



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

How to Discourage Plagiarism

Somewhat surprisingly, it's not only struggling students who plagiarize: indeed, it may be students who are under pressure to achieve who are more likely to engage in the subtler (and harder to detect) forms of plagiarism¹. Researchers have identified three situations where this is most likely: when students are under pressure (such as when work must be done with a tight deadline, or a work is particularly important for their grades); when students are not interested in the work; and when students feel that the assignment is unfair to the point where they have no hope of success without cheating².

The study "The Plagiarism Spectrum" identifies ten distinct forms of plagiarism³:

- *Cloning*, where the student submits work entirely copied from (or written by) someone else, is the most common and most severe, but also often the easiest to detect.
- *Control-C* is similar except that it contains a mix of copied and original material.
- *Find and Replace* is where material is copied but some words or phrases are altered to avoid detection.
- *Remixing* is paraphrasing other material and stitching it together so as to look original.
- *Recycling* is re-using one's own work and presenting it as new.
- *Hybrid* plagiarism mixes cited and uncited material.
- *Mashup* is where several different sources are copied without being cited.

The final three forms do not fit precisely into the traditional definition of plagiarism, but are relatively common forms of academic dishonesty:

- *404 Error* is when a student cites non-existent sources.
- *Aggregating* is using properly cited sources in a student's work that adds no additional material.
- *Re-tweeting* is when a work is cited and presented as being paraphrased, but the paraphrase is too similar to the original text.

1 Richard Perez-Pena. Studies Find More Students Cheating, With High Achievers No Exception. New York Times, September 7, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/08/education/studies-show-more-students-cheat-even-high-achievers.html?_r=0>

2 Jason Stephens. Why Students Plagiarize (webcast). <http://pages.turnitin.com/Plagiarism_45_Recording.html>

3 The Plagiarism Spectrum: Instructor Insights into the 10 Types of Plagiarism. Turnitin, May 2012. <<http://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2012/05/10/turnitin-analyzes-the-spectrum-of-plagiarism/>>



Queens College, in New York City, has developed a series of practical guidelines to help discourage plagiarism.

- Limit assignments to a few specific topics.
- Assign particular features, like "compare and contrast" or personal observation.
- Insist that students use both online and offline resources.
- Combine writing assignments with other related tasks; for example, ask students to keep a journal of the writing process in which they discuss their research, explore the topic and thesis, and even discuss any challenges they faced while completing the assignment.
- Set a schedule whereby students submit an outline, the introduction, portions of the text, research summaries, conclusions etc., by a certain date. Students could work on each of these sections in peer review groups.
- Ask students to prepare a list of references used, along with a brief summary of each and an indication of where the resource was acquired.
- Have students share their writing in groups, do peer reviews, submit writing to discussion forums, or even publish their writing on the Web. Broadening the readership of student writing heightens the risk that plagiarism will be discovered.
- Use class discussions as opportunities for students to share what they've learned as they've researched and written their assignments.
- Grade the assignment to reflect the writing and research process, as well as the final paper.
- At the beginning of the school year, distribute an integrity certificate that defines plagiarism, emphasizes the seriousness of the offence (and how it is counterproductive to the development of research and writing skills) and outlines penalties that will be imposed. Have students sign and return this document.
- Implement procedures that make plagiarism more difficult. Rather than simply asking for a final project, ask to see all of the different steps in a project, from research or brainstorming to the outline to the rough and then final drafts. You don't necessarily have to mark each one of these steps, but insisting that they be handed in gives more opportunities to catch plagiarism and makes it more difficult.

Source: Adapted from "How to Discourage Plagiarism" from Writing at Queen's College. Used with permission.

