

Faculty Guide to Preventing Student Plagiarism

by the 2007–09 Plagiarism Committee, Southern Illinois University

Proactive Measures

In addition to suggesting guidelines for responding to acts of plagiarism, scholarship on plagiarism suggests a number of proactive measures that individual instructors can take to reduce the likelihood of both intentional and unintentional plagiarism¹:

1. Communicate a clear plagiarism policy to students, one that clearly defines plagiarism and describes procedures for addressing plagiarism in accordance with the University's policy;

(Research indicates that students rarely know their institution's plagiarism policy and at least half of them do not have an adequate understanding of what constitutes plagiarism.)

2. Help students understand how to appropriately quote, paraphrase, and summarize sources of ideas, organization, and expression that students intend to incorporate into their work and how to correctly cite and reference these sources;

(Many scholars believe that most plagiarism is unintentional, and research indicates that it derives from an inadequate knowledge of how to quote, paraphrase, summarize, and cite sources.)

3. Provide students with tips when taking notes, such as always putting quotation marks around quoted material; always including full reference information for each source; always clearly indicating the source of each note taken; not considering note taking as simply highlighting text or cutting and pasting material from the Internet but as an

¹ While the reduction of plagiarism is an important goal, it should not be the primary goal of any pedagogy. Clearly, learning outcomes for each course and its assignments should be the first consideration. The proactive measures outlined here are not intended to supersede learning outcomes. On the other hand, the proactive measures listed here do reflect teaching practices recommended by findings of educational research.

important process of selecting what is important and what is not; and taking time to summarize and paraphrase source material, putting it “in your own words”;
(Many students have testified to rarely, if ever, taking notes on their reading or in preparing a writing assignment. Many assume that simply copying information is the same as note taking.)

4. Help students see that using sources in creating texts means bringing together information from multiple sources (source synthesis);
(Most students think that the way one reviews sources—say, in a literature review—is simply to summarize each source individually, even if multiple sources come to the same conclusions.)

5. Be specific about expectations of students with regard to collaboration with classmates and others on particular assignments;
(Some instructors approve of students working together, while others do not. Some students assume that such collaboration is acceptable.)

6. Recognize that students from non-Western cultures may have different concepts of authorship and little or no training in how to use sources and therefore may need extra help in avoiding plagiarism;
(Research indicates that students from Asian, Middle Eastern, and African cultures often have been taught to write in ways that include activities that are considered plagiarism in Western cultures.)

7. Discuss with students the importance of scholarly ethics (academic integrity): how it assures that we acquire accurate information and knowledge and reduces the risk of spreading misinformation, and how it assures that researchers and scholars are fairly recognized for their accomplishments;
(Many students will have never heard the phrase “academic integrity” before and will not know what scholarly ethics consists of. Many models of success beyond the academy

involve actions that either are unethical or would be considered unethical within the academic context.)

8. For major writing assignments or other projects, allow time for students to submit drafts of their product for your feedback and for their revision, based on your feedback;

(Instructor feedback is a highly effective mode of teaching, and allowing students to revise written assignments and other projects enhances the chances of student success.)

9. For writing assignments, expect some “patchwriting” (developmental plagiarism) that is unintended, and allow time for revision of patchwritten texts;

(Research indicates that patchwriting often occurs when writers are uncertain about how to adequately paraphrase and are novice writers making an effort to seem expert on a subject.)

10. Make certain that students understand the relevance of each assignment, and make sure that each assignment is relevant in order to assure student motivation to complete the task;

(Educational research is very clear that motivation is a crucial factor in learning. Scholarship on plagiarism also suggests that students are considerably less likely to intentionally plagiarize if they are internally motivated to accomplish an assignment.)

11. Perhaps contextualize assignments in order to more clearly focus on the relevance of an assignment to the students’ future work in the academy and/or in the workplace;

(Assignments that appear more “authentic,” more like “real-world” tasks, more relevant, tend to motivate students to not intentionally plagiarize.)

12. Allow students plenty of time to complete assignments and maybe even teach time management strategies;

(Inadequate time management is a commonly recognized reason for intentional plagiarism. Even when students are not otherwise tempted to plagiarize, if they do not

allow themselves enough time to accomplish their assignment, they may, then, be tempted to intentionally plagiarize.)

13. Recognize that some students will have low self-efficacy (that is, a lack of confidence in their ability to complete an assignment) and will need an instructor's expressions of confidence that they can successfully complete the assignment;

(Low self-efficacy has been shown to be a factor in intentional plagiarism. Students who feel they cannot adequately accomplish an assignment—or succeed at an assignment enough to receive a desired grade—are more likely to be tempted to intentionally plagiarize.)

14. Discuss with students how plagiarism is easily detected, especially plagiarism from online sources;

15. Do not assume that all students mean to intentionally plagiarize; try to establish and retain respect and trust between instructor and students.

(Students who believe that their instructors will ignore plagiarism are more likely to plagiarize than students who worry about getting caught plagiarizing. Instructors need to let students know that academic integrity is important to them. At the same time, developing an atmosphere of respect and trust between instructor and students can be crucial to effective student learning.)