

Discouraging Plagiarism through Assignment Design: Some Strategies

- 1) Provide an assignment sheet with detailed information about what is required. Include the specific question students should answer, the required number of sources, the types of sources acceptable for the paper (peer-reviewed articles? newspapers? websites?), and due dates for any preliminary assignments and the final draft. Clearly defined instructions will help to reduce students' anxiety and confusion.
- 2) Consider designing authentic assignments: Authentic assignments ask students to write for real audiences and real purposes, tasks that can heighten investment in assignments and help students prepare for post-college writing. For example, students might be assigned to write letters to an elected official or a letter to the editor of a particular newspaper or an essay to be posted in an online forum. Assignments that require writing for a specific audience or occasion but will not necessarily be read by real-world readers can also be a valuable learning experience. For example, students might write a speech for delivery at the United Nations.
- 3) Make your assignments course-specific: Specific assignments make it more difficult for students to find "canned" prepared papers online or elsewhere. For example, you might ask students to incorporate in their essay
 - a) a specific book or article read by the class
 - b) a discussion board post or particular class lecture
 - c) an original survey or interview they conduct
 - d) a primary source document not readily available online
 - e) a data set constructed by the class
- 4) Use a process approach: Help students avoid feeling overwhelmed by breaking large, complex assignments into a series of more manageable steps. This approach also acts as a disincentive to plagiarism since students may perceive it to be more difficult to "write backwards" from someone else's completed paper than to do the work themselves. A sample sequence of assignments leading to a final research paper might include
 - A topic proposal
 - An annotated bibliography
 - A detailed outline or first draft
 - A final draftAsk students to submit some or all of this preliminary work with their final draft. This approach allows you to give them credit for revision, if you wish, and to check for any suspicious whole-scale changes from one step to the next.
- 5) Assign "low-stakes" reflective writing: If students are required to reflect on their research and writing processes, you will have the opportunity to help them trouble-shoot as their papers are in progress. Reflective writing also helps students better retain the research and writing skills they are learning.

For example, a short time after assigning a paper, you might ask students to write a brief in-class reflection on their research process so far answering questions like "How many sources have they found? What are they? What difficulties have they encountered so far?" This writing could serve as the basis for an in-class discussion or be collected to identify students who may need assistance.
- 6) Devote class time to discussing appropriate citation practices. Discuss with students why plagiarism is considered a serious offense in academia and how it is detrimental to their learning and professional development. Provide instruction on paraphrasing, quoting, and proper citation of sources.

A helpful resource for faculty: “Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices”

http://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news_article/272555/_PARENT/layout_details/false

The chart below is taken from the following source:

Matto, Michael. “Faculty Tips on Preventing Plagiarism.”

http://academics.adelphi.edu/academicintegrity/pdfs/prevent_plagiarism.pdf

(link no longer active)

Some Reasons Students Plagiarize

LACK OF INTEREST

Students may believe an assignment to be busywork, or that the teacher does not read their essays carefully or with honest interest; they are therefore unwilling to work if their effort will not be recognized.

LACK OF INVESTMENT

Students may see some classes as more relevant to their education than others, or may not be fully invested in the ideal of intellectual inquiry. Students may not see the connection between the assignment and their learning or career goals.

FEAR OF FAILURE

Students may have strong pressures on them to earn high grades, especially those with scholarships that require maintaining a minimum GPA. Lack of confidence leads them to rely on others.

LACK OF ABILITIES

Students may be unprepared to tackle a given assignment but too embarrassed to seek help.

POOR TIME MANAGEMENT

Students may lack good study habits, or may not realize how long a project will take to complete, and therefore procrastinate ruinously. Rather than ask for an extension (or faced with a teacher who accepts no late papers), students opt to cheat.

NO FEAR OF CONSEQUENCES

Students may simply not care about getting caught, or in an amoral cost/benefit analysis, believe the benefits outweigh the risks. Some simply like beating the system.