

## Department of Botany guide to the Rhodes University plagiarism policy

Plagiarism by students in the preparation of assignments, practical reports and research projects is a longstanding problem, and the University has an official policy, which is available in both the Calendar and the university web site (<http://www.scifac.ru.ac.za/misc/plag.htm>).

Plagiarism is defined as:

*Taking and using the ideas, writings, works or inventions of another as if they were one's own.*

In practice, plagiarism means citing or quoting the work of others without giving the source of the information. In its extreme form, this consists of copying someone else's work (from the literature or a fellow student) and passing it off as one's own. But note that copying a source verbatim or slightly paraphrased, even if the source is acknowledged, is also plagiarism – you cannot use another person's writing and take the credit! An increasingly common form of plagiarism these days is copying paragraphs or even whole documents off the web, and this is one of the main reasons why universities worldwide are clamping down on plagiarism. It is in fact often quite easy to tell whether students write in their own words. When something sounds "copied", it is not difficult to trace the source of the text to a website using a web search. In its less obvious form, plagiarism consists of copying or paraphrasing information from articles or books and not citing a reference. In practice, it is very easy to plagiarise, and it is often done unintentionally. Incomplete or unsatisfactory referencing is more likely to be a matter of negligence than deceit, and will in most cases simply be dealt with by subtracting marks.

There are thus several different levels of severity of plagiarism, taking into account the amount of text plagiarised and whether a student has a previous record of plagiarism. The university takes plagiarism in all its forms very seriously. Students who are found guilty of minor forms of plagiarism will be warned the first time, and penalised in subsequent cases. In more serious cases, such as intentionally copying another student's work, first time offences will be penalised, and repeat offences will be dealt with more severely. This document details the Botany Department's policy for dealing with cases of plagiarism. It outlines how the different categories of plagiarism are determined, how and by whom cases of plagiarism falling into different categories are handled, and what penalties are imposed for different levels of plagiarism.

All students are expected to know and understand the principles and implications of this policy.

### Disciplinary procedures for dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism

The Senate has approved various disciplinary procedures applicable to dealing with suspected cases of plagiarism.

- The first procedure (Category A offences) relates to first time, minor infringements. It is handled by the staff member who detects the offence.
- The second procedure (Category B offences) relates to repeated offences of a minor nature, or to first time, major offences. It is handled in the first instance by a Departmental Disciplinary Committee, provided that they deem the offence not to be such that it might suggest a penalty more severe than the loss of a DP.
- The third procedure (Category C offences) relates to situations relating to major infringements by students which the Departmental Committee deems worthy of prosecution by the Senate Standing Committee on plagiarism.

**Records will be kept of all instances of plagiarism.** Departments and Deans will keep records of offenders to enable them to identify repeat offenders, especially as they relate to offenders in more than one subject or across more than one Faculty. These records will also be forwarded to the Senate Standing Committee on Plagiarism.

In all cases falling into categories A and B the alleged offenders have the right to state their case before the Departmental Committee, and will be provided with written reasons for any penalties imposed on them. If after hearing such cases the Committee is satisfied that an offence has in fact not been committed, the Committee will withdraw the penalty and advise the staff member who laid the charge accordingly.

If the Committee decides that an offence has been committed, or where the alleged offender requests it, the alleged offender will be allowed to have the allegation investigated by the Senate Committee as though it had fallen directly into Category C. In this case the student is warned of the very serious penalties that might be imposed by that Committee. Please see the University calendar or <http://www.scifac.ru.ac.za/misc/plag.htm> for additional details.

#### Guideline to the categorisation of offences

This guide outlines what type of offence falls into categories A, B and C, and also lists the Botany Department's policy for penalties to be applied to each type of offence. These are a guide to ensure consistency, and the final penalty imposed can be increased or decreased depending on extenuating or mitigating circumstances for each individual case.

#### **Category A: First time and minor infringements**

Offence	Penalty
Copying from another student, where the extent of copying is more than 10 % of the text of the assignment. First offence.	Assignment is marked as normal. The assigned mark is reduced by 15 %. The resultant mark is halved for both the lender and the copier.
Direct lifting of one or more segments or blocks of text (from another student, a journal article, book or the web) without quotation marks and due acknowledgement. Paraphrasing a block of text but using the ideas of the author without acknowledgement First offence and <10% of assignment text.	Deduct marks in accordance with the extent of the plagiarism
Negligent referencing, first offence	Deduct marks as appropriate.

