

Discourage Plagiarism By Promoting Academic Honesty

A Proactive Approach for Teachers

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web site for this handout: http://kairos.wide.msu.edu/porter/teach_plagiarism.pdf
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You can reduce – not eliminate – the opportunities and incentives for students to plagiarize and discourage the practice by implementing the following:

1. Have a clear policy regarding plagiarism and academic dishonesty that you present early, discuss seriously, and implement consistently.

- MSU policy is ambiguous regarding “plagiarism” per se. Policy puts burden on instructor to establish clear criteria and expectations regarding academic honesty.
- Treat plagiarism and academic honesty as major course topics, especially in classes focused on writing or the teaching of writing; philosophy and ethics; and research methodology.

2. Recognize that plagiarism is complicated. It is a topic that needs to be taught (not simple knowledge that can be assumed).

- Distinguish between plagiarism, copyright infringement, and academic dishonesty, overlapping categories that co-exist alongside other overlapping (and often inconsistent) policies, guidelines, and practices (e.g., standards of research integrity, professional codes of ethics, publishers’ permissions guidelines, professional organizations’ citation standards).
 - Plagiarism is not the only form of academic dishonesty. (Receiving inappropriate help on a project is another form of academic dishonesty.)
 - Plagiarism and copyright infringement are not the same thing. (Some uses of text permitted under copyright law can nonetheless be acts of academic dishonesty.)
- Discuss paradigm cases → clear instances of allowable vs. illegal practices.
- Discuss problematic cases (the ethical gray area) → See Appendix 2 below.

- Discuss citation and bibliographical conventions (e.g., APA, Chicago Manual, MLA). Make sure students know how they work. Teach students the art of paraphrasing (vs. direct quotation). Discourage lengthy quotation.
- Distinguish between felonies and misdemeanors – i.e., serious and intentional breaches (e.g., buying a research paper) vs. minor and perhaps inadvertent editorial errors (due to careless copy/pasting or notetaking strategies).
- Explain WHY plagiarism is wrong, how it hurts not only the student and the integrity of the academic enterprise but also damages the integrity of professional work generally.
- Recognize that, despite codes, laws, and ethical injunctions, “what people normally do” (i.e., common practice) has a strong influence. Understand WHY students plagiarize, and how, from an economic standpoint, it makes sense for them to do that.
- Recognize that the Internet has its own developing standards and ethics for acceptable use: the codes for reuse and distribution of online writing are not necessarily those for print. Writing practices on the Internet ARE different, and plagiarism policies should account for those differences.

3. Design writing assignments and respond to student writing in ways that discourage plagiarism.

- Assign purposeful writing. Clearly identify relationship of assigned writing projects to course goals. (Don't assume that the instructional purpose of the assignment should be obvious.) Corollary: Avoid boring, senseless, trivial, unduly burdensome, irrelevant, or otherwise ineptly designed writing projects.
- Engage the students' writing process → Have students submit planning assignments, research notes, drafts, etc. and provide feedback on that work. (Note: Feedback doesn't always have to be individual. Group feedback can be useful.) Be involved in the students' writing process and interact with them throughout the writing process.
- Have students “go public” with their work through peer review, email postings of planning assignments, publishing papers (via the web), in-class oral discussion of papers, etc.
- Know your students' writing styles → especially through in-class writing (e.g., essay exams).
- Create contextually specific writing projects. That is, establish assignment parameters that are not easily replicable: e.g., specify audience, number and type of sources, particular sources (or types of sources), particular methodology. The trick is to set parameters that make sense in terms of course goals and yet permit students some latitude in pursuing questions/topics of interest.
- Design assignments to address current issues in a field or brand new topics (on which nobody has yet written very much) → 9/11 papers in Fall 2002; the effect of the US Patriot Act on public policy. Or design assignments that call for original empirical research (e.g., interviews, first-hand observation, surveys).
- Allow students to pursue significant questions and explore interesting (to them) topics.
- Avoid the end-of-the-semester Monster Research Paper (15 doublespaced pages, 25 sources, open topic, unclear context) → the kind of assignment which requires students to do a ton of work for very little perceived reward in the form of learning or (probably) instructor feedback.
- Assign several shorter assignments instead of one larger assignment. (Q: Do the course goals require a major project? Or can the goals be met just as well with a series of shorter assignments?)
- Employ portfolio grading → have students submit notes and drafts for the project, not simply the final product. Grade the entire process, not just the end product.
- Vary assignments from semester to semester. (Or, if you want to use the same assignment, then have students turn in, and you keep, a second, “archival copy.”)
- Follow up on cases of suspected plagiarism (with colleagues; with published sources; via Internet search).

4. Stress a positive ethic of collaboration and acceptable use of others' work/writing (vs. a punitive approach). Stress the necessity of an ethic of fair use in a community of researchers and scholars.

