How to avoid plagiarism?

A definition of plagiarism is given in the university’s official exam handbook, and this was what the 2006 Handbook for Candidates said:

‘Plagiarism is the use, without acknowledgment, of the intellectual work of other people and the act of representing the ideas or discoveries of another as ones own in written work…To copy sentences, phrases or even striking expressions without acknowledgment of the source (either by inadequate citation or failure to indicate verbatim quotations) is plagiarism; to paraphrase without acknowledgment is likewise plagiarism…the mere mention of the source in a bibliography shall not be deemed sufficient acknowledgment; each such instance must be referred specifically to its source. Verbatim quotations must be either in inverted commas, or indented, and directly acknowledged.’

This contains two key ideas: - use of other people’s material - failure to acknowledge such use.

It would be impossible to write acceptable essays without drawing on material from the publications you are expected to read, so total originality is not required. It would, however, be possible to write entirely acceptable essays without ever using identifiable verbal passages of another author’s work. If you do use them, there is no difficulty in giving acknowledgment, as long as you note the details you will need for that.

Some tips:
1. Always note full publication details [author, title, year] at the beginning of your notes on a book or article, and also note the page in the margin each time it changes. If you summarise an argument that spreads over more than one page, note the range of pages that you are summarising from.

2. Give references to your source(s), when writing, wherever you are drawing on identifiable sources; put them in right away, so that you do not forget where they came from.

3. Try to take notes in your own words, rather than copying out extracts of the author’s words. This is harder work in the short term, but a much better way of learning – and much better preparation for exams.

4. You will be expected to learn the technical terms of sociology, and to use them in your own work when appropriate. But it is not good practice to copy stylistic flourishes (however attractive!), or sophisticated words, in order to sound good; better to do it your own way, even if that is less polished or formal. Eventually, of course, you will probably with experience develop your own formal style.

See over for some examples (drawn from previous student essays for the Soviet Society block) of what constitutes plagiarism, with the evidence on their sources to show how those have been used and acknowledged, and alternative versions which avoid plagiarism.
1.

**Student essay:**
‘However, in the 1980s education became more differentiated and closely linked to the needs of a more sophisticated and specialised economy. In 1984 came the Educational Reform Act with an emphasis on industrial and scientific skills and much less significance on political indoctrination. The reforms of the 1980s played down such sentiments as collectivism and were replaced by a more individualistic and self-seeking orientation... there was now more emphasis on “pupils’ own activity and interest-centred learning...” (Lane 1992: 297).’

**Book by Lane:**
p.293 ‘In the 1980s education became more differentiated and closely linked to the needs of a more sophisticated and specialised economy. In 1984 an educational reform was enacted...’
p.296-7 ‘The emphasis in the curriculum is on industrial/scientific skills whereas “political” indoctrination is a relatively small part of the curriculum...The values of “collectivism” defined as ...the reforms of the 1980s have played down such sentiments, which are now replaced by a more individualist and self-seeking orientation.’

**Non-plagiaristic version of student essay passage:**
‘However, Lane (1992: 293) states that in the 1980s education became more differentiated, corresponding to the growth of sophistication in the economy. In 1984 came the Educational Reform Act, which he sees as emphasising industrial and scientific skills, giving much less significance to political indoctrination and playing down collectivism. These were replaced by “…a more individualistic and self-seeking orientation”... and there was now more emphasis on “pupils’ own activity and interest-centred learning...” (Lane 1992: 297).’

2.

**Student essay:**
‘...at this early stage of collectivisation, the passive resistance of the peasants threatened disastrous economic consequences. Disruption in the early months of 1930 seemed likely to jeopardise the Spring sowing and, alarmed, the leadership drew back.’

**Book by Acton:**
‘Even if active resistance could be crushed, passive protest threatened to have disastrous economic consequences... the disruption of the early months of 1930 seemed likely to jeopardise the spring sowing. Alarmed, the leadership drew back.’

**Non-plagiaristic versions of student essay passage:**
Wimp’s version:
‘As Acton (1986: 225) said, “Even if active resistance could be crushed, passive protest threatened to have disastrous economic consequences... the disruption of the early months of 1930 seemed likely to jeopardise the spring sowing. Alarmed, the leadership drew back.”

Red-blooded student’s version:
‘Acton (1986: 224-5) describes how the peasants actively resisted collectivisation, and the leadership faced a situation where even if that was suppressed their passive resistance could still have serious effects on the economy. In early 1930 the disruption was such that it looked as though the spring sowing would be in danger. In the face of that threat, the tactics were modified.’
How to avoid plagiarism: tips

Take full publication details [author, title, year] at the top of your notes.

Show specific pages in the margin of your notes.

Insert references to your sources whenever you have an identifiable source - and put them in as you write, not later.

Take notes in your own words, not the authors’.

Do not copy ‘good bits’ for stylistic reasons