Plagiarism and its Consequences

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Different institutes and websites define plagiarism differently. But the one common notion is that plagiarism is an ethical offense in which one author closely imitates and uses ideas/thoughts of another author without giving appropriate reference. Plagiarism is an immoral act and a serious offense and has many consequences which has disturbed and damaged reputations of many authors since ancient times. *The Oxford English Dictionary* [5] defines plagiarism as "the action or practice of plagiarizing; the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another". According to *Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students* [1], "plagiarism occurs when you use another's words, ideas, assertions, data, or figures and do not acknowledge that you have done so".

Plagiarism is a crime because it is considered a theft- a theft of ideas or a theft of text. Using someone's hard work and dedication, and passing the work as your own is what constitutes plagiarism. Unethical use of other's work makes plagiarism a serious crime and hence is seriously condemned in every industry.

In India, plagiarism evolves mainly because of unawareness. People often plagiarise, sometimes deliberately and many times unknowingly. Many people don't know what plagiarism is and how bad the consequences may be. For example, using an image found on the internet and not citing it also constitutes plagiarism. This simple usage of images is often ignored while writing text. This unawareness regarding plagiarism lead to unfair practices. Students generally don't know how to use resources available and how to use them.

Plagiarism is quite common in schools but it is seldom identified and punished. Copying homework seems to be an easy way out for many students. This practice, when not caught and checked, seems to inculcate in them a habit to plagiarise. Continuing this habit, in colleges and other institutions, a student copies ideas from a research paper or a book, or copies assignments from other students. In college, assignment copying (from a friend or from internet) is one of the most common plagiarism seen. This attitude of attaining easy solutions (although ethically very wrong) makes the student lazy and careless. This way, the student does the job without enhancing his/her knowledge. Plagiarism, when identified, can lead to suspension and even expulsion in many cases and thus should not be taken lightly by students.

Some instances of plagiarism in colleges:
When a student copies the assignment or work directly from a book or research paper (published source), from other students (may be not published), or from internet (most common source now a days).

1. When ideas of others are used directly with additions of a few words to form a new text.
2. When different texts are merged i.e. making and presenting text by integrating various sources.

3. When other's work is improperly referenced. For example, definition is used in an article without using quotes even if referenced in the end. It will appear as if the definition is new and defined only in that particular article.
4. When one's own work done before is used to show current work. This is a form of self-plagiarism as one is using his/her own work.

Plagiarism may lead to very harsh consequences affecting the career of a student or a professional permanently. Some consequences may include:

1. The guilty student may redo the project with a reduced grade.
2. A fail grade may be given to the student indulged in plagiarism.
3. One further opportunity may be given if found guilty to resubmit the project within a specified time.
4. Academic probation and actions may be taken according to the degree of plagiarism and the committee members.
5. Expulsion may also be an action where very strict rules are followed, or in case a particular student is found guilty many times.

These actions permanently destroy the student and his/her academic reputation and haunt the student throughout his/her life whether he/she goes for a PhD, Masters, job or any other profession. In case of professionals, professional reputation is permanently damaged and the person may lose his/her job. Plagiarism therefore should not be taken casually.

To curb plagiarism and maintain an academic integrity, citing practice is followed in every research or project. Citing is an integral part of a research or a project since it

1. Shows the readers that thorough research has been done and various legitimate sources have been used to come up with this research.
2. Gives credits to other people without whose work the particular research would never have existed.
3. Gives the interested readers important sources which may come handy in further research.
4. Provides readers with various sources with which the reader may correlate and refer in case some prior understanding is required.
5. Showcases integrity and sincerity of a student presenting his work keeping academic ethics in mind.

Avoiding Plagiarism:

In general no student should ever copy and paste from any source. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to cite the sources used. In the body of the article or research, citations are used to refer to sources, and complete reference of all the sources used is provided in bibliography at the end. The sources to be cited may include printed sources (such as books), electronic sources (such as blogs), data (such as facts), images or recorded material (such as TV serials).

To cite electronic sources, one needs the author information (the author must be a known expert in the related field) and the date on which the information was last updated (because electronic information gets updated from time to time).

To incorporate and use other's ideas in one's own work, one may choose one of the following methods:

1. Quoting: Quotation marks are used directly around the words and source is cited. This is used when an important information (such as a definition) is to be used.
2. Paraphrasing: Paraphrasing is to state the source's central idea in one's own words. It may include change in structure, voice or parts of speech in the sentence.
3. Summarizing: It includes the source's identity and a summary of the whole idea of the source. The information is passed on neutrally (as source's perspective) without one's own biases.

Plagiarism is thus a serious offense and should not be practiced or promoted by any individual. It may ruin anybody's career and result in harsh punishments. It is good to practice healthy writing techniques, which are easy to follow once in practice. Thus, good writing techniques must be encouraged and promoted at every level of every institution, and defaulters must be suitably punished. This skilful writing will not only show dedicated work but will also earn academic and professional respect.

Every student, thus, should take plagiarism very seriously and should not indulge in plagiarism no matter what.

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