

Plagiarism-Proof Workshop Notes
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1) Why Plagiarism-proof, and not just turn-it in?

Have you all heard of the marshmallow test?

This was a Stanford experiment in 1972 that's been replicated many times to look at delayed gratification in children. Kids were given a choice- either one treat now (marshmallow or pretzel) or two treats if they waited for 15 minutes (alone in the room with the treat). Kids who were able to wait, ended up doing better in a variety of long-term assessments (BMI, SAT Scores, educational attainment etc...) The problem is that a lot of the reason for the discrepancy is less about will-power and more about economic background. In that way it is a sincerely unfair experiment. How is this related? Well, if we are creating assignments in which there is an incentive to cheat, it is a rare student who has the will-power not to cheat. Increasingly, there is more incentive to cheat, and the consequences are just not dire enough.

I come from a perspective that teaching is about guiding and mentoring to get a student to a place of understanding. If we give them information and ask them to regurgitate it back- they will not process it well, nor will they remember it in the long term. I don't want to set up my students to encourage them to cheat, and then punish them for what I encouraged them to do.

2) Understanding why students cheat

Students who cheat are not "bad"- students rarely set out to be bad. Instead, students who cheat do so because they panic, they are academically lost, they don't know that plagiarism is cheating, or the assignment is meaningless.

PANIC

There are a lot of things that are causing stress for students today (family, friendships, food insecurity, jobs, commutes, cars, mental load, etc...) and your course may have fallen off the list of priorities. More students are dealing with higher levels of anxiety and depression- these affect your brain function, and students literally don't have access to some of the rational parts of their brain during these times. And some students lack the organizational study skills to track when they are supposed to be doing work. Nor do they have the skills to admit to their error and talk to a professor.

ARE ACADEMICALLY LOST

Some students are over their head, content-wise. They don't understand what's going on in the classroom, and they don't understand the assignment.

DON'T KNOW THAT PLAGIARISM IS CHEATING

The rules are often cited at them, or most often put in the syllabus, but students don't know to prioritize this information, nor do they process it. Students who come from other cultures do not perceive cheating in the same light. In some places, cheating or plagiarism is normalized, even encouraged.

APATHY

If the assignment seems to be arbitrary, and hoop-jumping, students will not do it, nor put any of themselves into it. If they don't have to prove that they thought about it, then a generic answer is good, and that's easy to find.

3) Understanding how students cheat

Google

Often they don't mean to cheat, they mean to find the answer- and they turn to google. Well, google has all the answers, right? If you assign any standard assignment:

The symbolism of color in the Scarlet Letter;

The limitations of the Marshmallow test;

Causes of the Salem Witch Trials;

Not only are you going to get a TON of information, but pre-written papers (often at the A, B, or C level your students desire).

Friends

Again, they don't mean to cheat, but their friend/teammate/roommate/sorority sister took that class- maybe they'd like to see their old paper on the same topic? Oh that was good, I should say something like that, turns into, I'll just note that down.

Carelessness

Again, they are working quickly often. They found a source, took notes, the book goes back to the library, they didn't write down the website and can't find it later. Students often write and then go back to cite, and inadvertently miss some.

4) We need to address BOTH when we create plagiarism-proof assignments

Here are some suggestions for how to create plagiarism-proof assignments.

- 1) Address the topic from a place of mentoring, not punishment;
- 2) Make very clear deadlines and late penalties;
- 3) Give consistent and meaningful feedback;
- 4) Design your assignments around meaningful and growth-oriented work;
- 5) Give current, creative, and detailed topics to write on; and
- 6) Use available resources!

5) Address the topic from a place of mentoring, not punishment

- Go ahead and talk about it. Often

- Faculty often disagree about what plagiarism is, so you should talk about it in the context of your class, and your discipline.
- Talk about it in the context of the shared values of a University.
- Talk about research, and the idea of building on previous perspectives and ideas.
It's referencing, not citing.
- Don't emphasize cheating, which leads to a sense of judgement and policing.
- You may want to bring in a purchased paper or a plagiarized paper into class and talk about it.

6) Deadlines

- Make sure the assignment deadlines and your policy about late work is VERY, VERY clear and available in multiple formats (syllabus, BB9 calendar, stated in class).
- Consider not penalizing for late work (this can reduce anxiety and panic) with the caveat that students that need structure should be given the tools to make sure they stay on track.

7) Feedback

- Only assign what you have time to grade, and make sure to give substantive feedback on the assignments that merit it (and make it clear, which ones get feedback).
- Make sure to give a clear rubric to students ahead of time, go over it, and use it.
- Give feedback on each draft, and require students to respond to the feedback in some way.

8) Assignment Design

- Make sure the student is worthwhile to the student, so connected to the course goals, and make this connection explicit.
- More, shorter assignments (less of the grade depends on each one).
- Clear prompt and rubric.
- Multiple drafts.
- Change the assignments between semesters so that a paper bank doesn't build up.
- Break a single assignment into sequential components (scaffolding):
 - o Topic, annotated bibliography, critique of an article, intro for peer review, draft for faculty review.
 - o Don't allow students to change topic, or if they really want to, they must go through all the above steps for new grades.
- Include peer review, and teach and model how to do peer review.
- Build in an oral component (report, poster, interview...).
- Include a reflection- have students write about their process, how they did it and what was hard.
- Start the assignment from the in-class exam, and then build a paper from it.
- Have students grade their own work using the rubric (or create their own rubric) and justify that grading.
- Make sure to include annotated bibliography before the draft is due- and how they are using the source.
- Outline the paper, including how to use sources.

- Require the drafts with annotations.
- Require pre-approval of paper topics.

9) Assignment Topics

- Use current events.
- Combine hypothetical and factual.
- Emphasize analysis, application, and/or comparison, and not collection of information.
- Specify an unusual audience:
 - o So, writing an editorial for paper;
 - o Or, presentation for a high school class.
- Avoid open-ended topics.
- Be open to creative topics:
 - o Write a conversation between Nietzsche and Rousseau about religion in schools (place it in the afterlife);
 - o Create a historical avatar and keep a journal of the events discussed in class;
 - o Develop a fictional product to market.
- Start an assignment with a personal response in class, then develop citations to refute and/or confirm their perspective.
- Write from a different perspective:
 - o From the historical figure;
 - o From the patient's perspective;
 - o From the president of the board.

10) Use of Sources

- Not just for your students! Use the Reference librarians, Faculty Development, colleagues to make sure your assignments are fair and fit with the goals you have for the course, and for your department (and LEP or WACC).
- Give them the data set or references, even better if it's a local data set.
- Or require them to use classroom discussions (especially if you don't post them online).
- Provide source restrictions:
 - o No sources before a certain date;
 - o Only certain sources.
- Require photocopies or pictures of the sources as well as citations.
- Require them to cite the page every time they cite something.
- Look at good and not as good sources.
- Discuss the use of appropriate sources, and how to find them-
 - o Schedule a meeting with a reference librarian.
- Do citation exercises:
 - o Give them the endnotes and have them reconstruct the argument;
 - o Give a quotation with dubious "facts" off the web, have them find the source, critique it, and correct the facts with proper citation.
- Consider raising the value of the citations in the rubric.