

Hixon Writing Center Plagiarism Policy

The statement explains how the Hixon Writing Center (HWC) responds to possible instances of plagiarism in student writing that is brought to our tutorial or workshop sessions by students.

The HWC acts in numerous ways to educate Caltech students about working with the ideas and texts of other writers, including fostering discussions about the logics and varied methods of citation that academic writers use to cite sources. When tutors encounter unattributed language or ideas in a student draft that show signs of originating from a source other than the student author, we make every effort to talk with the student about the need to cite the sources of **all** language and ideas that are not his or her own. Our goal is to make sure students understand what citation is, how it works, and why it is necessary; we work to empower student writers with the knowledge that helps them to write with sources effectively and ethically.

The HWC does not report failure to attribute language or ideas to the Board of Control or faculty, and there are several reasons for this. First, we work with students on drafts, which are unfinished documents. While we strongly recommend that writers do not leave citation until the final stages of writing, many student writers still elect to do so. Next, we see the value in having a place on campus where a student struggling with issues of citation and/or academic honesty can come for education and open discussion. The Undergraduate Dean's Office and Board of Control agree about the value of such a space. Finally, readers' expectations for attribution vary meaningfully by discipline, genre, and assignment; only the professor who created an assignment can definitively assess if a student has met the expectations for citation established for that assignment.

A message for students:

While we will happily work with you to answer questions about how to cite your sources, the ultimate responsibility for attributing all language and ideas to their original authors lies with the writer of an essay, not with a tutor or any other outside reader. For the reasons stated above, a Hixon Writing Center tutor can never certify a paper as being free from plagiarism. Since conversations in the HWC vary widely in their focus, you should not see a lack of commentary about your citation practices as a tacit endorsement that they are correct. Some questions about citation may need to be directed to your professor, rather than to a HWC tutor. For more information about understanding academic citation and plagiarism, see our webpage: <https://www.writing.caltech.edu/students/plagiarism>

A message for faculty:

You should not view the fact that a student has discussed an essay with a Hixon Writing Center tutor as any kind of endorsement by our tutors of the academic honesty of the work the student ultimately submits to you. While we do talk with students about citation and plagiarism when it becomes relevant to our work with them, an individual tutor cannot possibly be knowledgeable enough to detect all problematic uses of sources in student writing across all disciplines. For more information about preventing and responding to student plagiarism, see our webpage: <https://www.writing.caltech.edu/faculty/plagiarism>