

ANTI-PLAGIARISM WORKSHOP

PLAGIARISM - AN INSTRUCTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Preventing plagiarism is an intrinsic challenge for many of us. Many considerations are important in ensuring our integrity as instructors as well as ensuring the student's integrity as learners (and future writers). In dealing with the problem of plagiarism, we need to consider our own ethics, the ethics of the student, and the ethics of our college/university/discipline.

When teaching your students about plagiarism, explain to your students that stealing is wrong. Stealing is morally and ethically wrong. And, for that matter, stealing is even wrong from a religious standpoint. Finally, stealing is criminal.

Explain to students: If you take a piece of text and claim it as your own (in the real world), you may be sued, fined, or put in prison. Further suggest to students: We have laws to protect individuals from theft of individual physical property, and we have copyright laws to protect individual authors from having their intellectual work stolen by individuals.

Before you begin, you (as the instructor) should consider some basic teaching tenets/ethics.

ANTI-PLAGIARISM CODE OF ETHICS

1. Consider that "meeting the needs of our students" is our primary concern.
2. Give your students the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible (especially on the first assignment...). You never know if a student has legitimate ignorance of the rules.
3. Never point the "finger of guilt" without evidence (assume the "innocent until guilty" perspective). You might find yourself involved in a lawsuit over a very small issue.
4. Do not "kill yourself" looking for evidence of plagiarism, and/or do not establish some sort of vendetta against the student (whom you suspect of plagiarism of a first-time plagiarism offense).
5. Plagiarism is stealing; therefore, consider that stealing is a petty crime. Treat plagiarism as a petty crime, until the student establishes a continual pattern of criminal offenses in your class (becomes a "repeat offender.")
6. Consider the student may be a "first-time offender." Use this opportunity to teach the student why you should not plagiarize (explain that it is illegal in the real world... and, in college, a student may lose their student-status, money, and pride).
7. Always tell your classes that you are willing to help them, and explain that you would take a "crappy paper" (and pass it) before you would accept a "plagiarized paper."
8. Always explain what plagiarism is (and give examples when possible).
9. Always explain the department/college/university policies on academic dishonesty and plagiarism with the students. And, be specific. Furthermore, take the time to talk about plagiarism to avoid the defense of "ignorance."
10. Recognize that plagiarism may be a "cry" for help (either they do not know how to cite, do not know how to write, or are in a position where they need help from an advisor...). Note: You

should not be a social worker, but refer the student to a social worker/advisor as needed. But, point to the proper channels for help.

11. When you have caught someone, you will not publicly or even privately humiliate them. You are a teacher/instructor, and your job is to help students not harm them.

12. Never persecute the entire class for the misbehavior of a few students (or even one student). But, cautiously teach the students what happens when you plagiarize and how to remedy the problem.

Now that you have the fundamentals, let's talk about plagiarism:

1. TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

Many Types of Plagiarism exist in the academy. Here are a few methods (which dishonest students typically utilize):

+ Paper Mill Papers (custom)

The student buys a paper online from a custom Paper Mill (a service which prepares a paper for the student based on the instructor's assignment/criteria, which are submitted by the student directly and purposefully). The student must supply the assignment to the paper mill authors; otherwise, the student may just submit the topic and the genre to the mill. Ironically, we can ask a student to revise the paper, and the student may actually pay for revisions or receive revisions for free based on their contract with the mill. In some cases, we may never know such a transaction has ever happened.

+ Paper Mill Papers (generic)

The student buys a ready-made paper from a paper mill; ready-made papers are either written ahead of time for a specific instructor or on a specific topic. In this case, a student can search through and preview papers before selecting and buying one. Such papers are ready-made and may be searchable through some anti-plagiarism software.

+ Free Papers

The student searches by topic/assignment on the internet then he/she locates an essay and downloads/copies the essay, which is usually available for free.

+ Piece-by-Piece Papers (General)

The student searches the internet for information on the topic/assignment. He/she copies and pastes the different pieces from different sites. Then, they assemble the paper with minimal effort to resemble the assignment.

+ Piece-by-Piece Papers (with Commentary)

Sometimes a student searches the internet for information on the topic. He/she copies and pastes different pieces of information from different sites, but they weave their own words into the words/passages from the internet (in an effort to reduce the workload).

+New Papers

Sometimes, a student writes a paper on a current topic, knowing that new material may not have been indexed to a search engine on the internet or anti-plagiarism search device. They may use newer things than are currently searchable.

