatively long time – it may take hours or even days.

After the comparison of documents is concluded, the system highlights any detected similarities in a report – usually in a PDF format. A number of systems offer clear interactive reports in their online interfaces. By highlighting any similarities and referring to documents with which the given passages correspond, the system accomplished its job and any further decisions are up to the evaluator.

Similarity report

When working with a similarity report, it is good to realise that the system is not intelligent – it carries out a computationally demanding task, but the intellectual decision as to whether the detected similarity constitutes plagiarism must be made by a human. No system is currently able to determine if the discovered text is cited properly, or if the author correctly referenced the right source. Systems often detect random similarities in commonly used phrases, in long titles, and also in tables or in attachments which are bound to various rules or legislation. A certain rate of overlap is normal, and it is logical that the system will always detect a small percentage of similarity.

The more advanced systems can also recognise similarity in cases where the text is not copied verbatim – most of them can deal with different forms of words (as a result of the lemmatisation, mentioned earlier) and different structures of sentences. Usually, they are not deceived by a couple of changed or added words. Currently, the majority of systems are not able to recognise a text changed by paraphrasing or translated into a different language.¹⁰ However, developers of the advanced systems are concentrating precisely on these functionalities, which means that we might get to see them soon.

When evaluating student work, it is important to use one's own know-how and not just rely on the results of software analyses. The first indication might be an insufficient link between the stated information and original sources. This might result from careless use of sources, or from an evident concealment of primary sources. In that case, it is necessary to thoroughly compare the extent of similarities with the primary source. If the source is not referenced and a lack of originality of the text is suspected, it is then necessary to find the original source, for example by using an internet search tool. Putting several random sentences into a search tool should be part of a marker's standard procedure, regardless of the output of the antiplagiarism system.

*Use your own
head, not just the
system*

If we have the original source and the likely plagiarised work at our disposal, we can identify further clues that could prove that the text is copied. The probability of creating two identical texts that include the same grammatical errors and typos is virtually zero.

¹⁰FOLTÝNEK, T., DLABOLOVÁ, D., ANOHINA-NAUMECA, A., RAZI, S., KRAVJAR, J., KAMZOLA, L., GUERRERO-DIB, J., ÇELİK, Ö., WEBER-WULFF, D. Testing of Support Tools for Plagiarism Detection. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 2020, 17:46. DOI: 10.1186/s41239-020-00192-4.

A master's thesis by a former Czech Minister of Justice showed a significant similarity to another master's thesis. The author copied substantial passages of text, sometimes paraphrasing them slightly. Plagiarism was proved, due among other reasons, to identical sentences that included the same typos. In her second master's thesis, plagiarism was proved through identical source referencing and copying a table, which contained incorrect data as a result of a change to the order of rows.

When considering plagiarism, it is necessary to conduct a complex evaluation of the text. It is definitely not possible to work just with similarity percentages and conclude that a certain work is plagiarised on the basis of one number. Especially when it comes to final theses, it may happen that several students are working on the same or similar topics (e.g., they are analysing the same problem in a laboratory using identical methods, but applying different formulae; they are mapping different territories using identical methods; they are using the same software which describes and shows the chosen methodology, but for different tasks). It is evident that in such theses, a higher rate of similarity will be detected in the methodology sections. Students will write the text using their own words, but they cannot avoid using identical technical terminology. The teacher must examine this and comment on the similarity in his or her reviews.

In the case where a high rate of similarity with the original source is detected, and the source is not cited correctly (thus meeting the definition of plagiarism), it is necessary to thoroughly substantiate this fact in the review. The teacher and subsequently the defence committee must express their opinion during the defence as to whether or not the case is one of apparent intentional disregard for rules of integrity. A teacher evaluating a seminar paper must take into account the fact that by writing texts, a student is learning not only about the topic, but also the skill of academic writing. When assessing a transgression, the marker will consider an unintentional omission in a seminar paper differently than the same mistake in a master's thesis.

