

# Strategies to Discourage Plagiarism

Summary prepared by Angie Best, IDC Coordinator

## Starting a Discussion with Students

*David Glassco, Associate Professor, Department of English Literature*

The first step with students is to make them aware of the reasons why we as faculty take plagiarism very seriously. It is dishonest. It is theft. The integrity of our language is crucial. One of the most important awareness strategy that faculty can employ is communicating to students what a university education is about; that is, the process of learning. The learning process helps students define a sense of self, *S'exprimer*, as the French say; one learns language to express oneself. If you present this argument to students, you can demonstrate how dangerous it is for them to take over another's language; it weakens the sense of self with each adoption/adaptation of another's words.

## Prevention Strategies

*Elaine Scharfe, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology*

There are several great Internet sites that outline strategies instructors can use to try to prevent plagiarism. Below I have summarized some of these ideas.

1. Ensure that the assignment goes beyond describing ideas by requiring students to engage and apply theories and data (Hinchliffe 1998). Include an analysis component in the assignment criterion to demonstrate, in a tangible way, that the student's intellectual contribution is worth a considerable portion of the assignment's grade.
2. Avoid generic essays by assigning narrowly focussed topics (U of Alberta 2003). This strategy may prove successful in eliminating most "Paper Mill" papers since their topics tend to be quite general in nature.
3. Require specific components of the paper (Harris 2002). For example, specify the structure of the introduction and conclusions. If you require a specific structure to one or more components of a paper, the occurrence of plagiarism will be easier to detect through shifts in writing style or the failure to meet specific requirements.
4. Assign topics that are relevant to current events (U of Alberta 2003). For example, have students select a newspaper article and evaluate the accuracy of the evidence or theory presented in the article. As a critical thinking exercise, the students would write a letter to the editor about the article they analyzed.
5. Include and evaluate the writing process; have meetings about the paper early on in the semester or ask students to hand in proposals, outlines, and/or drafts of the paper (Harris 2002).
6. Require an oral report (Harris 2002) or poster presentation. For example, a presentation of four critical thoughts in a research paper will require the student to distill and present information in a concise manner.
7. Ask students to reflect on the writing process (Hinchliffe 1998). This strategy can provide the instructor with a sense of which students are progressing, procrastinating, or having difficulty.
8. Include specific instructions about references, or restrict references by year or content (Harris 2002).
9. Critique a paper from a "Paper Mill" (U of Alberta 2003).

10. Use class time for peer review of earlier drafts (Leland 2002).
11. "Change the paper topics each time a course is offered" (U of Alberta 2003). If changing topics each year is not feasible, keep copies of previously submitted papers and inform students that you are doing so.
12. Ask students to hand in copies of their sources (U of Alberta 2003).
13. Clearly outline the penalties (Harris 2002). Early in the term, have a conversation with your class about what constitutes plagiarism and why it is important.

### **Assignments to Prevent Plagiarism**

*Elaine Scharfe, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology*

1. Respond to an assigned reading (Stone 2002).
2. Apply theory to own experience (Mensink 2002).
3. Research the accuracy of "science" presented in the newspaper and write a letter to the editor.
4. Analyze a difficult paragraph, theoretical passage, or model (Diepeveen 2002).
5. Write an abstract for an "anonymous" paper (Willison 2002).
6. Describe a career of a famous psychologist (author, chemist) using her/his publications.
7. Evaluate the accuracy of a lay person's web site.

### **Additional Prevention Strategies**

*Martin Boyne, Director, Academic Skills Centre*

1. Provide students with some scope to define their topics. Students are less likely to plagiarize if they are interested in the topic they have chosen (Leland 2002).
2. Require students to include an annotated bibliography (Harris 2002).
3. Emphasize the importance of independent thinking and critical thought in the process of constructing a thesis for a term paper.
4. Ask the students to consider the purpose of the paper and the audience before they start to write.
5. Take the opportunity to discuss the proper citation of sources and note taking with your students (Harris 2002).
6. Engage in a summary or paraphrasing exercise with your students.
7. Have students submit an example of their writing so that you may assess the student's individual level of diction, prose and thought to compare subsequent assignments.

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