+ Blogged (or Weblogged) Papers

A brother or cousin of the "Too New To Find" Piece is the blog (or weblog) paper. A blog or weblog is a type of website which is usually composed daily, weekly, or monthly. Blogs are sources for arguments, narratives, creative writing, and even some exposition. Since blogs are updated so rapidly, most search engines may not be able to search for such things. You need to consider this notion.

+ Friend's Papers

Sometimes, a student will often borrow (or even co-write) a paper with a friend and pass it off as their own. The friend may be in the same class (different section or instructor) or even a person from a previous semester.

+ Outsourced Papers (from a Stranger)

Sometimes, a student will ask someone (who has expertise in the subject matter) write the paper for them. Or, they may purchase a previously written paper from another student.

+ Fraternity/Sorority Papers

Oftentimes, fraternities and sororities maintain files of tests and successful papers/assignments from instructors. Sometimes a student will take these assignments (with or without permission from the group) and use it for the purposes of the class.

+ Co-Authored Papers

Students will often ask a person (even a loved one or family member) to co-write a paper (under the guise of "help"), although the family member will often be coerced into writing the entire paper (with little to no input from the student in the process of completing the assignment).

+Lying Papers

Students sensing a deadline (and who may not be skilled or apt to research) may instead write the majority of the paper but not use any sources. They just make things up. They fabricate data, support, authors, etc. And, while they may write the paper, the fabrication of information pigeon-holes them into plagiarism concerns.

+ Undocumented Sources Papers

Some students will not document their sources at all. But, for a paper to fit under the "plagiarism" heading, the student must use a majority of secondary sources without documentation and use most of the material as paraphrases. Furthermore, when a paper approaches (or exceeds) 50% of someone else's writing, you should really be concerned. Otherwise, you may simply have a case of "not knowing how to cite."

+ Not-My-Assignment Papers

Some students sensing a deadline may grab a paper (previously written for another class or written by someone else) and submit this paper instead of completing the assignment. While we often laugh when we see this type of submission, we must treat the assignment as a "plagiarized" work since it is not the assignment (and may not have been written by the student).

+ Other Professor's Papers

Some students may write a paper for another class and turn in this paper for your class. While some instructors are inclined to permit it, the bottom line is this: The student did not complete the assignment for your course; therefore, ethically, you should not award them credit. Consider this idea: What if everyone in the class did the same thing, then no one would have completed the assignment. You would be grading the same thing as another professor (a paper which might have been corrected and edited for another class already). So, my question is:

Where is the learning occurring? Furthermore, some schools have formal policies about this idea: A student may not submit an assignment completed in another class.

+Miscellaneous Plagiarized Papers

Some students may write a paper for another purpose (e.g., papers for religious speeches/lessons, papers for community outreach activities, papers for merit badges, etc.). You can usually find these papers by asking if the intent/purpose seems overtly dedicated to another audience and not the instructor.

2. PLAGIARISM BY SOCIAL SITUATION

Plagiarism is the product of several different socio-cultural conditions and life-based constraints.

Here are a few *generalizations (and/or stereotypes)* about students who plagiarize:

Class?

+Some "Rich/Affluent" students will typically buy papers (or "outsource" their work to others, use their membership in fraternity/sororities, and buy paper mill papers).

+Some "Poor/Impoverished" students will typically find free resources, have friends/family members write their papers, and/or recycle.

+ "Middle-class" students tend to not plagiarize as much as the stereotypical "rich" or "poor" students, since there is more of a stigma attached to being caught, punished, and losing money in their pursuit of a college education by middle-class families. Moreover, middle-class parents are more apt to condemn acts such as plagiarism in high school and middle school. We would expect the same conditions to carry forth in college.

Religion?

Surprisingly, students with devout religious beliefs will be less apt to plagiarize, although some do. Yet, the guilt which is often connected to less-than-desirable behavior such as sin/transgressions on others is readily associated with such acts.

Culture?

What are you kidding? Everyone, regardless of cultural background, may be a suspect.

Age?

Again, are you kidding? Everyone, regardless of age, may be a suspect. We have all seen the non-traditional student (or reentry student) take desperate measures to pass the course.

3. PLAGIARISM BY CONDITION

Who plagiarizes the most?

+Foreign/Second-Language Students (Many foreign students are not aware of the stigma associated with plagiarism. In their cultures, plagiarism, which seems to be borrowing, may be acceptable to a degree. But, don't kid yourself, not always... some cultures are very aware of plagiarism and discourage it strongly).

