

Skills students need to avoid plagiarism in academic writing

Student writers need many skills: reading for information; organizing their information to make a strong case; using appropriate language; spelling correctly; managing their time and so on. All of them are important.

Here, the emphasis is on skills **that ensure the person marking the paper is never in doubt about whose work they are assessing**. A student who is skillful at all the actions listed below will be 'doing their own work' and will be gaining full credit for researching and organizing information. More importantly, the student will be learning and showing their learning through the work they are creating.

Before they start writing, students need to be able to

1. **locate** others' ideas, words, thoughts and discoveries through researching sources
2. **evaluate** information they find via research to decide
 - which are useful and relevant for the task
 - which are reliable and valuable for the task
3. **take notes** from sources that record others' ideas and thoughts, either verbatim or in summary form. They must include information that allows them later to connect the notes and the original source
4. **select** skillfully from amongst their collected notes and jottings to identify
 - which statements, ideas and discoveries need a citation
 - which are 'common knowledge' and belong to everyone
 - which must be cited verbatim (such as passages with a unique word)

As they are writing, students need to be able to:

5. **summarise** others' statements and thoughts in ways that captures the most important points
6. **paraphrase** others' words, keeping the meaning but not too similar to the original
7. link information from the notes to specific points in the writing, usually with **in-text citation**
8. **weave together** a variety of others' ideas and discoveries

9. use a range of strategies for **signaling to the reader which ideas and conclusions are the student's own** (e.g. *'In conclusion, I would argue that....'*; *'As a result of these actions, a strong case can be made for concluding.....'*; *'The text says X. My own view is...'*)
10. **signal someone else's ideas** are being used to support the argument (e.g. *'As Brown (2002) argues that police responsibilities extend to'*)
11. **indicate the use of others' words** (e.g. hanging indents, quotation marks, italics) *'Brown (2002) states, 'it is the responsibility of the police to.....'*
12. keep signaling to the reader where their own words stop and start and where others' words and ideas stop and start
13. create a readable, smooth piece of writing.

To comply with academic requirements, students must:

14. select an acceptable **referencing system**
15. **apply the conventions** of the selected system consistently and accurately, both within the text and at the end in reference lists.

Ideally, over time, the student does all these things in a way that demonstrates his or her own unique 'voice'. This will be easier if

- the student reads other people's writing where similar skills are displayed
- gets timely, specific feedback from teachers which stresses what the student needs to do to make their work closer to these requirements
- has plenty of opportunities for safe practice.

All the skills listed will be harder to develop if the student has any characteristic that makes writing difficult. These include, for example, working in a new language, dyslexia, lack of experience in reading texts for meaning, and lack of practice. Students in these categories will need more help.

A further complication might derive from students' previous academic experience where different kinds of writing were encouraged and valued. The student must unlearn these.

Task: in 3's

Identify where and how university Librarians actually are actively involved in developing students' skills in carrying out these functions and where else they might be involved.

ELEMENTS IN A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO STUDENT PLAGIARISM

Think about your own university.

Put an X by the elements that are in place; XX if strongly in place

Put an O by the elements that are lacking.

1. Understanding 'the rules of the game'

What is expected in university study; academic regulations about citation and attribution; how grades are set etc

2. Teaching the student the skills they need as learners

Writing, researching, problem solving, etc

3. Designing out easy cheating opportunities

Not setting tasks that have already been solved, with only one answer, where the answer is easy to find.

Not re-using tasks that have been set before, or where the students can easily find someone who can answer etc

4. Designing in ways of monitoring + checking students' activity

Checking 'Who did this work?'

Checking 'Has the student started the work yet?'

Checking 'Is the final result the same as the work observed in progress?'

5. Creating a culture where markers are willing to detect and report cases

No 'blind eyes' being turned. Markers willing to improve their spotting skills for work that is not the student's own

6. Using a range of detection strategies

Proactive and reactive, electronic and based on sharp eyes

Making sure you do not accidentally disadvantage some groups

7. Procedures that do not penalise the 'whistle-blower'

Creating reasons why someone who spots plagiarism should take action.

Removing obstacles to taking action

8. Agreeing what makes a proven case

Not requiring too much evidence

Sticking to the 'balance of probabilities'

9. Dealing with cases quickly, consistently, defensibly

Resources

- “Undergraduate Cheating: who does what and why” Arlene Franklyn Stokes and Stephen Newstead in Studies in Higher Education vol 20 no 2 1995 pp 159-72. [This paper is one of the first to look at academic misconduct in Britain.]
- “Guilty in whose eyes? University students’ perceptions of cheating and plagiarism in academic work” P Ashworth, P Bannister and P Thome in Studies in Higher Education Vol 22 no 2 June, 1997 pp 187-203 [Describes how differently students and teachers see plagiarism and why students choose to cheat.]
- Plagiarism: a Good Practice Guide** by Jude Carroll and Jon Appleton, 2001. Published by JISC as part of their project (see below) A pdf version is available on <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/pub01/brookes.pdf> (Dec 01) [The first half of the Guide covers teaching and learning approaches; the second half discusses how to deal with cases fairly and lists institutional responsibilities for handling plagiarism well.]
- “Cut-and-Paste Plagiarism: preventing, detecting and tracking online plagiarism” Lisa Hinchcliffe, May 1998 <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~janicke/plagiary.htm> (Dec 01) [This paper takes a more overtly staff-development line, aimed at the academic reader]
- Cyberplagiarism** <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/> (Dec 01) [A really good site, written in plain English and addressing the issues of e-plagiarism especially.]