- To be effective writers, students should:
 - Consult and use other sources of information (but learn the conventional methods for crediting those other sources of information).
 - Collaborate with others (but recognize the difference between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" collaboration in academic and professional contexts).
 - Credit others' contribution to their work (in conventional and appropriate ways).
 - Understand the laws, ethics, and policies that guide appropriate use of others' work or written material.
- Encourage students to be honest and forthright about their use of others' work/writing. (When in doubt, students should ask instructor's permission, ideally early in the writing process.)

Appendix 1. Four Basic Ethical Principles of Copyright and Use of Others' Writing

- You should credit others' contributions to your work. You should not claim, as your own, work that you have not done.
- You should be willing to share your own work with others to promote the development of knowledge and the good of society.
- You should use others' work, in appropriate ways, to inform your own work. In some cases, the Fair Use clause of copyright law allows you to use others' work without asking their permission (e.g., for purposes of critique and education). In other cases, you must have the author's permission to use their work. In some cases where law might allow you to use others' work, ethical considerations require that you ask permission.
- If you have doubts about whether or not you are using your own or others' writing ethically and legally, ask your instructor. Follow this primary principle: Be up front and honest about what you are doing and about what you have contributed to a project.

Appendix 2. Problematic Cases for Discussion

In each scenario, identify whether the writer's actions constitute an instance of: (a) plagiarism, (b) academic dishonesty, (c) copyright infringement, (d) some of the above, or (e) none of the above. In each situation, adopt both the instructor's and the student's point of view to determine: (a) What can/should the instructor do in response to the situation? and (b) What can/should the student do in the first place to avoid or correct a problem?

- Jennifer, a graduating MSU senior, pastes a version of the MSU logo as a graphic on her resume (both the print version and the electronic version), which she sends out to potential employers.
- Jim, a graduate student in English, recycles his senior undergraduate thesis paper for use in a graduate course. The original paper was the student's own work. However, Jim submits the paper in nearly its original form, with only minor revisions.
- Jenna asks her roommate to proofread a paper that she is submitting in her ATL Tier I writing course. The roommate provides extensive proofreading corrections and some stylistic suggestions as well (including recommending different phrasing for some passages).
- A history teacher discovers that one of her better students, Mike, has used direct quotation in a paper (an entire sentence), but without using quotation marks. Mike did, however, identify the source for the quotation in his bibliography – which makes the teacher wonder whether it is an act of intentional or accidental plagiarism.
- A writing teacher gets a paper from one of his weaker students, Charles, at the end of the semester. The paper is much better stylistically than anything Charles has written so far in the semester (very few grammatical errors, but does have some; stylistically fluent and mature), and the teacher very much doubts that it is Charles' own original work. The teacher checks on the Internet to try to find the paper (or pieces of it), but is unable to find clear and compelling evidence of plagiarism.
- A teacher asks students to create a web page of annotated sources on a given historical topic. Jane locates a web page with an interestingly distinctive layout and uses that web page template as the basis for her own assignment. She collects and annotates the historical sources on her own, but she "borrows" the HTML coding pertaining to the format and typography of the page.
- In his technical writing graduate course, Heping recycles a report that he wrote as part of his job as an automotive engineer. Because the report data are proprietary, Heping changes the technical specifications and the budget numbers, substituting fictional data.
- Jorges belongs to a Usenet group that discusses the effects of recent federal and state legislation on the work of environmental scientists. (a) In a research report written for an ES graduate class, he borrows some of the general ideas discussed in that group, presenting them as his own ideas without referencing individuals or the group at large. (b) In a research report written for an ES graduate class, he quotes specific

individuals from the group, indicating their names and using appropriate conventions for quoting sources as specified by the instructor. However, he does not ask their permission to quote their postings.

- I. Jean collects survey information from her fellow graduate students in educational psychology, and uses that information as the basis for a graduate research paper. (The survey asks participants about their sexual behaviors as well as about their attitudes toward sexuality.) Jean gets oral permission from the students to use the information they have provided (she uses it anonymously), but she does not clear this research with the University committee on the use of human subjects or with her course professor.

Appendix 3. Resources

Resources on Plagiarism and Academic Honesty (WRAC web site, developed by Dànielle DeVoss)
<<http://www.msu.edu/~wrac/t1/plagiarism.html>>

Avoiding Plagiarism (Purdue University OWL)
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html>

Thinking and Talking About Plagiarism (Nick Carbone)
<<http://bedfordstmartins.com/technotes/techtiparchive/ttip102401.htm>>

Bibliography of Plagiarism Research in Writing/Composition (Rebecca Moore Howard)
<<http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/articles.html>>

Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers (Robert Harris)
<<http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>>