+Students with Time Constraints (Many students are often plagued by their own procrastination which forces them to plagiarize).

+Students Who Are Lazy

+Opportunists

+Students with Heavy Commitments (Students who are in college/university sports, who feel no sense of instructor connection or concern, will sometimes plagiarize)

+Students with access to previous assignments (oftentimes, sororities or fraternity members may have files from previous semesters).

4. TARGETS OF PLAGIARISM

When given the opportunity, a dishonest student will seize it. Common victims:

+New Teachers

+Graduate Students/Graduate Instructors

+Apathetic Teachers

+Lenient Teachers

+Older Teachers (who do not seem --to the student-- as being apt to use the internet or modern anti-plagiarism technology).

5. WHERE DO INSTRUCTORS MAKE MISTAKES

1. We rush into teaching secondary sources and source documentation at the beginning of the semester. In this case, students may or may not learn the appropriate way to use sources. The end result: Lower-level students will loosely apply the idea of using secondary sources, often assembling a "piece by piece" essay (without proper citation).

Solution: Find the right time to teach documentation. And, make sure you do it as well as possible.

2. We do not teach secondary sources soon enough. Sometimes, we neglect teaching students about using secondary sources too late in the game.

Solution: Again, find the right time to teach documentation.

3. Teachers do not have a few writing assignments which help the individual student to establish confidence in writing. We sometimes push students into doing work before rewarding them for simply doing the work.

Solution: Allow the students to write without sources. Find something easy, such as a narrative or autobiography.

Here's an analogy: A mouse moves for cheese. A donkey moves for a carrot. A businessman moves for money. What have you provided to your students, in order to make them move forward (positively)?

4. Teachers put too much pressure on the student. If you trap students, by requiring too many papers (too close together) and which are too long, you force students into doing things which they would not normally do... like cornering a wild animal.

Solution: Give the students plenty of time to complete the assignments. Try to be fair and equitable in assigning papers. Consider carefully length parameters.

5. Instructors are too lenient. If a student plagiarizes, then you must take action immediately. Metaphorically "Slapping a student on the wrist" does nothing but leave a temporary mark. You need to put the idea into their head that plagiarism is absolutely wrong.

Solution: Be bold. Let them know that plagiarism is very serious. Start by showing them the university guidelines for academic dishonesty and discuss possible repercussions.

6. ANTI-PLAGIARISM METHODS

Recognize that plagiarism is a matter of taking sentences, paragraphs, pieces of paragraphs, pieces of documents, and whole documents. You are looking for one or all of these levels of language when taking steps against plagiarism.

A. Search

1. Use search engines on the internet to search for Plagiarized Works:

1.1. Use a Search Engine on the Internet.

Note: Select lines of text from the work and search for them. Some engines allow you to put these lines into quotation marks (in the search field) for more specific searches.

1.2. We recommend to search for parts of a sentence (no less than 7 words) rather than a whole sentence. These types of searches seem to yield a more reliable return.

Note: Some search engines search by title, some by keywords, some by tags, etc. Not all search engines are alike. Different search engines use different things to categorize documents.

1.3. Be patient.

As in the case of "newer" material on the internet, you may need to wait a few weeks to do a search for the plagiarized material. At BasicComposition.Com, most of our material is catalogued on the internet in about four weeks (that is with a drive or push towards spiders/crawlers/robots). You can try researching for plagiarized material about five weeks later.

1.4. Use multiple search engines.

If you use one search engine, you may find a very limited return. However, if you expand your search, you may find much more documentation.

1.5. Focus on the Middle or the End of the Paper.

Sometimes, students who plagiarize by supplementing their own words or who tend to paraphrase without citation, tend to become lazy towards the middle to the close of their paper. We recommend looking at the middle of the document. We would search for this "middle" material first.

3. Use Anti-Plagiarism Software.

These computerized anti-plagiarism devices are fantastic for searching out plagiarized work. Moreover, they can provide some valuable insight into the nature of the plagiarism.

4. Share the Paper with Other Instructors

Sometimes, students tend to write papers and other teachers have seen them. If you cannot find the paper (but it seems to relate to any sort of standardized curriculum within your department), consider that it may have been used in another instructor's course. FERPA laws (currently) do not allow you to discuss grades unnecessarily (so don't). However, you can ask a teacher if they have seen a paper before... You might find the plagiarized paper.

5. Check the sources.

If you suspect fabricated data or other types of dishonesty, you might just check the sources.