**Category B:** Repeat offences of a *minor* nature, or *first time major* offence

The Dean will be informed in writing of all category B offences. Repeated intentional plagiarism may result in the withdrawal of a student's DP for the course.

Offence	Penalty
Copying another student's assignment: Repeat offence copying >10% of text	Mark of zero for both copier and lender.
Direct lifting of one or more segments or blocks of text without quotation marks or due acknowledgement. Paraphrasing blocks of text without acknowledgement. Repeat offence and/or >10% of text.	Deduct marks up to 100 %.
Negligent referencing, repeat offence	Deduct marks up to 100 %, depending on extent and seriousness of the offence.

**Category C:** *Major infringements*

This category includes intentional plagiarism of more than half the assignment at postgraduate level, and repeated intentional plagiarism at any level. This category of offence will be referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Plagiarism. Category C offences are seen in a serious light and can result in a student being excluded from the university.

**Scientific referencing**

There is a standard way to reference scientific books, papers, web sites and other information sources for Botany essays, practical write-ups and other written submissions. All relevant literature must be cited in the essay text. This is a brief guide to citing references in the text and preparing the reference section at the end of your essay or report. You will notice in your reading of the literature that papers in different journals differ slightly in their conventions, for example the punctuation, use of abbreviations for journal names, etc. The important thing is to be *consistent* throughout the text. You should consult a recent issue of the South African Journal of Botany if you want more examples of how different sources of information are cited.

Citing references in the text:

When you are citing a fact or an idea from a book or journal article, you acknowledge your source as follows:

Smith and Jones (1995) consider this approach to be pointless and a waste of time.

OR

The approach of visiting the Rat and Parrot on a regular basis has been considered a waste of time (Smith and Jones, 1995).

Increasingly, web sites are used (but see note below), and these can be cited in the text like other references by giving the author and date. Where there is no author or date, use "Anonymous" and "no date" (see example below). It goes without saying that web articles

without an author or a date are in most cases not suitable material on which to base your scientific essays! If the website is published by an organisation (e.g. Cape Conservation Unit), the name of the organisation can be cited as the author.

It has been widely stated by early workers in the field that eating mushrooms is great fun (Anonymous, n.d.).

You may sometimes need to include more than one citation to support your statements. You should then list the papers in order from the earliest to the most recent:

A number of studies on the quality of food and service provided by various university residence kitchens have been undertaken (Frank and Furter, 1980; 1981; 1996).

OR (in alternative style)

Frank and Furter (1980; 1981; 1996) compared the quality of food and service provided by a range of university residence kitchens.

Sometimes, more than one paper by the same author published in the same year is cited. You deal with this in the following way:

A small but significant percentage of students was found to prefer drink to food altogether (Russian and Bear 1999a; 1999b; 2000).

When there are different authors, you should still list them from the earliest to the most recent. If the dates of two references are the same, these should be listed in alphabetical order.

There have been a range of studies that support the argument that junk food is the cause of student eating disorders (Ham and Burger, 1960; Hake, 1977; Tjips *et al.*, 1977, Nosh and Guzzle, 1993).

Some people list authors alphabetically. This is acceptable – *the important thing is to be consistent throughout the text.*

There have been a range of studies that support the argument that junk food is the cause of student eating disorders (Hake, 1977; Ham and Burger, 1960; Nosh and Guzzle, 1993; Tjips *et al.*, 1977.)

This above example brings an additional issue into discussion: where a paper has more than two authors, you cite the first author, followed by “*et al.*” (short for *et alia*, which means “and others”), which may be italicized (again, conventions differ and the important thing is to be consistent). However, in the reference section, you must list ALL the authors associated with that publication.

In order to avoid plagiarism, you should avoid quoting texts word for word, and try and re-phrase the key ideas in your own words. If you really have to quote another piece of work verbatim, put what you take from the paper in quotation marks, and provide the reference and page number.

There have been several excellent studies on the fine dining establishments in the frontier town of Grahamstown. To quote one worker “I have never experienced a finer ambiance or

better food than that which I was so fortunate to enjoy at Mr Burger" (Debonears, 1872; p34).

