

Writing Matters



A Matter of Morals?

When you discover a student has plagiarized in a writing assignment, it is easy to become overwhelmed with the feeling that you've been taken advantage of, that somewhere, that student is sitting back with a "gotcha" grin. Suddenly, writing assignments take on an "us vs. them" atmosphere. Sure, there are occasions when the student simply wants to cheat. However, most plagiarism occurs not because of a lack of morals but because of one or more other "lacks" the student may have: a lack of time management skills, resulting in last-minute panic and copy/paste; a lack of knowledge about the process of writing; a lack of knowledge of research styles and conventions; a lack of ability to paraphrase or summarize correctly; a lack of comfort writing at a college level, feeling intimidated by real or perceived expectations. When viewed in this light, plagiarism isn't a battle to be fought. Instead, it is a concept to be taught. It presents an opportunity to support our students' writing with honesty and clarity, and to offer them support as they produce writing for our classes.

Preventing and Addressing Plagiarism

Perhaps the best approach to take with plagiarism is the "prevention" approach. It is much easier to deal with plagiarism before it happens rather than waiting until it has already occurred.

Early in the semester, talk about plagiarism openly. Give your definition of it as well as your policy on dealing with it should it occur. Show students examples of what you consider plagiarism. Many students do not have a solid grasp on how to paraphrase, summarize or use citations. Models of good and bad writing help students recognize these skills that they will need to learn.

In all of this talk about plagiarism, recognize that many of our students are novices when it comes to writing and the multitude of skills it involves. They need our explicit guidance in academic conventions that are common in our disciplines.

Finally, be sure to offer your students support for major writing assignments. If you want a particular format, research style, etc., offer models, workshops or class periods dedicated to the style of writing you wish to see. Our students cannot read our minds; be clear in your assignment, and then provide opportunities for students to learn about the details you

want in each assignment.

When designing the support structure for assignments, think about using SafeAssign, the instruction tool built in to Blackboard. SafeAssign presents students with a chance to learn about plagiarism. When a paper is uploaded, SafeAssign will highlight passages that are too close to other sources. This tool, then, is best used on rough drafts, thereby giving students an opportunity to learn from the feedback that SafeAssign gives. If you only use it on final drafts, your students do not get the benefit of incorporating the feedback into their writing.

If, despite all your best efforts, a student still plagiarizes, hold to the policy that you discussed openly with your class earlier in the semester. It is best to conference with the student individually, stressing the importance of plagiarism. This also gives you a chance to use it as a "teachable moment" no matter what the outcome. Handle it as an opportunity for the student to learn for the better.

By explaining plagiarism to our students, supporting major assignments, and upholding our policies, we can give our students the best chance possible to understand plagiarism.

What a good thing Adam had. When he said a good thing, he knew nobody had said it before.

—Mark Twain

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PREVENTING PLAGIARISM: USING SAFEASSIGN IN BLACKBOARD

BY JENN HIPPENSTEEL & LINDA VENTURO

Wed., November 30, 2011, 2:00-3:30 p.m.
Bradford Hall Conference Room

Plagiarism can be one of the most frustrating aspects of using writing in the classroom. However, you and your students have access to an easy-to-use tool that not only helps to reduce the occurrence of plagiarism, but it also helps to teach students what plagiarism is. In this workshop, we will show you how to use the Blackboard component, SafeAssign. We will also address ways of designing writing assignments so that students are encouraged to use their own words and to integrate source material in correct ways.

Please RSVP by November 28 at:
<http://www.southwesterncc.edu/preventing-plagiarism-professional-development>.



Training is brought to you by the
Professional Development Committee.

WAC Awards in Spring!

Be sure to remind your students to keep the essays they have written for your classes this semester.

These essays are eligible for the WAC Essay Awards competition in the Spring! Your students could win money for the essays they had to write for classes!

Take time to be grateful
during this season of
thanksgiving!



Anticipatory plagiarism occurs when someone steals your original idea and publishes it a hundred years before you are born. —Robert King Merton