

Creating Assignments That Discourage Plagiarism¹

Plagiarism is often viewed as an issue to be confronted after an assignment has been turned in, but instructors can effectively head off plagiarism before students enter the classroom—during course planning. Most instructors agree that the majority of students do not plan to plagiarize when they first hear about an assignment, or even in the weeks that follow before the due date. Most strategic plagiarism occurs the night before an assignment is due, when cold reality has set in, and the student realizes there is simply not enough time to do the work before class time. For this reason, creating plagiarism-proof assignments can do the double work of discouraging dishonesty and also helping students improve their approach to assignments.

The following suggestions overview several ways instructors can enhance assignments and discourage plagiarism.

Avoid open-ended topics. When students have few guidelines or parameters for choosing topics the temptation to plagiarize increases. Some instructors will narrow subjects to the local, asking students to explore issues within the institution, town, or state. Other options include

- *Providing a list of possible topics, with the option to discuss others with the instructor
- *Narrowing topics to a particular issue or set of issues, with parameters for currency and level of narrowing, or connecting possible topics to a theme (perhaps brainstorming ideas as a class)

Break assignments into smaller stages. Create a multi-tiered approach to high-stakes assignments (this practice actually reduces grading time for the final project and increases instructor satisfaction with students' efforts). Students might write a "topic exploration" in which they brainstorm ideas for writing topics and narrow to one or two topics. Then, they might turn in a draft of an essay using 1-2 sources before the longer, "final" piece is due (requiring at least one draft before the final can serve the same purpose). Conferencing early in the research process, with individual students or in small groups, can lessen the likelihood of plagiarism and help students gain feedback early. *Consider choosing a time after which students cannot change their topic for the assignment.*

Other ideas include

- *Assigning a source summary or Annotated Bibliography before the assignment is due
- * Integrating an oral presentation before assignment is due (or at same time)
- * Finishing with a post reflection or "meta-learning essay," in which students reflect on their research and writing (what problems did you face, and how did you address them? What research strategy did you follow? Where did you locate your sources? If you had more time, what aspect of the assignment would you continue to develop?)

Ask students to use class materials or class discussions as sources. This approach ensures that students tie their writing more closely to the course material and has the added benefit of increasing students' interaction with course texts.

Provide source guidelines. Be specific about the number and types of sources students should use in their research. Perhaps be as specific as naming journals or web sources that students should consult.

¹ Assignment suggestions adapted from: Burwell, Hope, and William L. Kibler and Jessica A. Keir. Cheating and Plagiarism Using the Internet. PBS Teleconference. April 2003.

Ask for photocopies of sources. Depending on the level of research in the assignment, photocopying sources could be a heavy request. You might ask students to turn in only a copy of the pages they cited from in their work, or from the two or three most important sources in their research. (Be sure to let students know about this requirement at the start of the assignment)

Further Resources:

Burwell, Hope, and William L. Kibler and Jessica A. Keir. Cheating and Plagiarism Using the Internet. PBS Teleconference. April 2003.

Clark, Beverly Lyon. "Plagiarism and Documentation: A Self-Instructional Lesson." Teaching the Research Paper: From Theory to Practice, From Research to Writing. Ed. James E. Ford. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995. 286-298.

Dornan, Reade W., and Lois Matz Rosen and Marilyn Wilson. Within and Beyond the Writing Process in the Secondary English Classroom. Pearson Education Group: Boston, 2003.

Harris, Robert. The Plagiarism Handbook. Pyczak Publishing: Los Angeles, 2001.

McCabe, Donald L., and Gary Pavela. Ten Principles of Academic Integrity. College Administration Publications. 2002. August 18, 2003.
(<http://www.collegepubs.com/ref/10PrinAcaInteg.shtml>).

Palmquist, Mike. The Bedford Researcher: Bedford St. Martin's, 2003

Reid, Stephen. The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.