Detection tools

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) commissioned a technical study on the software available in this area, reporting the findings in July, 2001. for reports of the project which includes technical reviews of source code detection software see <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/mle/plagiarism/>

<http://www.google.com> will search for and extract text that most other search engines miss (e.g. many pdf files). Most people use Google to do a blanket search. Graham Alsop and Chris Thompsett, writing in the August, 2001 edition of Educational Developments, comments, “ If you are confident that part of the work is plagiarised then using Google is a good place to start. The advanced search facility allows you to look for exact matches to strings of text. It does not extrapolate your search”. (p. 15)

<http://Plagiarism.org>

...asks you to register then offers to check submitted work against other similar work on the Web. This system was tested at five UK HEIs under the JISC project (see above). **FindSame** at <http://www.findsame.com>. went offline in October, 2001) and will relaunch as a commercial package (date unknown)

<http://www.plagiarism.com>

uses the Glatt Plagiarism Screening Programme which offers either a self-teaching package to help students learn not to plagiarise (probably only useful for postgraduates) or a package that removes every fifth word from the document. It then times how long it takes the student to replace them and how accurately the task is done. It claims this will detect plagiarism.

CopyCatch detects collusion by comparing essays in a student cohort, looking for shared material. For information, contact davidwoolls@copycatch.freereserve.co.uk tel: 01608 662068. David has sold the package to many UK Higher education departments.

<http://www.turnitin.com/> is a commercial site that provides a report within 24 – 48 hours. The report offers sites from which the suspect material might have been drawn. The same is offered by <http://www.howoriginal.com> . <http://www.canexus.com/eve/index.shtml> offers a free trial download programme. This checks essays in progressive word strings. Can be very slow but many people really rate it.

<http://www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm> lists more than 150 “paper mills” including free sites, pay-per-page “services” and categorises sites by topic and disciplines. <http://www.essaycrawler.com> offers 35,000 free essays “...so you can get done and get on with your life”.

Decisions and questions: their link to plagiarism

Students often ask themselves questions when they start thinking about the work you give them. Their individual answers to these questions – and more – will shape how each student does the assignment or task you set.

You will deter students from plagiarism more effectively if you take their decisions into account.

‘Fake it or make it?’

- Should my energy go into finding the answer that someone else has made? Or should my energy go into making my own answer?
- Has someone already done this task I have been asked to do? Or if not exactly the same, something similar?
- Can I find something similar or a something that matches the task relatively easily?

‘How does the task fit with the rest of my life / course?’

- If I don't do this task, what will suffer? If I do the task, what will suffer?
- How hard is this task to do?
- Can I do a ‘good’ answer / paper etc (or even a ‘good enough’ one)?
- Do I have the skills? Do I have the time to do it? Do I have access to necessary resources to do it?

‘Is the task worth doing?’

- Does the effort required match the value I will get from the work?
- How organised do I have to be to tackle this?

‘Will someone catch me if I do not do it?’

- What are the chances that I will be identified if I fake it or pass off someone else's work as my own?
- If I am identified as faking it, what will happen?
- How often is someone checking that I am doing what I have been told to do?
- Are the penalties (if I am caught) enough to worry me?

'Crossing the line': make up your own mind

The teacher says: *'Choose one of these 3 companies and investigate the advertising campaign the company you choose has used in the past two years. Write a report that evaluates the campaign's impact and make recommendations for future campaigns. Do your own work. Hand in an individual report.'*

Three students do what is listed below in this order.

You decide: When do they cross the line between **collaboration and sharing** and **'submitting someone else's work as their own for credit?'**

1. Discuss the task with other students.
2. Look at past examples of similar student reports. Discuss together what is good and bad about the other students' work.
3. Decide to do the assignment on the same company.
4. Decide to all do a bit of research on advertising campaigns in general (*who designed them, impact, cost, etc*) but to have specialists who really go into depth on one aspect. Everyone to make notes.
5. Brief each other orally on each student's research on advertising campaigns in general. Tell each other about useful sources of information and which sources were especially good.
6. Exchange copies of each others' scribbles and research notes.
7. Delegate someone who is really good at information retrieval to collect information on the chosen company's advertising campaign(s). Share it.
8. Identify the important headings and structure for the final evaluative report.
9. Share out the writing task for the report. Each student writes one or two sections of the report. Everyone contributes to the 'conclusion' section.
10. Combine the sections. Each student takes the draft away and writes an individual version of the final report. No person changes more than 5% of the other students' work.
11. Each student submits his final report and signs a statement that this is *'an individual report and my own work'*.

