

Self-plagiarism... What!?!

Is self-plagiarism a thing? Yes, it is, as odd as it may sound. And you should avoid it.

If you've written down your thinking or opinions or some research you've done, and later—for another course or in another degree program—you copy and paste (or paraphrase) some of your earlier writing into another paper, you have committed self-plagiarism **if** you don't properly credit yourself and your earlier writing.

REMEMBER: Avoiding plagiarism is all about properly acknowledging the sources you're using. And an earlier paper by you can be a source for a later paper by you. So give yourself credit! Cite your earlier paper just as you would cite any other paper or article you rely on in your current paper.

HOWEVER, if you're tempted to use a paper you wrote for a previous course (Hey! It's your paper; you did the work) to fulfill an assignment for your current course, stop and think again. **No,** you cannot re-title that old paper, maybe revise a few sentences in the intro and conclusion, and hand that in. Your professor and your classmates expect you to be doing new work in response to the course material. Handing in an old paper as if it is new is deceptive, dishonest, and unacceptable. It is self-plagiarism.

What you can do is build on that earlier paper, do some additional research and thinking and writing—maybe on a particular aspect of the earlier topic that you didn't address in the old paper. If your old paper provides some good context or background for the new paper, then you can use a little bit of the old paper for that purpose **as long as you properly cite your earlier paper**, just as you would any other source. And we should add, ... **as long as it's OK with your professor.**

In fact, those who go for a higher degree or a career in academia are bound to rely on their earlier work as they pursue their research interests. They are building on work they've already done, so they will, almost inevitably, draw from earlier papers they authored as they write up their ongoing research findings. There's nothing wrong with this. They just need to **properly document their source not only when it's someone else's work but also when the source is their own work.**