*Procedure when
plagiarism is
detected*

In the case of a systematic breach of rules for working with sources, and of a student's apparent intention to present someone else's ideas as his or her own, it is not possible to be lenient. The procedure for detected plagiarism is discussed in detail in chapter 6.

In the majority of the cases publicised in the media, plagiarism was only suspected several years after the work was written – when the work or the plagiarised text were published, when a new antiplagiarism tool was used, or when the discrepancies were noted by another researcher pursuing a similar topic. For people who are active in the public sphere, the initiative for a second evaluation of a final thesis usually comes from journalists. It is fully justified to require moral integrity from people who participate in the leadership of institutions or, for example, make decisions about the use of financial resources. It is appropriate to warn students who are writing their paper or creating an artwork about the potential consequences, so that in ten or twenty years they are not accused of plagiarism, which could end their career prematurely.

6 Penalising plagiarism

Plagiarism is generally regarded as a serious transgression of the principles of academic integrity, and accordingly, any cases identified are usually dealt with directly within academia. Universities have sanction mechanisms at their disposal that apply to students, alumni and to academic staff for cases of systematic breaches of rules for working with sources and an apparent intention to present someone else's ideas as the author's own. This handbook concerns the issue of plagiarism in student work; the options for applying penalties for plagiarism by academic staff are, therefore, not included.

Penalizing plagiarism belongs primarily to the autonomous authority of universities

It is necessary to distinguish between the identification of plagiarism and penalising the plagiarism

Principally, it is important to distinguish between three different processes: 1. formation of a suspicion of plagiarism, 2. confirmation of plagiarism, and 3. penalising the plagiarist. While the suspicion is typically raised by a teacher, the confirmation and the issue of a potential penalty are in the realm of a disciplinary committee or a committee appointed by the rector, according to § 47c of the Higher Education

Act. It is important not to confuse the confirmation of plagiarism with the process of penalising it. This could lead to the evaluation of the facts of the case through the perspective of mitigating circumstances. Those are relevant for deciding the adequate penalty for the student, but not for the identification of plagiarism.

The penalties for students who plagiarise should primarily be differentiated with regard to the extent, seriousness and motivation for the offence identified, but one may also consider the overall context of the given case. Issues that are usually taken into account include, for example, the type of work that contained plagiarism (the procedure for plagiarism in seminar papers has a different level of severity than that for final theses), or the position of the offender in terms of his or her educational stage (a university will deal differently with plagiarism in a seminar paper of a first-year bachelor student and a seminar paper submitted for a master's programme).

The severity of penalties should be differentiated based on a range of factors

Plagiarism of an enrolled student may be classified as a disciplinary offence

A university can classify plagiarism committed by a student as a disciplinary offence under § 64 of the Higher Education Act. This offence is characterised as a caused violation of obligations imposed by legal regulations or internal regulations of a university or part of it. The potential sanctions include a warning; a conditional expulsion for a fixed period during which the student is excluded, and with conditions under which the student can prove him- or herself; or even a permanent expulsion from the study programme. The nature of the conduct that constituted the offence, the circumstances of the offence, any consequences caused, the extent of the student's fault, the student's previous conduct and any effort to remedy the situation are also taken into consideration when determining the punishment. If dealing with the offence on its own will lead to correction, it is possible to abandon any sanctions. Expulsion from studies is only considered in the case of an intentional disciplinary offence. The hearing to consider the allegations must take place within one year of the date the alleged misconduct happened, or – if an allegation goes to court – then the hearing must be completed within one year of the final judgment of the case.

Plagiarism may also lead to a further serious legal consequence for the student – the grade for a diploma examination or part of it, or the defence of a dissertation, may be declared null, leading to the removal of his or her academic award. Nullification procedures are dealt with by § 47c to § 47g of the Higher Education Act. Intentional unauthorised use of someone else's work, which constitutes a serious breach of legal regulations governing the protection of intellectual property, is one of three types of conduct punishable under these provisions.

