

# A faculty guide to plagiarism

This document is available as part of the *Troy University Libraries Tutorial*. The Tutorial can be accessed online from your TROY Library Web site. This document updated 1/2/09.

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## About the student guide

*A Student Guide to Plagiarism*, available within the Library Tutorial, helps students understand what plagiarism is and how they can avoid plagiarizing. Faculty are encouraged to make use of this guide—to use it as a handout, include it with online courses, etc.

## How to detect plagiarism

Please note that these are simply suggestions—some tools and methods to utilize and clues to look for. They may indicate the possibility of plagiarism or some other scholarship problem, but should be used as part of a larger, more holistic approach.

1. Use the university-provided plagiarism detection service, *TurnItIn*.
2. Have students write a short paper early in the term so you can compare the writing style/level with their later work.
3. Look for peculiarities in wording or formatting:
  - Inconsistent or peculiar formatting (font, color, word case, spacing, and documentation style) may indicate that the document was copied and pasted together from a variety of sources.
  - British word usage (other than within direct quotes).
  - Inconsistency in the level of vocabulary.
  - Inconsistency in verb tense (past, present, future).
  - Inconsistency in the writer's literary point of view, e.g., their use of I, we, this author, etc.
  - Obscure or older references that are unlikely for the student to have actually used. Note: Keep in mind that instead of true plagiarism, i.e., literary theft, this could simply be an indication of poor scholarship, e.g., the student is referencing (using) a primary source discussed in a secondary source without

properly referencing the secondary source from which they really received the information.

4. Consider if the completed assignment is not quite on target. That is to say, does it appear as if have they taken a previously created work that was pretty close to the current assignment, and tried to force-fit it to the assignment that was assigned.
5. Have students give a class presentation on their assignment, or hold a one-on-one question and answer session regarding his or her assignment.
6. Ask the student. Tactfully asking a student about their work does not mean you are accusing them of cheating, just that you are concerned or curious about one or more aspects of it. If a portion of plagiarism is accidental or unintentional, a direct approach may quickly and easily allow you to identify the root of your concern, and give the student an opportunity to correct, or at least learn from, their errors.
7. Compare the paper to the sources. Note: This task will be easier if you require students to turn in an electronic copy of their work.
8. Ask the student to produce drafts, notes, outlines, or other material used to develop their paper. Note: This request is a more reasonable one if you have previously informed your students that they may or will be required to do so.
9. Ask the student to produce their sources—print or electronic copies of journal articles or Web sites, or direct you to the library or database from which they obtained books. Note: This request is a more reasonable one if you have previously informed your students that they may or will be required to do so.

### **How to help students avoid plagiarizing**

The following is not a formal how-to guide, but is a broad spectrum of suggestions and ideas to assist faculty and administrators in dealing with issues of plagiarism.

Administrators should make their faculty aware of institutional policies and procedures, and regional or departmental guidelines regarding plagiarism. It is of paramount importance that faculty handle plagiarism issues in a proper and uniform manner, both for their sake and that of the institution, as well that of the student.

1. Faculty and administrators need to know what plagiarism really is (and is not). While the publication *A Student Guide to Plagiarism* provides sound guidelines for defining plagiarism, individual persons and institutions will vary in how they choose to define plagiarism, or differentiate among certain aspects thereof.
2. Faculty should make students aware of what plagiarism is and how they can avoid plagiarizing. Providing them with the publication *A Student Guide to Plagiarism* is one way to accomplish that goal.
3. Let students know why plagiarism is an important issue.

4. Take the time to discuss and promote student responsibility; codes of conduct; academic integrity, honesty, and trust. Conduct your academic affairs in a manner which exemplifies and promotes these ideals.
5. Present a positive attitude when discussing plagiarism with your students. Make it clear that you are not out to get them, but rather to educate them. Remind your students that taking the time to address the subject will:
  - Help them to avoid plagiarizing.
  - Assist them in developing their research, writing, and critical thinking skills.
  - Improve their academic performance, both in terms of the grades they receive and by what they actually learn and retain.
  - Strengthen the value of their degree by supporting and enforcing the Standards of Conduct of Troy.
6. Know the reasons, intentional and unintentional, why students plagiarize.
  - Read point #1 of *Anti-plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers*  
<http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>.
  - Read the section “Current State of Cheating” from “Kimbel Library: Presentations: Cheating 101: Paper Mills and You”  
<http://www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/papermil.html>.
7. Use your syllabus or other course materials to let your students know your policy on plagiarism, including specific penalties.
8. Have a clear policy regarding recycling or dual publication, i.e., when, if ever, do you allow it.
  - Recycling defined: As stated in *A Student Guide to Plagiarism*, “Another type of self-plagiarism: A student reusing their own paper, or a modified version thereof, without permission of the instructor(s). This could mean recycling a paper they previously turned in, or writing one paper to satisfy the requirements of two concurrent assignments. Whereas some definitions of plagiarism would not apply here, since the student is not representing someone else's work as their own, many instructors and institutions may choose to classify such actions as plagiarism. In any case, unauthorized recycling or dual publication is an act of dishonesty and is always unacceptable.”
  - If you do allow a student to satisfy two concurrent assignments (yours and another instructor's) with one paper, presentation, or project, never do so without the approval of the other instructor.
9. Assignments and topics.
  - Give assignments that interest the student, either by choice from a pool of topics, or by instructor approval. If the students are interested in the topic, they will be more inclined to do quality research and writing.
  - Research assignments should be designed to reduce the likelihood that the student can find, purchase, modify, or recycle a previously created work to fulfill the assignment.
  - Make assignments that are unique and specific.

