

VI CONCLUSION

Penalties or no penalties, the ultimate loser in any case of plagiarism must surely be the individual who commits it. More so than the ‘duped’ party (a teacher, editor, or whoever), it is the culprit who is cheated – cheated (by himself) out of a real education, out of a chance to learn or discover something new, and at the same time losing his own sense of integrity and self-respect (not to mention the respect of others).

Those of you who avoid plagiarism by conscientiously acknowledging the sources of all the ideas that you have borrowed are to be congratulated on doing the right thing. But take heed of this advice. If someone shows you how to borrow money legitimately instead of stealing it, this does not mean that you are thereby encouraged to borrow whenever you can and as much as you can. Remember that you should borrow only when you *need* to, and not just because loans are freely available.

When you write, do not forget that a borrowed idea (however good) is still a borrowed idea, and a piece of writing full of only borrowed ideas does not speak well for the quality and originality of the writer’s mind. If you come across a good idea or observation which is stimulating and insightful, or which is essential to the topic you are writing on, by all means use it (with proper acknowledgement). But, at the end of the day, you must realize that it is the quality of *your own* thoughts that counts, and not the thoughts of those whom you cite. And it is only through *having* your own thoughts – stimulated by the thoughts of others if you like – that you can grow intellectually.

So, cite other people’s ideas if you need to, but do so wisely and selectively, and always properly. Above all, *trust yourself*. In all the ‘great thoughts’ that you will ever read about, none is more fundamental than that true success comes only with self-reliance.