AVOIDING UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is when someone else’s work is passed off as your own. It may include:

- Using someone else’s words directly without accurately acknowledging their authorship (whether this is from a published source or another student)
- Using ideas from someone else’s work without accurately acknowledging their source
- Colluding with another student to produce the same or similar work
- Passing off someone else’s original work (e.g. a commissioned essay) as your own

Although you may be thinking that you would never be so dishonest, it is possible to commit plagiarism unintentionally. Unintentional plagiarism can happen if:

- You are not careful about recording details or note-making
- You do not learn how to cite references at university
- You do not fully understand the role that references play in your academic writing

These errors also put you at risk of committing poor academic practice. This is the term used when you produce work which may be fully referenced, but (for instance) relies too heavily on only one or two sources, or is generally too derivative (includes too many words quoted from other people and not enough of your own analysis and exposition), or is inadequately paraphrased (too close to the original).

Both plagiarism and poor academic practice leave you liable to penalties which may be determined at a School, Faculty or University level. These can range from a substantial reduction in your marks (or even a mark of zero) which can affect your final degree classification, to a formal misconduct hearing which may result in your being asked to leave the University.

Things you can do to avoid unintentional plagiarism

- **Read your feedback carefully** – if your referencing has been criticised, find out what you are doing wrong and put it right before your next submission. A ‘second offence’ may be treated much more seriously, even if it is for another marker.
- **Develop good note-making and record keeping practices** – be thorough and accurate, avoid doing ‘cut and paste’ research, read a paragraph then write in your own words what you have understood and how it relates to your assignment brief.
- **Find out when you need to use a citation** – acknowledge every idea you get from your research – not just direct quotes.
- **Understand how to use references to support your discussion** – referring to other people’s work and showing how it helped to build your own ideas is a way of sharing your research journey and situating your work in the body of work in your discipline.