

50 Ways of Addressing Student Plagiarism Pedagogically

Over the last 25 years or so, responsible scholarship on student plagiarism has increasingly emphasized addressing the problem proactively—that is, implementing ways to help students NOT plagiarize. We might well, then, be asking ourselves: How can I be a teacher before being a judge? How can I teach to prevention and save myself as much as possible from having to respond to plagiarism? The following are tips that focus on taking a proactive approach:

Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism Generally

1. View plagiarism, even much intentional plagiarism, as an educational opportunity:
 - An opportunity to help students improve their abilities to integrate source material into their own writing and thinking;
 - An opportunity to help students understand better how academic writing amounts to broad, ongoing “conversations” that require the accurate citation of source material;
 - An opportunity to help students understand the conventions of the particular disciplinary discourse they are seeking to use; and
 - An opportunity to help students become more ethical writers and persons.
2. Model informed and ethical writing yourself.
3. Familiarize *yourself* with the research-based scholarship on plagiarism and let it guide your responses to plagiarism cases.
4. Make your course a safe environment for students to ask questions about using source material and plagiarism in your classroom and in one-on-one conferences with you—and make sure that students perceive your course as such a safe environment.
5. Design your courses around clear—and clearly communicated!!—student learning objectives. That is, make sure that students understand what they are intended to learn AND why those learning objectives are important. Research tells us that students who are invested in their course tend not to intentionally cheat in that course—and communicating to students what they are to learn and why is a first step toward getting students invested in their own learning.
6. Make sure that your assignments are clear, that they clearly align with your course learning objectives, and that you clearly communicate them to students, ideally in writing, along with rubrics or scoring guides to show students how they will be graded on the assignment learning objectives.
7. Know the discourse conventions and citation/documentation standards of your discipline and communicate them to your students. Research suggests that not only undergraduates

AND graduate students but also university and college professors can be unclear on exactly what plagiarism is and is not.

8. Clearly describe your course plagiarism policy. Be specific about your expectations of students, especially with regard to citation and documentation, collaboration, and self-plagiarism—that is, turning in the same paper for assignments in different courses. Collaboration can be especially important. Some teachers want students to talk to other students about their writing and to get feedback and share ideas. Other teachers prefer that students not discuss their work with peers.
9. Offer guidelines for collaborative writing (if you assign or allow collaboratively written papers) and require individually written and confidential progress reports and final evaluations of each group member from each group member, including self-evaluations.
10. Hold a classroom discussion about plagiarism. There has been debate over how students perceive and understand plagiarism. Miguel Roig's research has shown that undergraduate students have a hard time identifying plagiarized passages, suggesting that their knowledge of plagiarism is incomplete. To make matters worse, Roig's research has shown that college instructors' definitions of plagiarism frequently are not the same and are sometimes even at odds with each other. So, we can't assume that just because you know that students have been exposed to teaching about plagiarism, what they learned aligns with your own understanding of plagiarism. In addition, Susan Blum's ethnographic research has revealed significant differences between students and their teachers on what constitutes plagiarism.
11. Discuss hypothetical cases. Ask your students how they would handle these cases, and let them know how you would handle them.
12. Jerry Kilpatrick ("Teaching Acknowledgement Practice Using the Internet-Based Plagiarism Detection Service." *Marketing Education Review* 16.1 (Spring 2006): 1-5. http://www.academia.edu/713476/Teaching_Acknowledgement_Practice_Using_the_Internet-Based_Plagiarism_Detection_Service) recommends, when submitting student texts to Turnitin or other Internet-based plagiarism detection services, teachers should use Turnitin as a teaching tool. If possible, have students receive the Turnitin reports on their own texts, and teach students how to read those reports. "[T]ake the edge of presumptive guilt off its use" (p. 2). Encourage students to view the reports as formative feedback that is just one more tool for revising. Submit your own texts, and let students know what you found.
13. Consider making plagiarism the subject of a writing assignment. This strategy is especially powerful in a writing course. Have students read sources on plagiarism. Maybe have them practice summarizing individual sources and synthesizing sources on particular topics. Maybe have them share their summaries and syntheses in small groups. Maybe have students write up a proposal for a plagiarism policy.
14. Have students reflect in writing on the processes they used when composing their papers

or other written documents, describing how they chose their topic, the processes they used to complete the assignment, and the obstacles they encountered and how they overcame them. This reflective assignment forces students to talk in-depth about their work.

- Reflecting on their writing processes can reveal dangers for unintentional and developmental plagiarisms.
- Reflecting on their writing processes also can reveal intentional plagiarism. Writers who intentionally plagiarize sometimes do not take the time to become familiar with their subject matter and, of course, often do not have a process they care to describe.

