

BISLA Plagiarism and Cheating FAQ

All assignments at BISLA should be: (a) based on *your* reading of the sources, (b) based on *your* analysis of the sources, and (c) written by *you*. Ask your teacher to what extent he or she wishes you to use information drawn from lectures in your assignments (usually, it is fine to do so).

DEFINITIONS

Plagiarism

If you use a statement, argument or idea from someone without giving him or her credit, you are guilty of plagiarism. You can avoid plagiarism by citing your source(s).

You must cite a source in two cases: first, whenever you are using the exact wording of the source (in this case, enclose the words in quotation marks; if you add words to the quotation, use square brackets) and, second, whenever you are summarizing or paraphrasing a statement, argument, idea or narrative from the source. If you do not do this, you are guilty of plagiarism. If an entire paragraph in your paper is a summary or paraphrase, feel free to leave your citation until the end of the paragraph (you do not need to put a citation after every sentence in this case).

You usually do not need to cite a source when you are referencing a commonly known or agreed-upon fact, e.g., “The Second World War began September 1, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland.” When in doubt about whether or not to cite something, contact your teacher for clarification.

A properly-cited quotation:

Aristotle claims that “contemplation alone seems to be liked for its own sake, since nothing results from it apart from the fact that one has contemplated, whereas from the practical virtues, to a greater or lesser extent, we gain something beyond the action.” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b1–4)

A properly-cited reference:

Aristotle claims that the practical virtues are not liked for their own sake because we gain something from doing them whereas we must like contemplation for its own sake because we gain nothing from it besides having contemplated. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b1–4)

Cheating

If you pass off others’ work as your own or if you help someone else do so, you are guilty of cheating.

For example, if you give your assignment to another student to copy, that student is guilty of plagiarism; you are guilty of cheating. To give another example, if you give another student the answer to an assignment or on a test, but nothing is literally copied, it is not plagiarism, you are both still guilty of cheating.

CONSEQUENCES

Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will be brought before an academic disciplinary committee. In principle, a student may be expelled on the first offense. In practice, we would prefer to give students a second chance, in which case, the student will receive an official warning and be placed on academic probation. Additionally, in this case, the student will, at minimum, fail the assignment in question or possibly even the course. If the first offense is sufficiently serious or if there is evidence that it is, in fact, not the first offense, the student may be expelled.

FAQ

1. *What about discussing the text or the assignment with others? What is the difference between “helping” and “cheating”?*

- If you have read the text and discuss it (or the assignment) with your friends, that is not plagiarism or cheating. In fact, you should discuss it with your friends. This is, in a way, what BISLA is all about.
- If you have not read the text and your friend simply gives you the answers, obviously this is cheating and could also be considered plagiarism.

If a teacher does not believe an assignment is your work, the teacher may ask you a few basic questions about it. If you cannot answer them, you may be docked marks or may receive a 0 for the assignment. If the assignment is very well done, the teacher will expect you to be able to answer more complex questions, as it is not possible to write an excellent assignment without careful study and great effort.

The standard here, as always, is what is reasonable. Obviously, you might forget the details of an answer after you have written it. That said, if you hand in a good, well-written answer, and, when asked, you cannot remember even the most basic details of the text, that suggests you did not read the text and therefore are not handing in your own work.

Teachers are not looking for any tiny mistake that could be construed as plagiarism. Rather, this becomes a problem when teachers find an assignment that is obviously not the work of the student who has handed it in.

2. *What about getting help understanding the text?*

- Your understanding of the text should be based on: (a) the text itself, (b) your own analysis, (c) your discussions with others at BISLA (other teachers are fine, too, of course), and (d) class.
- Your understanding of the text should not be based on anything else, that is, it should not be based on other books, articles, internet sources, etc.—unless the teacher explicitly asks you to examine such sources.

Of course, this does not mean that you cannot discuss your class work with people outside BISLA—that’s ridiculous. However, these people should not be giving you the answers to your assignments or writing your papers for you. The standard remains the same as the above: If you cannot answer basic questions, then the work is not likely yours.

3. *What about getting help writing an assignment? (Here we come to the most common cases of plagiarism.)*

- ✓ It is OK to get advice on your assignments. As indicated above, advice on the content (or the ideas) of your assignment is fine provided you have read the text and have worked significantly on the answers yourself. Advice on the English style and grammar of your assignment is also fine if the changes are few or if they are very general (your proof reader either corrects only a few sentences, or, e.g., he or she gives you general advice about how to use the definite article).
- x It is *not* OK if someone makes so many changes to your paper that any part of it starts to become his or her work, not yours. There may be some confusion as to how many changes are too many. The assignment should be almost completely your own work (again, discussions with friends—if you have read the text—are fine).
- x It is *not* OK to take something written by someone else and simply to put it in your own words (unless you cite it, as explained above).
- x It is *not* OK to translate anything (including the text you are studying) from another language (such as Slovak or German) into English and then to pass it off as your own work. This has actually happened.
- x It is *not* OK to copy text from a different version or translation of the work we are reading and then to pass it off as your own work. This, too, has actually happened.
- x It is *not* OK to use the exact wording of any source (book, article, web page, etc.) without quotation marks and a proper citation indicating where the quotation comes from (author, title of the work, page number or web address).

The five situations above are all plagiarism.

4. *What if I accidentally plagiarize something?*

- It does not matter whether you intended to plagiarize or not. It is your responsibility to make sure you do not plagiarize. When in doubt, always contact your teacher for advice.

As I indicated above, however, teachers will not look for any tiny mistake in order to punish you.

If you use a few words from the text you are studying without quotation marks, it is quite reasonable to conclude that it is an accident. If you cite a sentence or two from the text you are studying, but forget to use quotation marks, that, again, is possibly an accident. In these cases you are guilty of plagiarism. However, the teacher may just give you a warning. To be safe, you should simply make sure such “accidents” never happen.

That said, if you regularly take long passages from the text without quotation marks, that is no accident. It is intentional plagiarism. Moreover, if you copy all or part of another student's assignment, it is also plagiarism. Claiming that you discussed it and then just accidentally wrote several identical sentences is not a plausible excuse.

Finally, if a student at BISLA allows another student to copy his or her work, that student is not guilty of plagiarism. However, that student is cheating and the penalty will be equally severe.

To repeat, whenever you are in doubt or if you have any questions, please contact your teacher (or, if appropriate, your tutor) for advice.