At the end of your work, all literature that you cite is to be listed in a Reference section. The format required by the Botany department is as follows:

### References:

These must be listed alphabetically (not numbered), and where more than one paper is cited by one author, these must be listed from the earliest to the most recent.

1. The example below shows how to reference a complete book. Note that the book title is either italicised or (if handwritten) underlined. The citation includes the name(s) of the author(s), the date of publication, the title of the book, the publisher and the city where the book was published.

Caroll, L. 1860. *Alice in Wonderland*. Mushroom Publishers, Berkeley, California.

2. Often, books comprise chapters written by different authors and edited by one or several authors. In such a case, you cite the author(s) of the chapter in the text, and cite the chapter in the reference section as follows:

Linder, H.P. 1998. Numerical analysis of African plant distribution patterns. In: C.R. Huxley, J.M. Lock and D.F. Cutler (Ed.s). *Chorology, Taxonomy and Ecology of the floras of Africa and Madagascar*. Pp. 67-86. RBG Kew.

Note that the book title (not the title of the chapter!) and any scientific names (genus and/or species) are either italicised or (if handwritten) underlined.

3. The example below shows how to reference a scientific paper. Note that the journal name (not the name of the paper) and any scientific names are italicised or (if handwritten) underlined.

Smith, A.B. and Jones, J. 1995. A new system of classification of the genus *Magnolia* based on modern methods. *Journal of Irreproducible Results* 12: 3-17.

The journal name is followed by the number of the volume (12 in the example above) and the page numbers (3-17). You should write out all journal names in full. You may use the *standard abbreviation* (not one you invented!) for all journals cited, but a mix of abbreviated and fully spelled out journal titles is unacceptable.

4. The following is an example of how to reference a web site.

Anonymous, n.d.: <http://www.literature.org/authors/carroll-lewis/alices-adventures-in-wonderland/> (accessed 20/09/2005).

You must give the address of the exact page that contains the information you are citing, not the main or home page. You should also state when you accessed the website. This is important as web pages are often updated, changed or removed altogether.

### A note on using references from the web

The web is a convenient way of accessing a mass of information on virtually every subject. This accounts for its increasing use by students in scientific essays and reports. However, it is important to be discerning in choosing information from the web to ensure that the “facts” stand up to scientific scrutiny. For every peer reviewed scientific article with authors and a date, there are thousands of sites of the type “Aunt Mabel’s orchid home remedies for hay fever”, supposedly scientific articles which are in reality advertisements, and so on. In many cases these do not have a traceable author whose affiliation and credibility can be assessed. Many student essays are full of such dubious references, which suggests that the student is either lazy or unable to select appropriate references out of the mass of available material. Neither scenario will earn you high marks.

In general, information cited in a scientific report or essay should be peer reviewed, i.e. it should come from a publication (usually book or journal) where the material is evaluated by scientists in the relevant field to ensure that the published material meets acceptable scientific standards. Even then, you should be critical of the conclusions reached! Always ask: what is the evidence? Is it presented in an objective way, or is there some other agenda? The primary, peer-reviewed literature is more likely to contain quality information than an anonymous website.

Many peer reviewed publications, e.g. scientific journals, are available on-line, and web-based research databases are a key tool for finding these articles. The library staff will assist you if you are unsure about how to use these electronic resources, which are available via the University’s Library website ([www.ru.ac.za](http://www.ru.ac.za) -> electronic resources). There are also websites where one can access research reports that contain quality information not necessarily found in the printed literature. Examples are the National Botanical Institute’s website, the Botanical Society’s Cape Conservation Unit and the Conservation Planning Unit at the University of the Western Cape. Websites with peer-reviewed educational material (e.g. The Virtual Plant) are also acceptable sources of scientific information.

Some essays require citing sources other than peer-reviewed literature in specific contexts. An example would be an essay about the impacts of a planned development on a certain vegetation type, where you might want to cite the developer’s website to show their arguments. You might need to cite a website of government policy, or a newspaper article relevant to your essay. In such cases you need to ensure that you cite these pieces as *opinion* rather than unchallenged fact.

The bottom line is: Just because it is in print, or on the world wide web, it is not necessarily true! An important skill you are expected to develop in your university career is to discern good science and sound argument from poorly substantiated arguments, opinion and “facts” that someone out there wants you to believe. If in doubt, leave out the web references and stick to peer-reviewed books and journal articles.