Universities may now also penalise alumni for plagiarism

Nullification of a diploma examination or part of it, or of the defence of a dissertation, may only apply if the person in question, as a result of his or her conduct, failed to fulfil (or only partially fulfilled) the requirements or prerequisites stipulated by the Higher Education Act, the study programme or the study and examination regulations. It is a condition, however, that the conduct is persistent or repeated improper conduct, or that the possibility of the graduate of the given study programme gaining requisite knowledge and skills is substantially reduced by the conduct. The nullification procedure must be initiated ex officio by the rector within three years from the passing of a diploma examination or part of it, or from the defence of a dissertation. The basis for the rector's decision is a statement from a seven-member inquiry committee, which decides by an overall majority. It is not possible to appeal a nullification decision; however, action may be brought in an administrative court.

Approaches to penalising students for plagiarism

In practice, there are considerable differences in the severity of penalties applied for plagiarism within the Czech academic community. Such differences exist not only between individual universities, but often also between individual departments of the same university. The following diagram (image 2) depicts the common practice in the Czech academic community. The models of some universities or their departments may differ.

Plagiarism is not only a breach of academic integrity that is dealt with by the autonomous authority of universities, but it may also entail legal consequences. The rights of an infringed author (or the person exclusively entitled to use the author's work) are stipulated in the Copyright Act. An unauthorised infringement of copyright that fulfils the appropriate definition and represents severe harm to society, may be classified as a crime, or several concurrent crimes, according to the relevant provisions of a special part of the Criminal Code.

Plagiarism may also be penalized through procedures beyond the scope of authority of universities

Provision § 40 of the Copyright Act lists a number of claims that the infringed author may demand from a court – e.g., determination of his or her authorship; injunction to prevent breaches of the copyright, including any potential future breaches, or any unauthorised infringement of the copyright; disclosure of information about the manner and extent of the unauthorised use and other information; rectification of the consequences of the breach; adequate redress for the damage suffered in the form of an apology or even financial compensation. The court may also grant the right to the successful party to publicise the judgment with the associated costs paid by the unsuccessful party, and it may determine the extent, form and manner of the publication. Further, the author has the right to demand payment of any lost profit from the party in breach, to the value of the normally expected revenue for licensing the work at the point of the unauthorised use, and expenses for unjust enrichment amounting to double the fee for such license. Unauthorised use of a work is also an offence under § 105a para. 1 a § 105b para. 1 of the Copyright Act, punishable by a fine of up to 150,000 CZK.

Should the unauthorised infringement be substantial, the perpetrator may have committed a crime of infringement of copyright, rights related to copyright and rights to databases under § 270 of the Criminal Code. The crime of infringement of rights of another under § 181 of the Criminal Code, or even fraud under § 209 of the Criminal Code, may also be taken into consideration. The perpetrator would

