Plagiarism – What is it and how can I avoid it?

1. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which statements, ideas, illustrations, etc. are used in one's own work without the source being correctly indicated or without making clear how closely they correspond to the material used. This means that not only the omission, but also the incorrect indication of sources falls under plagiarism. Plagiarism is not a minor offense and can have serious consequences, up to and including expulsion from the university and the taking of legal action. Ignorance is not an excuse.

2. What are the different types of plagiarism?

There are different kinds of plagiarism. These include:

- submission of work that was written by a third person, under his/her own name
- submission of an old paper or thesis that has been graded
- rewording of text (indirect quote) from a source without stating the source
- not marking verbatim (direct) quotes
- taking over ideas, concepts, models etc. from other sources without stating this *correctly*

Most cases of plagiarism are based on ignorance. Therefore, examples are shown below to help avoid the incorrect citation of sources. For the construction of the examples, excerpts from KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY (1979) and LINDSTÄDT (2004) were used.

Verbatim quote without clear marking of the verbatim takeover

Example 1

Original (KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY 1979: 279)
Hence, the derived value (utility) function of an individual does not always reflect "pure" attitudes to money, since it could be affected by additional consequences associated with specific amounts.

Student paper
Therefore, the derived value function of an individual does not always reflect "pure" attitudes to money, as it could be affected by additional consequences associated with specific amounts (see KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY 1979: 279).

This is plagiarism! Although the correct source was named and the sentence was even slightly adapted, essential parts of the sentence were taken over word-for-word, and this word-for-word takeover was not identified as a direct quote. **Word-for-word quotations must always be identified as such by quotation marks.** This also applies if only *parts of sentences* are taken over directly. It must always be evident to the reader whether formulations have been taken from another source.

Correctly, the student paper should have read:
Therefore, "the derived value function of an individual does not always reflect 'pure' attitudes to money", as "it could be affected by additional consequences associated with specific amounts" (KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY 1979: 279).

Verbatim quotes should only be used in exceptional cases, i.e., when the exact wording is important (e.g., for definitions). In general, formulations from the literature should be paraphrased, i.e., reproduced in **one's own words**. If one verbatim quote follows the next in a student's paper, it is impossible for the reader to tell whether the student has understood the quoted text's contents. Verbatim quotations can therefore not be a substitute for students' own formulations.

Missing exact reference

Example 2

Original (KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY 1979: 279)
In summary, we have proposed that the value function is (i) defined on deviations from the reference point; (ii) generally concave for gains and commonly convex for losses; (iii) steeper for losses than for gains.

Student paper
KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY suggested that the value function (i) is established based on discrepancies from the reference point; (ii) is typically curved inward for gains and usually curved outwards for losses; (iii) has a steeper slope for losses as compared to the slope for gains.

This is also plagiarism! Although the two authors to whose work the student refers are named, and the corresponding passage from the original text of KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY (1979: 279) is paraphrased, no (exact) source is named. Thus, the reader does not know whether the student self-independently summarizes the work by KAHNEMAN and TVERSKY or whether a summary of the work by the authors themselves is reproduced by the student or whether the student reproduces a summary of the work by KAHNEMAN and TVERSKY from secondary literature, i.e., from another source. This means that even **if formulations from the literature are paraphrased, the exact source must still be indicated.**

Correctly, the student paper should have read:
KAHNEMAN/TVERSKY (1797: 279) suggested that the value function (i) is established based on discrepancies from the reference point; (ii) is typically curved inward for gains and usually curved outwards for losses; (iii) has a steeper slope for losses as compared to the slope for gains.

Translation plagiarism

Example 3

Original (LINDSTÄDT 2004: 497):
Diesen Effekt haben KAHNEMAN und TVERSKY bereits in der ersten Version ihrer Prospekt-Theorie beschrieben und ihm durch Einführung einer Wahrscheinlichkeitsgewichtungsfunktion Rechnung zu tragen versucht.

Student paper:
KAHNEMAN and TVERSKY already described this effect in the first version of their prospect theory and tried to account for it by introducing a probability weighting function.

This is plagiarism. The English source was simply translated into German, but not identified as a citation.

> Correctly, the student paper should have read:
>
> *KAHNEMAN and TVERSKY already described this effect in the first version of their prospect theory and tried to account for it by introducing a probability weighting function (see LINDSTÄDT 2004: 497).*

3. How can plagiarism be avoided?

Basically, there are two ways to refer to external sources in a paper:

(1) verbatim quotes (direct citation)
(2) paraphrasing (indirect citation)

Verbatim quotes are used when the exact wording of a phrase is important; paraphrasing is used when the exact wording is not important. **A paraphrase must differ significantly from the original, but the meaning of the quoted statement must, of course, be preserved.** By reproducing a passage of text in your own words, you can show that you understood the content of the passage in question.

There are various citation styles that specify the form in which a direct or indirect citation should be given. The binding guidelines of the Chair of HRM and Organization can be found in the „Formal Guidelines" which are available in German and English on the [website of the chair](#).

4. What other help is available?

The University of Tübingen Library offers a self-study course on proper citations and how to avoid unintentional plagiarism for students – both, in German and English. For more information, please visit the library's homepage or ALMA.

Sources

Kahneman, Daniel; Amos Tversky (1979): Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica* 47(1979)2: 263-292.

Lindstädt, Hagen (2004): Entscheidungskalküle jenseits des subjektiven Erwartungsnutzens: Ein Plädoyer für die Verwendung unterer und oberer Wahrscheinlichkeiten. *Schmalenbachs Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung* 56(2004): 495-519.