

General Advice on Self Plagiarism for Postgraduate Students

- and on submitting papers as an alternative to writing chapters in a thesis.

As all of you should be well aware, plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas or words without giving credit for authorship to the originator, and/or without seeking permission from the owner of any copyright that may apply to those words. This practice is a huge taboo in the sciences, and something that you must avoid in your publications, be they talks, posters, papers or your thesis. There are a few exceptions – generally known as fair usage. These include use of copyright materials for teaching or in a seminar private to your own institution, so long as this does not undermine sales of commercial teaching materials, being one. (See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptions-to-copyright#teaching>.) Although here you are exempt from copyright you should still give credit for the use of words or figures originated by someone else.

But many people are not aware that it is possible to **self-plagiarise**. As an obvious example, when you publish a paper, the journal in which you publish will usually require you to surrender the copyright, except for the limited fair use clause. If you were to reuse parts of that paper in your next paper without seeking permission, this would infringe the original journal's copyright. Publishing the same thing twice, even when you wrote the original, may help you develop a longer cv, but it amounts to wasting the scientific community's time both as readers and referees, and is sometime referred to as "recycling fraud". This applies equally to parts of a paper as to whole papers.

In your thesis, self-plagiarism is particularly frowned on, as the thesis is a test of your own ability to work as an independent scientist and to communicate your science independently. One reason for this is that very few papers from students in the life sciences are single author, and although declarations at the start of the thesis require you to point out the work of others, it is very difficult to be sure exactly which words were written by whom in a multi-author paper which may have been through draft iterations and changes. When you quote more than say a full sentence even from your own paper you must therefore put the text in quotation marks and refer to the paper and its authors. If you use a figure from a paper – even one you generated in its entirety, then put "also used in" and the reference. In general it is best to rewrite as much as possible, finding your own new words. The thesis allows a longer text than published journal papers with more detail in methods, additional figures that would usually be supplementary in a paper, and additional discussion.

Please note that if examiners are suspicious of plagiarism of any type they are asked to report it, and the electronic text of the thesis will then be examined using Turnitin software.

In principle you may seek permission from the degree committee to submit a thesis consisting of set of published papers bound into your dissertation with introductory commentary. In practice the current degree committees both for the Faculties of Clinical and Veterinary Medicine and for the Faculty of Biological Sciences **are very unlikely to give this permission** unless the papers are all single author or some other very pressing case is made, for the reason outlined in the previous paragraph. This would not (for example) include having limited time to spend on the thesis because of lack of extended funding or accepting an early job offer.