- When possible, make the assignment, or a portion thereof, local or regional, or related to the student in a personal way.
- "As part of the paper or as a separate assignment, have students reflect personally on the topic they are writing on or on the process of doing research and writing." (Quote from Kimbel Library, <http://www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/easystep.html>)
- Change or rotate assignments/topics on a regular basis, and keep them up-to-date.
- Set clear guidelines and approval procedures for students selecting/modifying their own topics.
- Have students apply classroom instruction, discussion, or readings to their assignment.
- Make assignments that require critical thinking and synthesis, not just a rehashing of facts or a presentation of someone else's ideas.

10. Research and reporting.

- Make your students aware of the resources available to them. Troy University provides a wealth of library materials and personal assistance.
- Require students to turn material in as their paper develops, e.g., the thesis statement, an outline, notes, a list of sources, drafts, a list of research tools they used (databases, libraries, etc.) and the dates they used them.
- Let students know that they may, or will, be required to produce or turn in their sources, e.g., print or electronic copies of journal articles or Web sites, and the name of the library or database from which print or electronic books were obtained.
- Provide sample(s) of what you consider to be a good paper, both in terms of content and style. Note that you can provide this online through the Troy University Library's electronic reserve service.
- Make it clear how you want papers formatted. Use a standard format, e.g., American Psychological Association, Modern Language Association, or Turabian. Spell out the name of the style you want followed and name book that prescribes that source—don't take for granted that students know what is meant by APA, MLA, or Turabian. Similarly, encourage them to purchase and retain the proper book:
  - For APA: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Fifth Edition.
  - For MLA: *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Sixth Edition.
  - For Turabian: *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Seventh Edition.
  - Citing electronic resources, e.g., online databases or Internet sites, is often a difficult process which is covered only briefly in the aforementioned guides. Therefore, to assist you in this process, the Library provides a formal guide, *Citing the World Wide Web in Style*. It is

available online from the *Troy University Libraries Tutorial for Students, Faculty, and Staff*.

- When possible, require/emphasize the use of current references. To clarify this point: Requiring at least a portion of the sources to be current, will reduce the student's ability to use (plagiarize) a previously-created work to fulfill their assignment.
  - Make specific resource-type requirements, guidelines, or recommendations. For example: No more than X number or percentage of material from the Internet, at least a specified amount from journals, requirements regarding the level or amount of scholarly/peer-review/refereed articles, print or electronic books.
  - Ask students to annotate their sources. This could include a brief summary or description of the source, its reliability, suitability, a comparison with other sources, etc.
  - Have students provide a record of their research. What libraries did they use and did they request/receive assistance? What thesauri or other research tools did they use? What human resources (instructors/peers/librarians) did they use to develop their search terms and strategies? What catalogs, databases, and search engines did they use? Which of those resources yielded good results and which were dead ends? What terms did they search on ... which ones were productive and which ones yielded poor results? What were the dates and times spent on their work? What research or writing skills do they think they most need to improve?
11. Set deadlines and put in writing penalties for exceeding them.
  12. Have a written policy regarding, and procedure for requesting an extension of deadlines.
  13. Use the University-provided plagiarism service, *TurnItIn*, and encourage your colleagues to do so.
  14. For assignments that take the form of a written paper or notes for a verbal or audio-visual presentation, require students to turn in not only their printed report, but also an electronic copy. To clarify this point: This will help students avoid plagiarism if you let them know that you will use the electronic copy to assist you in plagiarism detection, should it be necessary.
  15. Help students learn from their mistakes.
    - Ask/allow them to correct their graded papers, revise their presentations notes/materials, etc.
    - When grading papers, projects, presentations, or other assignments, be specific in your evaluation. Differentiate (and specify) your grading for grammar, style, content, etc., and make suggestions for improvement.