Skill needing development	Activity, case study or problem
Locating others' ideas	
Evaluating the authority of sources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an imaginary task [<i>An essay on inter-country adoption</i>] 2. List seven sources of information (a refereed journal article, a Wikipedia entry, a newspaper article, a text book, a neighbour's story, a web site offering adoption help, a blog, an article in a woman's magazine like <i>Cosmopolitan</i> etc) 3. Ask student groups to rank them and justify their decision. What criteria are they using? 4. Compare answers. Give your own answers.
Where is a citation needed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find a page of text with no more than 3 in-text citations in a subject close to the one they are studying. 2. Retype the text and remove all the in-text citations 3. Ask students to find the [x number of] places where a citation is needed. Explain why. 4. Compare answers. Give your own. Talk about it.
Common knowledge?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List 10 sentences where five need citation and five are 'common knowledge' 2. Ask students to sort them. 3. Compare answers and discuss. 4. Get the students to draw up criteria for differentiating between the two. Write it up and hand it to them.
Paraphrasing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a short text and three paraphrases of the text : two OK and 1 not-OK. Can they spot the 'not-OK'? 2. Provide a short text and three paraphrases – one OK and one not-OK and one not easy to classify. Can they rank them? 3. Provide a short text. They write a paraphrase. You collect and redistribute. 4. In groups of four, classify their colleagues' attempts (for example, OK, not OK, in the middle) 5. All tour and review the efforts of other groups (and safely notice how their own work was treated). 6. Can they improve their colleagues' 'not OK' efforts?
Correctly citing words Correctly citing ideas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide incorrect examples of both. Can they fix them? 2. In four groups, ask them to write 'Do's and don'ts' for each. After two minutes, rotate the papers and keep adding. Two minutes and rotate, keep adding and correcting. Rotate again. Post and discuss.

A Chinese proverb:

*I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand*

Where do the students in your courses spend most of their time: Hearing? Seeing? Doing?

If someone walked into your courses, what would they see and hear?

- you talking most of the time (80% or more)?
- students doing most of the talking (80% of the time)?
- you telling the students things they need to know?
- students spending most of their time using and applying information to their own problems and concerns?
- students spending most of their time on examples and problems similar to their own problems and concerns?
- students sitting behind computer terminals?
- students sitting in chairs, probably in lines?
- students sitting in small groups (3 or 4) from the start of the session?
- you asking the students a question every five minutes or so?
- students answering the questions you ask?
- all* students answering the questions you ask (rather than 1 or 2 only)?
- students thinking hard before they answer questions (i.e. not answering immediately)?
- students working individually on tasks you set them?
- students working in pairs on tasks you set them?
- students working in small groups on tasks you set them (e.g. about 4 people) ?
- you providing key information (i.e. things they must remember) in written format?
- you creating special handouts for the students?
- you giving students written information that is standard for all library users?

What does a 21st Century librarian look like?

Joyce Valenza is a secondary school librarian in Pennsylvania, USA. She maintains a huge and lively Web presence <http://mciu.k12.pa.us/~spjvweb/> that shows how she and her teacher colleagues built a team, pulled students into the Library and transformed how they use it. She describes the process in a long PowerPoint presentation which includes audio and video accounts from students. <http://mciu.org/~spjvweb/november.ppt>.

On 26 July 2006 in her blog, Neverending Search, [<http://joycevalenza.edublogs.org/>] Joyce posted her ideas on the changing role of educational librarians. She asks:

“What should we [school librarians] be doing right now? What should we be planning for? **What does a 21st Century librarian look like?**”

She then offers a list of characteristics she would expect to see which I have slightly modified in line with her final statement (“Please feel free to add and edit!”) to make it more applicable to an international audience and tertiary educators. This is how she suggests you spot a 21st Century Librarian:

1. “You make sure learners and teachers can **access databases, portals, and websites** that help them develop and are appropriate for their curricula.
2. You think about **what you can do that Google cannot** and what you can do that cannot be outsourced to Bangalore.
3. You know how **to create a blog or website to pull resources together**; you organize the Web for learners.
4. You consider your role to be **‘info-technology scout’** for the new information and communication tools used in business and academia then translate their use for learning and help classroom teachers use them.
5. You think ‘outside the box’ about **“collection”** [to include, perhaps] ebooks, audiobooks, open source software, streaming media, and much more!
6. You use new **technologies for interaction** [for example, materials suggestion forms, book review blogs, online calendars, etc.]
7. You know this is only the beginning of **social networking** and plan educationally meaningful ways to incorporate student excitement (and your own) for social networking.
8. You [advocate] **interactive and engaging communication tools** for student projects: digital storytelling, wikis, podcasts, streaming video
9. You promote **reading** and explore downloadable audio books. You (and your students) are creating digital booktalks.