15. Hold one-on-one conferences with your students to talk about their writing processes.

A Note about Assignments: Some suggest that teachers ought to assign writing that makes plagiarism difficult. For example, some writing teachers deliberately ban students from using sources. Other teachers assign specific topics and specific sources to use. Neither of these strategies is inherently bad, but the fact is, at some point, students are going to have to engage with source material and engage with it on their own. Vincent Prohaska has a more nuanced suggestion: Make assignments "that call for integration of reading material rather than summarization"—that is, assignments that force students to synthesize material from multiple sources. Beginning by constraining students' choice of sources can facilitate a teacher's monitoring of students' use of source material, but as time progresses that constrained writing needs to open up into real writing, where students find and evaluate their own sources.

Helping Students Avoid Unintentional Plagiarism

16. Teach your students how to synthesize source materials—that is, to summarize what multiple sources have to say on a topic, both where they agree and where they disagree. A major reason for unintentional plagiarism is a lack of familiarity with how to bring together information from multiple sources, how to see relationships and overlapping ideas among sources and how to summarize multiple sources together.

17. Teach students how to formally cite sources.

- Have students practice where to include citations. See Richard Fulkerson's exercise in citation in his article "Oh, What a Cite! A Teaching Tip to Help Students Document Researched Papers Adequately" (*The Writing Instructor* 7 [Spring/Summer 1988]: 167-172).
- In addition to teaching parenthetical citation and/or footnoting, teach students how to introduce source material (quotations and summaries), using conventional "tags," such as "According to Nelms," "As Nelms has stated," "Nelms argues that," etc. In *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (2nd Ed., NY: Norton, 2009), Graff and Birkenstein provide an extensive list of the conventional frameworks for integrating others' ideas with your own ideas and the contexts and rationale for the use of these frameworks.

18. Teach your students how to formally document sources in lists of "References," "Works Cited," etc. Documentation is a dry topic for discussion and best learned through practice. Lecturing on citation and documentation is NOT an effective pedagogy. Instead, you might provide exercises in revising plagiarized passages, thus requiring students to practice citing and documenting source material. And in fact, perhaps the best way to teach citation and documentation is by showing students a good online source for citing and documenting sources in your discipline and just relying on them to eventually absorb these conventions through practice both in your class and beyond it.
19. Don't assume that just spending a class period on teaching citation and documentation will mean students "know" how not to plagiarize.
20. Have a classroom discussion (or even two) about what students believe constitutes plagiarism. Encourage students who have been educated in non-Western cultures to describe how they have been taught writing. Do not be judgmental.
21. Teach note taking. It's not just summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. Teach your students how to read source material, determine relevant information, and digest that information, AND how to include subjective responses, which can connect source information with personal experience, with prior knowledge, and with information provided by other sources. Teach students the importance of (1) distinguishing b/w source material and the writer's own material; (2) making sure to clearly indicate the source of material on every page, every note card, etc., of notes.
22. Teach students how to effectively summarize individual sources. Practicing summarizing forces students to actually engage with the source, and not simply skim the source.
23. Have students share their texts and provide peer response that includes guidance to question the originality of writing that is highly sophisticated.
24. Teach time management to work against carelessness due to being in a rush.
25. Teach students about the dangers of multitasking. Research tells us that the human brain cannot multitask. It can only switch a person's conscious attention between multiple tasks. We can do two things at once only if at least one of the tasks is something that is routine and requires little or no attention—AND does not require the same kind of cognition as the other task. Research also tells us what the dangers of multitasking while learning are: (1) a significant (40% or more) drop in productivity; (2) a significant increase in time to task completion (around 50% longer); (3) a significant increase in errors (up to 50% more); (4) more difficulty making decisions; (5) impaired memory, due to divided attention; (6) significantly worse grades; and (7) less ability to transfer learning to new situations, because different regions of the brain have to be used, if the tasks compete for attention (e.g., if both require verbal processing, as in texting while reading). Multitasking, then, can lead to unintentional plagiarism, if the student is media multitasking while writing. And the evidence is overwhelming that students do media multitask while doing schoolwork—

even in class!—a lot! For example, one study found that 80% of college students admitted to texting in class, some sending 11 or more texts in a single class period.

26. Discuss with students the differences between *institutional* contexts where plagiarism is accepted and *independent or competitive* contexts, where it is not. Make sure that international students understand that they will be expected to adhere to Western academic ideas of authorship and plagiarism. Most academic assignments present independent contexts, not institutionalized ones. A good rule of thumb for students is to assume that all academic assignments present independent contexts, unless they are specifically told otherwise.
27. Define and discuss plagiarism thoroughly with students, allowing students themselves to express their thoughts and feelings about plagiarism. Perhaps even allow students in your class to help you shape a policy on plagiarism that would be allowable at your institution. Research suggests that many students have strong feelings about plagiarism and also have misconceptions about it.
28. Allow students opportunities to receive feedback from you and then to revise their written work. This process allows you to catch unintentional plagiarism early and educate students in proper integration, citation, and documentation methods.

