

Guidelines for Plagiarism Prevention

I. Explain what “plagiarism” means

Of course, most students will tell you they already know what plagiarism means. But do they really understand the difference between a legitimate paraphrase and a plagiarized one? Or between a proper citation and an improper one? Spending some time during the beginning of the course to explain plagiarism may go a long way toward preventing future problems.

You may also wish to distribute examples of plagiarism and legitimate citation, and then go over the differences together. This will clarify some of the common misconceptions about plagiarism and reduce the likelihood of “honest mistakes,” while at the same time showing how serious you are about the issue. Finally, you can direct your students to our website, where they can take a [quiz](#) on the difference between plagiarism and legitimate citation.

II. Explain what’s Wrong about Plagiarism

Without instruction, it may be hard for your students to understand the seriousness of plagiarism. Their response is often: “How can copying some words actually hurt anyone?” But the reality is that plagiarism is an act of fraud that involves both stealing (another’s intellectual property) and lying (implying that the work is one’s own). This undermines the principles of trust and respect that make education possible. But when they plagiarize, students hurt more than just their instructors and the person from whom they steal. They also hurt themselves, because they fail to acquire the research, analytic, and writing skills that they would have learned by doing the assignment honestly. Finally, plagiarism also victimizes those classmates who have legitimately earned their grades and degrees, and who will be competing with the plagiarizer for school admissions and jobs.

III. Make the Consequences Clear

Students often do not know just what they risk when they plagiarize. Begin your course by establishing a clear policy on plagiarism. Give very specific information about the penalties involved. You may want to create a specific policy for your courses in addition to your institution’s general policy. Try telling your students, for example, that any case of plagiarism will result in immediate failure of the paper, and that a second instance will result in failure of the course and possibly expulsion, will doubtless make them think twice about it. Be sure to cite your policy on any research assignments as a reminder

IV. Start off with Clear Expectations

First, let your students know you expect them to produce thoughtful, original work. Students are often under the illusion that the goal of their assignments is to collect the best information possible. Explain to them that while good research is critical, you are even more interested in their ability to transform the information they find into an original and persuasive argument than in their ability to come up with the most or best sources. The skills they learn in working to further the ideas and arguments of others are a valuable part of what they will take away from their assignments. Knowing this may help them understand the value of original work.

You may also want to establish some rules in advance: Should your students collaborate? Will you require separate “works cited” pages and bibliographies? How many sources will they be required to consult? How many sources will they have to include in their paper? Will online sources be sufficient, or would you like your students to find printed material as well? Starting off with clear guidelines will prevent most of the confusion that leads to unintentional plagiarism, and allow no excuses for the intentional kind.

V. Assign Specific Questions or Topics

Provide a list of topics or questions that you would like your students to address in their papers. The more particular the questions, the less likely that your students will find papers already written on them. If you worry that lists like this restrict your students’ creative freedom, you might want to add an option that allows your students to develop their own topics in consultation with you or a teaching assistant.

VI. Require Students to Submit Thesis Statements, Introductions, Outlines, or Drafts

One of the best ways to ensure that your students’ work is original is to check it during the process of composition. Since rough drafts, etc., are not as readily available for copying as finished papers, the simple fact that they have to submit one will encourage most of your students to produce original work. It often takes more work to forge these materials than it does to produce them originally. Also, if you have time to comment on what they submit, you can monitor how they respond to your feedback and whether their papers show the flexibility of works-in-progress.

VII. Have your students Annotate their Bibliographies

Ask your students to summarize the content and usefulness of their sources in a few sentences. Be sure to tell them that copying library abstracts or blurbs from the backs of books is not permissible. Emphasize that the annotation has

to be in their own voice and words, and should specifically discuss the relevance of the source to their research. This exercise should take no time at all for students who have done their work honestly. Plagiarizers, however, will find it considerably more difficult.

VIII. Assign Oral Presentations

Have your students answer questions about the process of researching and developing their ideas. This is also an excellent opportunity to ask them specific questions about their papers, and to bring up passages that seem suspicious. Questions like “This quotation here is a little unclear. Could you tell me a little more about the article from which you got it?” can be very effective in determining how much work the student did without offending or seeming suspicious.

IX. Require Recent and Printed Sources

Most papers from online paper mills and other cheating databases are already several years old at best. Having your students integrate at least one contemporary source in their paper will keep your students up to date on the issues and help ensure legitimate research and work.

X. Assign a Paragraph on the Composition Process

If you do not have your students give oral presentations or turn in drafts during the composition process, you may want to have them submit a paragraph explaining how they arrived at their topic, how they began researching it, what criteria they used for evaluating their sources, and what they learned from the research project. This will give you an idea of how well they have comprehended the material and the degree of fluency they have in speaking about it.

XI. Encourage Concision

Students often try to “fill space” by “borrowing” material once they have finished with their own ideas. Tell your students that it is very obvious when they “pad” their papers to fill up page requirements. Encourage them to be as concise as possible, focusing on the substance of their claims rather than the length of their writing. Make sure they know the trick to writing a long research paper lies in coming up with a thesis or argument which requires the assigned number of pages to develop, and not in drawing out the points they make or citing multiple sources to prove a single idea.