

**Prompt:** Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment:

It is better to try to be original than to merely imitate others. People should always try to say, write, think, or create something new. There is little value in merely repeating what has been done before. People who merely copy or use the ideas and inventions of others, no matter how successful they may be, have never achieved anything significant.

Is it always better to be original than to imitate or use the ideas of others? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Essay:** Originality and individuality have always been key values stressed by higher education in our country. Imitation is used to learn the skill, but originality and innovation are expected from those who have mastered it. Indeed, the greatest inventions and progress have all stemmed from new, revolutionary ideas. Yet, against common belief, it is not always better to be original.

It is undoubtedly true that the vast majority of inventions result from novel research – that is why they are given their name “invention”. The printing press, antibiotics, gunpowder, the airplane, and the internet were all discovered by people who not only had ideas far ahead of their time, but also put these ideas into action (or came across something by accident). People who had accepted Newtonian physics for years had their entire reasoning process shattered when Einstein proposed his new theories of general and special relativity to give a new definition to “space-time”. There is no doubt that these trailblazers were remarkable and contributed much to the benefit of society; however, when personal benefit is put first, originality may only serve to hinder.

Not all people are as brilliant as Einstein or Galileo (and Galileo’s new ideas led to his being condemned by the church and forced to recant his views). For the common person, imitation is the best method of achieving success. We see this through our school system everyday: while teachers claim to want originality, there is always pressure to emulate the eloquent styles of world-renowned authors, or to copy the paintings of masters. Imagine if students only tried to say, write, and think original ideas. Nobody would ever achieve a passing grade in math or physics. Furthermore, original ideas, no matter how brilliant, may not be accepted by society. It is of no benefit to yourself to state a new idea if it only leads to imprisonment or your being shunned (though you may achieve “significance” or more accurately, infamy, in the long run).

There are many individuals who have become famous and admired through the use of others’ work, and disregarding moral qualms, this is obviously the way to go. In a free economy, there is nothing to stop us from capitalizing on the ideas of others (as long as it isn’t illegal). For example, Apple Computers developed the GUI software that allows us to navigate computers easily today, but Microsoft used this technology and made the most profits. Microsoft has continuously done this with other technologies, and no one can deny that Bill Gates has not achieved something significant. If it weren’t for him, the proliferation of the technology may not have occurred, though it was technically “available”. It does not only take genius to invent a new idea, but also to see that the idea takes root and is put to use.

Surely many of the names we remember in history are those of brilliant people who came up with innovative new ideas. However, this option is not available to the vast majority of the population simply due to incompetence. And people often forget another class, the ones who didn’t have any original ideas of their own, but who used those of others to bring success and fortune to themselves or their country – people like Cornelius Vanderbilt the railroad baron and Bill Gates the “thief” of Apple technology. There is no doubt that they have achieved something significant, simply by using the ideas of others. Originality is not the only means to self fulfillment, success, and international renown.