Plagiarism is using another’s work or ideas as your own. It is a type of cheating. You should never copy the words of a published work in your lab report. It should go without saying that copying from another student is also plagiarism.

Part of writing a lab report is thinking about what you’ve read and finding a way to present the information to suit the assignment. Lab assignments help you learn about the research process, how to do basic lab procedures, and apply the concepts you have learned in class to analyzing and writing about the results of your lab in an original way.

You will be expected to use these kinds of skills in many classes, and possibly also in your job.

The rules about plagiarism may be different at VCC than at other schools that you have attended. VCC takes plagiarism very seriously. The student conduct policy says that students who plagiarize will receive a grade of zero on the assignment the first time and be expelled from the college for a second infraction.

It is every student’s responsibility to be aware of what plagiarism is, and to avoid doing it.

This sheet will help you understand what plagiarism is and how you can write a lab report without plagiarizing.

**What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas as your own, without giving credit for the source of information. There are several different types of plagiarism. Some are more obvious than others. Some examples are shown on the next page.
Original text:
Cells are surrounded by membranes that permit some materials to pass through them, but exclude others. Thus, these membranes are termed SELECTIVELY PERMEABLE. The size of the solute particles affects the ability of some materials to cross the cell membrane. The rate of movement is affected by the temperature of the medium and the chemical nature of the molecules, particularly with respect to their lipid solubility. [taken from the Biology 0983/0993 lab manual]

Student A’s lab:
Cells in the body are surrounded by membranes that permit some materials to pass through them, but exclude others. These membranes are termed selectively permeable. The size of the solute particles affects the ability of some materials to cross the cell membranes. The rate of movement is affected by the temperature of the medium, the chemical nature of the molecules and their lipid solubility (MacKenzie et al., 1994).

Student B’s lab:
Cells’ membranes permit some materials and exclude others. These membranes are termed selectively permeable. A number of factors control the rate of diffusion, such as the size of the solute particles. Diffusion rate is also affected by temperature and the nature of the molecule (MacKenzie et al., 1994).

Student C’s lab:
Cell membranes “permit some materials to pass through them, but exclude others. These membranes are termed selectively permeable. The size of the solute particles affects the ability of some materials to cross the cell membranes. The rate of movement is affected by the temperatures of the medium, the chemical nature of the molecules and their lipid solubility” (MacKenzie et al., 1994).

Student D’s lab:
The selectively permeable membranes that surround cells act as gatekeepers. A number of factors influence the permeability of the cell membrane, including temperature, lipid solubility, and the size of the solute particles (MacKenzie et al., 1994).
**How can I avoid plagiarizing?**

Obvious plagiarism (like student A) can be avoided by not copying from a source material and handing in the work as your own. Never copy words from a textbook, lab manual, website, classmate or friend. Anything that you hand in for marks should be your own original work. If you only change the wording a little, it is still plagiarism. Putting together passages from several sources is also plagiarism.

While students will use the same standard template of a lab report (abstract, method, results, etc.); they should not use the same flow of information and organization in each section as another student. Lab partners will be writing about the same results, but this does not mean they will emphasize the same ideas in their analysis, or even necessarily draw the same conclusions.

Preventing accidental plagiarism (like student B) requires that you are careful not only in your writing, but also in your research. If you take good notes from your source materials, you will be able to write your lab without worrying about mistakenly plagiarizing.

Tips for note-taking to avoid plagiarism:

- Read the source material, and then make your notes based on your understanding. Don’t quote or copy large sections from your sources. Close your book (or look away) while making your notes using your own words.
- Never cut and paste from a website into your document. Take notes from the site as if it were a book, and then write your lab from your notes.
- Write the name of the source on the top of each page of notes.
- Write the page number for each note next to it.
- If you quote anything in your notes, write it in quotation marks.
- When you are writing your lab, you may want to group all your notes for a particular topic together, and write from these notes.
- Write your lab based on your notes rather than from the original source material.

Here is how these tips would come together in a student’s notes:

**Source Material:**

Cells are surrounded by membranes that permit some materials to pass through them, but exclude others. Thus, these membranes are termed SELECTIVELY PERMEABLE. The size of the solute particles affects the ability of some materials to cross the cell membrane. The rate of movement is affected by the temperature of the medium and the chemical nature of the molecules, particularly with respect to their lipid solubility.

When there is a net movement of molecules from an area of high concentration to an area of low concentration, the process is called diffusion. The net flow follows a concentration gradient.
A special type of diffusion through a semi-permeable membrane, called OSMOSIS, occurs when solute molecules cannot pass through cell membranes whereas water molecules can. The result is that water molecules move from a region of high concentration of water (low concentration of solute) to a region of low concentration of water (high concentration of solute). Depending on the net flow of water, a cell may expand, shrink, or stay the same size when placed in solution of varying solute concentration. [taken from Biology 0983/0993 lab manual]

Student notes:

Writing the reference in the proper format at the top of your notes makes writing your 'Works Cited' at the end of your lab easier.


Page 31  Selectively permeable: cell wall allows some things to get through, blocks others. Solute’s ability to pass through influenced by size of particles, temperature, chemical nature (lipid solubility)

Diffusion: movement from high concentration to low. “The net flow follows a concentration gradient”.

Osmosis: Type of diffusion through semi-permeable membrane. Solute can’t pass, but water can. In osmosis, water moves from where there’s high water concentration (low solute) to where there’s low concentration (high solute). Follows the concentration gradient.

Cell wall shrinks, expands, stays the same with movement of water (osmosis).

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Word-for-word copying is in quotes.

Keeping a record of the page numbers in your notes can help you to find a reference if you need to check it. Page numbers are also required when referencing a book or a lab manual in most scientific reference styles.

All of these notes are written in the student’s own words. This student has thought about the material after reading the lab book, and has found a new way to summarize what the authors wrote.

This student can write her lab from these notes without inadvertently copying the authors.