Dübendorf, 15 July 2020

Guideline for the Plagiarism Check Service

1 Purpose

1.1 «Any full or partial use of the work of others, without correct citation, constitutes plagiarism and is prohibited» [1] . Funders and publishers are increasingly conducting plagiarism checks for applications and manuscripts by default. If they do so, they use automated plagiarism detection tools that detect similarities between texts based on word sequences. The similarity-threshold of plagiarism detection tools can be very low (matches of as little as four words may be classified as plagiarism). Therefore, text passages (e.g. methods, lists of references) are sometimes wrongly classified as plagiarism. To help research and technical staff at the four research institutes within the ETH Domain to deal with this issue, Lib4RI offers a plagiarism check service. The purpose of this guideline is to set out the rules for this service.

2 Legal and ethical foundations

2.1 The Swiss Federal Act on Copyright and Related Rights (SR 231.1)[2] regulates the protection of authors of literary works, including scientific works. It states that published works may be quoted if the quotation serves as an explanation, a reference or an illustration, and the extent of the quotation is justified for such purpose. The quotation must be designated as such and the source given. Where the source indicates the name of the author, the name must also be cited.

2.2 The guidelines for good scientific practice set out by Eawag, Empa, PSI and WSL[1] identify the principles and rules for publishing research and indicate the procedures which will be implemented in the case of suspected misconduct, including plagiarism. These rules derive from commonly accepted norms and values in research.

3 Definitions

3.1 «Any full or partial use of the work of others, without correct citation, constitutes plagiarism»[1]. In particular, plagiarism includes the following practices:

i. «The author uses extracts from another author's work without citing the source.
ii. The author takes extracts from another author's work and paraphrases them slightly without citing the source.
iii. The author translates texts or extracts from foreign-language documents and submits them as his/her own work without citing the source.
iv. The author submits a paper in his/her name which he/she has actually commissioned another person to write.
v. The author submits the work of another author in his/her own name.
vi. The author takes an extract from someone else's work, paraphrases it and indeed cites the original author, but somewhere other than in the context of the extract»[3].

3.2 Any full or partial reuse of one's own previous work, without correct self-citation or indication of reuse, constitutes self-plagiarism and is to be avoided. If the copyright is transferred to another party (e.g. a publisher, journal etc.), self-plagiarism may be considered an illegal copyright infringement.

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[1] Eawag, Empa, PSI & WSL (2014) Scientific Integrity. https://www.psi.ch/de/integrity/dokumente.
[2] Federal Act on Copyright and Related Rights (1992/2017). https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19920251/index.html.
[3] ETH Zürich (2019) Plagiarism. https://ethz.ch/students/en/studies/performance-assessments/plagiarism.html.

3.3 A plagiarism check is a comparison of similarity between texts. It is usually done with a dedicated software that checks a text against a database of publications. The results are used to evaluate and decide whether a text contains plagiarism.

4 Scope

4.1 The plagiarism check is performed by Lib4RI. The service is available to all research and technical staff at one of the four research institutes within the ETH Domain. The service is free of charge.

4.2 Works of bachelor, master and doctoral students are primarily subject to supervision by the student's home university. However, plagiarism checks can be done, if the student's home university does not provide access to a plagiarism check service to the supervisor at the research institute within the ETH domain.

4.3 Authors may request a plagiarism check for their own work in the following cases:

    i.   An author would like to check whether the manuscript contains plagiarism prior to submission.

    ii.   A funder rejected an application on the basis of plagiarism.

    iii.   A journal rejected a manuscript on the basis of plagiarism.

4.4 In cases with multiple authors, any of the authors may submit a plagiarism check request subject to the conditions listed under section 4.3. To maintain transparency, requesting authors must inform [Eawag, Empa, WSL: all co-authors / PSI: the corresponding author(s)] about the plagiarism check in advance and share the results of it afterwards.

4.5 Requesting a plagiarism check for another author's work can create an environment of suspicion that is unconducive to collaborative research. Therefore, a plagiarism check request for another author's work requires the approval of [Eawag: depending on involvement: head of department, coach or, if both involved, another member of the directorate / Empa: the appropriate head of department / PSI: Directorate Support / WSL: Stab Directorate].

4.6 Supervisors or superiors are exempted from the requirement to seek approval (see section 4.5) when requesting a plagiarism check for the work of their staff. However, the requirement to inform the co-authors / corresponding authors is analogous to cases with multiple authors (see section 4.4).

5 Procedure

5.1 To submit their plagiarism check request, clients must fill in the form on the Lib4RI website and upload their document as a Word or PDF file there.

5.2 Lib4RI will review all requests, if necessary forward it to the relevant authority mentioned in 4.5, and inform the client whether their request has been accepted or rejected. If accepted, Lib4RI will run a plagiarism check using the software PlagScan.

5.3 It is important to understand that so-called «plagiarism detection software» does not detect plagiarism. It only detects similarities between texts based on word sequences. A human (i.e. the client) must evaluate the plagiarism check report and decide whether similarities between texts actually constitute plagiarism. This evaluation is not part of Lib4RI's plagiarism check service.

5.4. Lib4RI will deliver the results to the client within a few days as a Word and PDF file. An example of a PlagScan report is given here. The client is solely responsible for handling the results, evaluating the report and deciding whether the text contains plagiarism. Instructions on how to interpret a PlagScan report are given here.

5.5 A plagiarism check may only be done once for each text.

5.6 All comments, questions and concerns can be sent to publicationservices@lib4ri.ch.

6 Data protection

6.1 Data and documents sent to Lib4RI will never be shared with unauthorised third parties, internal or external.

6.2 After processing, data and documents uploaded to PlagScan will be erased from the PlagScan servers. For more information refer to PlagScan's Privacy Policy.

6.3 After processing, data and documents sent to Lib4RI will be stored on the Lib4RI servers. Upon request, Lib4RI will erase the documents from the Lib4RI servers. However, Lib4RI will retain the administrative data.

7 Responsibility and liability

7.1 All research and technical staff at the four research institutes within the ETH Domain are personally responsible for complying with the copyright law and guidelines on good scientific practice.

7.2 Clients are obliged to use the Lib4RI plagiarism check service appropriately and in accordance with this guideline.

7.3 Neither Lib4RI nor the service provider PlagScan can guarantee complete detection of all text similarities and cannot be held liable for undetected plagiarism.

8 Entry into force

This guideline is provisional and will be revisited after a trial period of one year. It is effective immediately.