

HOW TO... DETER AND DETECT PLAGIARISM

INTRODUCTION

When designing teaching and assessment, good anti-plagiarism measures are often good learning/teaching measures. For example:

An assessment task that requires the application of a theory to a fresh case study/ image/text, rather than the reproduction of that theory, will be harder to plagiarise from existing sources, but will also better demonstrate student understanding.

A supplemental assignment to accompany a piece of written work – a short piece reflecting on any problems encountered – will demonstrate the learner's knowledge and authorship of the work they have submitted, but can also make them to consider their own learning process.

The following guidelines are therefore not suggested as parallel or additional to learning and teaching; they're ways to facilitate learning which also discourage plagiarism. Ideally, they make explicit the anti-plagiarism benefits of some of your existing practices.

'Plagiarism' is often used to describe practices including unauthorized collaboration, inadequately referenced quotes, and essays from ghost-writers or essay banks. These guidelines address various practices. Many suggestions will reduce accidental plagiarism, and also reduce deliberate plagiarists' ability to claim ignorance.

These guidelines mostly address written work but many can be of use for other assessment.

Examples (in italics) have been offered by staff at Goldsmiths – please contact E.Saxey@gold.ac.uk if you have a useful practice you'd like to share.

TRAINING LEARNERS

Time invested in training learners can reduce time spent detecting infringements. You might:

Discuss the academic authorship conventions of your discipline with learners

- what is considered original work
- what might be "common knowledge"
- what requires referencing

Reassure learners that using the work of other thinkers and writers is an essential aspect of scholarship, and will get them credit, if their sources are cited correctly.

Teach academic skills such as correct referencing and citation (Carroll, 2000), summarising and paraphrasing.

Include assessment – preferably at a formative stage - that requires students to demonstrate these skills (Devlin, 2002).

Inform learners as to what assistance they can legitimately get from outside sources (helping to correct their writing style, grammar, content etc). Direct them to other assistance (such as the Library website, the Centre for English Language and Academic Writing, departmental essay clinics). Define acceptable and unacceptable collaboration (Devlin 2002).

Encourage students to use Turnitin software to check their own work for accidental plagiarism, and better understand how and when to reference. Tutorials:

<https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1953/>

Use tailored materials - tutorials to inform, and quizzes to check student understanding, delivered through learn.gold. Contact the Goldsmiths Learning Enhancement Unit to discuss creating a resource with your department.

Training learners - examples from Goldsmiths:

Tutors in Anthropology have found that peer to peer discussion is a productive way to introduce plagiarism, presenting the subject less as an externally imposed edict, and more as a way of thinking about learning.

Tutors in the Language Studies Centre find students are anxious about the minutiae of how to reference. It's helpful to counter this anxiety with emphasis on why we reference - offering principles that provide good general guidance.

Media and Communications emphasises that in an essay, how a quotation is introduced and discussed is as important as the quote itself. One tutor notes that students are on the cusp between reporting the arguments of others, and owning their own arguments, and can fall into plagiarism if they don't make the shift successfully.

Some students in the Computing department are asked by tutors to define plagiarism in their own words during tutorials. This ensures their understanding broadly matches departmental definitions.

First year History students receive study skills training which includes guidance on plagiarism, and essays are submitted using a template which contains a plagiarism warning. There is also an online tutorial about plagiarism on the History area of the VLE.

DESIGNING ASSESSMENT

Assessment which unintentionally encourages plagiarism can undercut the best teaching.

Some suggestions from research literature:

Avoid repeating identical assignments from year to year (Carroll, 2000). Learners will often have friends at higher levels in the same programme.

Over-assessment can encourage plagiarism, so consider reducing the amount of traditional written assessment in any module/programme (Langsam, 2001) Most departments already stagger deadlines to assist students with time management. Varied means of assessment – seminar discussion and presentation, online discussion, annotated bibliographies – are harder to plagiarise from existing sources than traditional essays. Assessing work produced in class (Culwin & Lancaster, 2001, Carroll, 2000) can demonstrate authorship.

Make tasks more specific to reduce the chance of students finding a suitable pre-written essay: name a particular element (text, image, critic) that must be used.

Use essay/assignment topics that use unique elements - personal experience or course-specific information, a field trip report, or a specific case study (Carroll, 2000, Devlin 2002, Culwin & Lancaster, 2001) - or recent elements (event, text or image) on which there is unlikely to be as much material available (Culwin & Lancaster, 2001).

Require students to use at least one source from after a certain date.

Set assessment tasks which build on the other aspects of the programme e.g. field learning, lectures, classroom discussions (Carroll and Appleton 2001, Gibelman, Gelman and Fast 1999). Such work will be harder to plagiarise from existing sources, and will also reduce the incentive to plagiarise as the learner will be more familiar with the material.

Assessment, learning outcomes and marking criteria should encourage and reward higher levels of engagement: analysing, evaluating and applying knowledge rather than collecting, reproducing or presenting existing information (Carroll, 2000). Essays asking for a definition or a summary ('What is X?') will be easy to answer using material from pre-existing sources – consider instead asking students to compare theories, or to apply a theory to a new example.

Confirm the student's choice of assignment title/description ahead of submission and check drafts or plans. Learners will have to complete some stages in advance of the deadline – promoting time management, which reduces plagiarism. Also, titles or plans seen in advance of submission prevent learners from substituting an 'essay bank' essay at the last minute.

Designing assessment - examples from Goldsmiths:

A tutor in Media and Communications makes questions focused and unique, and thus harder to plagiarise from existing sources. One essay requires students to write their own manifesto and compare it to Vertov's, or to write a cultural analysis of an item of clothing they own.

Design have split a 2000 word traditional essay into three parts, each of which directly relates to the contact hours (including a museum trip and a lecture series). This should discourage both plagiarism and absenteeism.

DETECTING PLAGIARISM

Prevention is best, but detection is necessary. Your own skills are still the best guard against plagiarism. You will have experience of what's usually produced by students at each level in your discipline. You can also look out for:

Style

- Changes in font and layout
- Hyperlinks
- American spelling for some words

Content

- Changes in writing style
- Writing levels that exceed a student's usual standard
- A response that, while competent, doesn't answer the question

Metadata

- Is the file older than it should be?
Check File > Properties > Statistics
- Was it originally written on a computer that it seems unlikely the student could access? Check File > Properties > Summary

Bibliographies and references

- Cites material not available locally
- No recent citations
- Mixed citation systems
- Lack of citations

TURNITIN

Turnitin is a text-matching software available through learn.gold. Turnitin highlights phrases in essays that match existing sources, and gives you a link to the source they match. You then make an informed decision whether the matching constitutes plagiarism.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Learn.gold pages on Turnitin
<https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1953>
- Goldsmiths Learning Enhancement Unit pages on plagiarism
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/gleu/resources/plagiarism/>

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