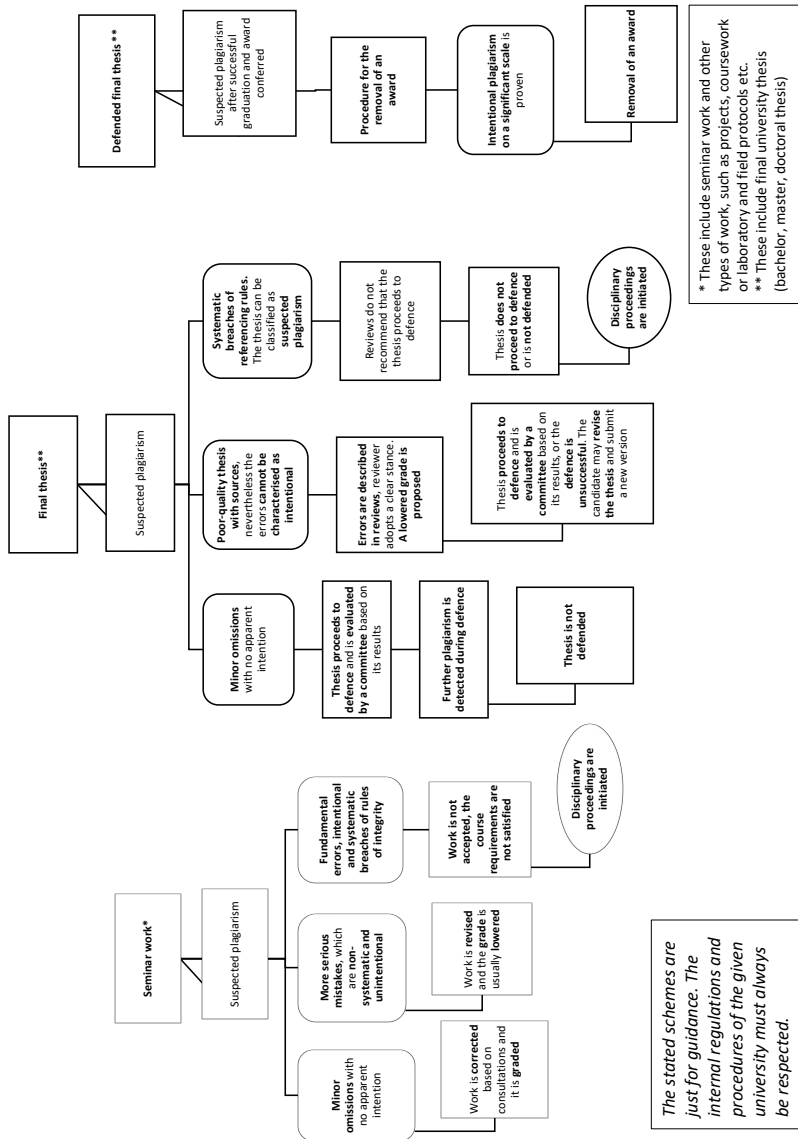


Figure 2: Common practice when plagiarism is suspected

then face imprisonment of up to two years, a ban on activities or forfeiture.¹¹ This, however, is the ultimate sanction, which we do not have to be concerned about in the vast majority of cases when supervising final theses.

Legal claims under the Copyright Act, sanctions for offences and crimes and the removal of academic awards, are available options but these are the ultimate means for copyright protection. The foundation of plagiarism prevention is knowledge and moral integrity among students, academics and scientists, and raising awareness about this phenomenon among the general public.

¹¹SOTOLÁŘ, A. *Porušení autorského práva, práv souvisejících s právem autorským a práv k databázi (Komentář)*. [on-line]. 2020 [cit. 4. 4. 2020]. Dostupné z: http://www.noveaspi.cz/products/lawText/13/6500/1/2?#pa_270.

7 Final pieces of advice

The previous chapters dealt with a number of important topics, whether theoretical (referencing rules, text originality) or more practical (detecting and penalising plagiarism). We would like to approach the final chapter from a purely practical perspective and summarise the topic in the form of advice, which should help to reduce the incidence of plagiarism in student work. We will begin with a simple motto: “Prevention is better than restrictions and sanctions.”

The academic environment is, in and of itself, quite a complicated place with a number of internal customs, relationships and operational rules. It might not be easy for students to know their way around

1. Make it clear to students from the beginning that any form of plagiarism is not permitted

this environment perfectly from the beginning, and, at the same time, to understand that, in some areas, the boundaries are clearly fixed and no discussion is allowed. Across the academic community, plagiarism is generally regarded as a serious transgression. For that reason, a strict ban on plagiarism is an integral part of ethical codes, and sometimes it is even dealt with by special regulations or guidance on procedures. An unambiguous explanation is very much desirable as it prevents any potential doubts. On their own, however, the formal rules and expectations that the academic community should abide by are not enough. It is also necessary to ensure that individual members of the academic community are aware of them and understand them. Therefore, it is essential to keep explaining to students, at the beginning and during their studies, what plagiarism is, what different forms it can take, and that it is completely forbidden. Students then will not be able to plead ignorance as their excuse, and any case of plagiarism will be an intentional act.