6. Require some in-class essays (to be handwritten). Use these essays to gauge what you have and what you receive.

Note: Some teachers require one diagnostic essay in the beginning of the semester (to be written in class). You may use such tools to identify the level and scope of your students writing. In many cases, using a genre graded within the class can be very helpful (i.e., have the student write a very simple argument piece, then have them write a more refined paper for more credit later).

C. THE PENALTY SYSTEM

A good and ethical instructor may consider the "two" (or even "three") strike rule, although three strikes may be "giving into the student's will/desires." You should not punish first-time offenders stiffly.

+ Oftentimes, the first offense should meet with a slight reprimand (and thorough explanation of the problem, as well as specific conditions to rectify the situation).

+ The Second offense could meet with total failure (of the assignment, the class, or of the entire institution).

D. REPRIMANDS/PUNISHMENTS

Dealing with a plagiarized Work

Depending on your institution, department, or other governing body, you may have quite a few options (these are presented from Slight Reprimand to Punishment).

1. Partial credit
2. Redo the assignment (for Full Credit)
3. Redo the assignment (for Partial Credit)
4. Failure of the assignment/No Credit
5. Redo the course (with another instructor and issue a "Withdrawal" grade)
6. Failure of the course
7. Suspension from the College/University on Academic Grounds
8. Expulsion from the College/University on Academic Grounds

E. REWARD

You can reward students for not plagiarizing, although this sort of practice might not be seemingly appropriate to some. You CAN promise extra credit to students who do not have a documented history of plagiarism in your course (at the end of the course). Nothing is wrong with rewarding honesty and integrity.

F. THREATS

You can threaten students with immediate failure of the assignment on the first offense.

You can threaten students with immediate failure of the course on the first offense.

You (may be able) to threaten the student with immediate withdraw from the college/university based on your academic integrity policy.

G. DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGIES

1. Try Peer Grading (Swap Papers with Your Colleagues)

You can try not grading your paper. First, you might frighten students into not plagiarizing; at this point, the student does not know who is assessing their paper. Second, a fellow staff member might recognize a paper from your class. Either way, this practice helps.

2. Try Having Teachers Use Different Source Documentation Systems

Some teachers like one source documentation system, while other like a different source documentation system. Find balance between both preferences by allowing half of the faculty to teach one type of documentation system and allowing the other half of the faculty to teach a different one. When a student tries to plagiarize borrowing another assignment from another class, you will most likely be able to spot it immediately.

H. PROVIDE THE SOURCES

Have students write using the sources that you provide. Not only is this practice a viable educational experience which is measurable, this practice helps you to confine the possibility of plagiarism.

I. HAVE STUDENTS RESPOND TO READINGS

You can have students write explicitly about readings/essays used in your class. For example, if you are currently using a reader, you may ask students to respond to, argue with, and summarize these texts.

7. ASSESSMENT: DETECTING PLAGIARIZED PAPERS

We have learned a few things from linguistics and rhetoric.

Here is what we know:

1. Students tend to use patterns of behavior when they write (e.g., their logical skills and development of ideas are very limited until they are acclimated to the college culture).
2. Students have particular sets of skills (e.g., grammar, punctuation, etc.) when they come in the classroom (they may only know how to use certain types of punctuation in particular ways, or use only certain types of sentence structure).
3. Students only have a vocabulary of so many words (their base is obvious).
4. Students tend to use a particular kind of style (e.g., lengths of sentences, types of sentences, etc.).

Some teachers will consider a stylistic analysis (or even critical discourse analysis) in the most extreme cases of plagiarism.

We can look for these patterns and conditions in student writing, and we can tell if a paper is above the student's ability.

Additionally, to solidify our understanding of the student's ability, we can solicit diagnostic essays from students during the first week of classes.

These essays plus in-class-handwritten assignments may help us to judge the student's level of ability in writing. From such artifacts, we can normally tell if a student's writing ability has surpassed the norm.

Some drawbacks exist in such types of threat assessment:

- +Word Processing (with Grammar and Spelling Checkers)
- +Tutors (who proof the paper as a condition of their employment)
- +Writing Center Consultants (who proof the paper mistakenly)
- +Electronic Thesaurus/Dictionary Use

However, since most students who plagiarize rarely use these types of things, spotting a plagiarized paper becomes much easier.

Again, whenever possible, try to use a diagnostic essay.

Perhaps, you might even try requiring some handwritten, in-class writings which you collect from time to time.

Some instructors actually have handwritten mid-term and final exams. Just an idea.