Helping Students Avoid Developmental Plagiarism

In addition to the previous tips for helping students avoid unintentional plagiarism, consider the following:

29. Discuss with students how moving from a novice writer to an experienced, "expert" writer takes time and practice.
30. Emphasize how trial and error—and revision based on error—is one of the most powerful methods of learning.
31. Provide a safe and supportive environment for trial and error and revision.
32. Embrace developmental plagiarism, often in the form of patchwriting, as an inevitability.
33. In fact, consider assigning a writing task that invites patchwriting, an assignment which then leads into a class discussion of why patchwriting is unacceptable in academic writing and how to avoid it by learning how to read and absorb the language and conventions of a profession, academic discipline, or other community and by learning how to adequately summarize and synthesize source material and cite sources.

Helping Students Avoid Intentional Plagiarism

34. Clearly describe your course plagiarism policy. Make sure to describe the possible consequences of being caught intentionally plagiarizing.

35. Include in your syllabi and elsewhere statements encouraging ethical behaviors, and explain how these ethical behaviors align with the course learning objectives.
36. Do NOT exclusively focus on plagiarism detection and punishment.
37. Encourage discussion of plagiarism in a safe-environment classroom. Often, students have misconceptions about other students' views on plagiarism. Surveys have shown that many students believe that there is a lot more intentional student plagiarism occurring than there really is. Students sometimes get the idea that they are in competition with other students in the class, and if they think those other students are plagiarizing, they are likely to be more tempted to plagiarize themselves.
38. Consider making plagiarism the subject of a writing assignment. This strategy is especially powerful in a writing course. Have students read sources on plagiarism. Maybe have them practice summarizing individual sources and synthesizing sources on particular topics. Maybe have them share their summaries and syntheses in small groups. Maybe have students write up a proposal for a plagiarism policy. Increasing student awareness that everyone in the class is thinking about plagiarism can inhibit intentional plagiarizing.
39. Assign students to summarize their sources for papers. Perhaps, assign an annotated bibliography. Research has shown that often, students who plagiarize simply have not taken the time to understand the source material they are using for their writing. Plus, being unable to summarize a source that has been used in a paper is one indicator of possible intentional plagiarism.
40. Break writing assignments into smaller assignments that not only help students learn writing processes but allow you to view your students' writing processes in progress—thus, discouraging the word-for-word copying of an entire text.
41. Provide lots of scaffolding in writing assignments—that is, provide instructional supports early in the course and then gradually remove these supports as your students show their increasing understanding and mastery. For example, you might assign students to summarize readings and revise their summaries for an early paper but then, not make that assignment for later writings.
42. Have students reflect in writing on the processes they used when writing their papers or other written documents, describing how they chose their topic, the processes they used to complete the assignment, and the obstacles they encountered and how they overcame them. This reflective assignment forces students to talk in-depth about their work.
 - Reflecting on their writing processes can reveal intentional plagiarism. Writers who intentionally plagiarize sometimes do not take the time to become familiar with their subject matter and, of course, often do not have a process they care to describe.
43. Hold one-on-one conferences with your students to talk about their writing processes and

to address any intentional plagiarism you discover. Note that such conferences should not be considered as part of a criminal investigation so much as an effort to discover why the student intentionally plagiarized and what can be done to resolve those issues.

44. Work at increasing each student's self-efficacy.

- Try to provide early assignments where students succeed. Such assignments need to be ones where students will perceive this success as an indication that they can succeed on course assignments to come.
- Break longer assignments into component parts and set deadlines for completion of each part. Then, evaluate each part as it is submitted. This allows for early successes and early opportunities for revisions that will increase student chances of success.
- Always speak to students with respect and projecting the expectation that each student has the ability to succeed.
- In feedback, find positives to note.

45. Frankly discuss the obstacles to succeed that students often face. Take on the role of coach and indicate that you will help them succeed as much as possible. But don't mislead students; make sure they understand that you also have an obligation to uphold standards.

46. As a class, discuss workload and family pressures and stress. Have students share their strategies for dealing with these pressures and stress.

47. Teach time management. Perhaps, assign students to read responsible web pages on how students can manage their time. Maybe include a weekly calendar as a required text for the course. Perhaps, assign students to create their own weekly calendar template, filling in times that they will be in class, at work, in meetings, having meals, doing laundry, sleeping, etc. Then, have them fill in the blank times in the week with schoolwork. Make sure they understand the rule of thumb that they will need at least 2 hours of study (reading, writing, etc.) time for every 1 hour in class. That's 6 hours of study time per week for each course that meets 3 times per week.

48. Work on motivating students.

- Make sure that students understand the relevance of what they are learning in your course
- Provide contexts for writing assignments. Include a purpose and an audience for the text to be produced. Let the students role-play as experts on the subject matter.

49. Discuss the value of citation.

50. Discuss institutionalized writing contexts and the Internet and how and why school writing is different.