2. Do not assume that students enter university with a (perfect) skill of academic writing

Similarly, the following advice is aimed at the requirement for good awareness and education of students. Everyday practice clearly shows that the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students who enter university studies vary significantly. The skill of academic writing is not tested as part of the admission process in many study programmes, and it is, therefore, unsurprising that many candidates begin their studies without this skill. For this reason, it is necessary to include the teaching of academic writing in all study programmes – not as an accessory subject, but as an integral part. Students should have the opportunity (or rather obligation) to complete at least a basic course on this issue, within which all the necessary requirements for fulfilling their study obligations

are comprehensibly explained to them. For some study programmes, basic knowledge and skill in this area will not be sufficient, and in those programmes, students should have the opportunity to complete different variations of the relevant courses or a different way of demonstrating the essential competences. Students must not encounter the teaching of academic writing for the first time while writing their final theses.

The third piece of advice is very simple and following it requires neither a lot of time nor resources. If we require original work from students, we should dedicate some time to designing an original assignment. Recycling topics for assignments (of any level) by itself invites plagiarism. How can we demand that students put effort into writing their work if teachers do not put effort into preparing an original topic? Why should I write a paper on a topic that has already been covered by ten other students? These and similar questions rightly come into students' minds. Original work deserves an original assignment.

3. If you expect original work, prepare an original assignment

4. Do not supervise too many theses simultaneously

This piece of advice is also very simple. Adhering to it, however, may prove more complicated and it depends on a number of factors within individual departments, study programmes and you yourself. Management of universities, guarantors or study programmes, department heads and individual academics should all make a common effort to ensure that supervisors have enough time and space for fulfilling their role and working with students. A merely formal supervision with no actual involvement and contribution is not the best arrangement.

Many students struggle when writing their final thesis. That might be due to content (development of the topic), wrong pace of work (time pressure), lack of skills or external factors. Some students contact their supervisors and ask for advice or help, others, unfortunately, keep silent and let the problem reach a stage that is hard to resolve. Plagiarism is one of the outcomes. One of the effective preventative measures, therefore, is regular communication with the student (see point 4) and checking the progress of his or her work. That does not mean that the checks should be overly frequent and merely formal. The goal is to have an overview of how the student is progressing, provide relevant feedback and offer help if the situation requires it.

5. If the work is extensive, check the student's progress regularly

6. Do not rely just on antiplagiarism systems; the opinion of an expert knowledgeable in the given issue (that is you!) is key

Antiplagiarism systems are covered in detail in chapter 5. Here, we only want to highlight that such tools can never replace the work of a specialist who is knowledgeable about the given issue. They are merely tools serving for a more or less perfect comparison of the uploaded text with a database

of earlier published text sources. In this regard, the systems have a much better ability than humans to detect whether a student has copied a larger or smaller passage of a specific document into the text of his or her own work. However, only an expert knowledgeable in the given field can subsequently evaluate whether the detected similarity actually constitutes plagiarism (the source is not declared), whether the similarity is insignificant (stating common knowledge, false similarity), or whether the similarity is in fact desirable (correct citation, for example of a relevant article). Currently, systems are unable to make such a judgement and cannot understand the meaning of the text. It is also true, however, that without them we would be wholly oblivious in many situations as nobody can have a complete awareness of all work ever written. Therefore, do not be afraid to use them (more often rather than less), but always with common sense and a professional evaluation of their findings.

Finally, we wish you to encounter plagiarism as little as possible, and to be able to dedicate your efforts to the professional development of your students instead of dealing with ethical transgressions.

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