

Forestalling Plagiarism in Student Papers: A Writing Short-Take

40% of undergraduate students recently surveyed admitted to having plagiarized written sources in the past year; 38% said they had plagiarized from Internet sources. Nearly half of these students considered such cheating trivial (*The New York Times*, 3 September 2003).

The following are three types of tools that instructors can hone and apply to forestall plagiarism in student papers. The “bumper stickers” *inform*, *reform*, and *transform* provide a mnemonic device by which to remember the tools.

Inform

Inform students about plagiarism. Don’t assume that they know either what constitutes plagiarism or why plagiarism is a serious offense. Instead,

- **Define plagiarism for students.** (Texas State UPPS 07.10 defines plagiarism as “the appropriation of another’s work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one’s own written work offered for credit.”)
- **Describe various types of plagiarism:** downloading or copying an entire paper, “plagiaphrasing,” failing to give credit to a source or adequate information in the citation, and relying too heavily on the vocabulary or sentence structure of a source.
- **Explain why plagiarism is a serious academic offense and what penalties may be assessed.** In an essay entitled “College Thinking,” former Texas State administrator Dee Sellars writes, “Theft of ideas is the most heinous crime in academics since the ideas are the only products professors have.” Sellars adds, “There is little mercy for either crime in academics.” Discuss with students potential academic and/or disciplinary penalties for plagiarizing.
- **Examine with students one or more examples of plagiarized work.**

Reform

Reform classroom practices to deter plagiarism.

- **Create paper topics that are specific to the perspectives you have offered in lectures or the class has discovered during discussion.** Rebecca Moore Howard of Syracuse University suggests that too often “We expect authentic writing from our students, yet we do not write authentic assignments for them.”
- **Change paper topics often** if you continue to teach the course.
- **Offer students examples of acceptable documented quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.**
- **Specify due dates for component parts of students’ papers** as they proceed through the process of researching and revising—e.g., a bibliography, hard copies of Internet or journal sources, paper drafts. Consider using a portfolio or notebook approach like Pat Shields’s, and check the portfolio or notebook along the way.

(OVER)

Transform

Help to transform the campus culture.

- **Reference the Texas State Honor Code on your syllabus, and include the faculty pledge:** “I recognize students’ rights and pledge to uphold the principles of honesty and responsibility at our University.”
- **Devote class time early in the semester to explaining the meaning and significance of the Honor Code.**
- **Require students to write the student pledge by hand on every paper they submit:** “I pledge to uphold the principles of honesty and responsibility at our University.”
- **Routinely require students to submit their papers to TurnItIn**—but do not rely on TurnItIn as a substitute for other, more organic tools for forestalling plagiarism.

For additional information and suggestions, see

Council of Writing Program Administrators, “Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices.” January 2003. 25 October 2004 <<http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/index.html>>.

J. D. Landau, “Teaching Tips: Understanding and Preventing Plagiarism.” *American Psychological Society Teaching Tips*. 25 October 2004 <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/teaching/tips/tips_0403.html>.

University of Alberta Libraries, “Preventing Plagiarism.” 2004. 25 October 2004 <<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/preventing/index.cfm>>.

Prepared by Sue Beebe
Director of Lower-Division Studies
Department of English
Texas State University-San Marcos

October 2004