What is plagiarism?

(And why kids should care!)

By Joyce Valenza from LM_Net Digest, July 2003

Definition:

- Plagiarism is the act of presenting the words, ideas, images, sounds, or other creative expression of others as your own.

How serious is the problem?

"A study of almost 4,500 students at 25 schools, conducted in 2000/2001 suggests cheating is . . . a significant problem in high school - 74% of the respondents admitted to one or more instances of serious test cheating and **72% admitted to serious cheating on written assignments. Over half of the students admitted they have engaged in some level of plagiarism on written assignments using the Internet.**"

Based on the research of Donald L. McCabe, Rutgers University

Source: "CIA Research." Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 2003 <http://academicintegrity.org/cai_research.asp>.

For students. If:

- you have included the words and ideas of others in your work that you neglected to cite,

- you have had help you wouldn't want your teacher to know about,

You have probably plagiarized!

Two types of plagiarism:

- **Intentional**
  - Copying a friend's work
  - Buying or borrowing papers
  - Cutting and pasting blocks of text from electronic sources without documenting
  - Media "borrowing"
  - Uninformed Web publishing

- **Unintentional**
  - Careless paraphrasing
  - Poor documentation
  - Quoting excessively
  - Failure to use your own "voice"

Rationale for academic integrity (as if it were necessary!)

- When you copy you cheat yourself. You limit your own learning.
- The consequences are not worth the risk!
- Cheating is unethical behavior
- It is only right to give credit to authors whose ideas you use
- Citing gives authority to the information you present
- Citing makes it possible for your readers to locate your source
- Education is not an "us vs. them" game!

Is your academic reputation valuable to you?

Real life consequences:

- Damaged the reputation of two prominent historians, Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin,
  - Kearns left television position and stepped down as Pulitzer Prize judge for "lifting" 50 passages for her 1987 book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (Lewis)
- Senator Joseph Biden dropped his 1987 campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. (Sabato)
  - Copied in law school and borrowed from campaign speeches of Robert Kennedy
- Boston Globe journalist Mike Barnicle forced to resign for plagiarism in his columns ("Boston Columnist . . .")
- Probe of plagiarism at UVA--45 students dismissed 3 graduate degrees revoked
  - *CNN Article AP. 26 Nov. 2001*
  - Channel One Article AP. 27 Nov. 2002

Consequences (cont'd)

- *The New York Times* senior reporter Jayson Blair forced to resign after being accused of plagiarism and fraud.

- "The newspaper said at least 36 of the 73 articles he had written had problems with accuracy, calling the deception a "low point" in the newspaper's history."

"New York Times Exposes Fraud of own Reporter." *ABC News Online*. 12 May, 2003.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/newshour_index.html

Possible school consequences:

Is it worth the risk?
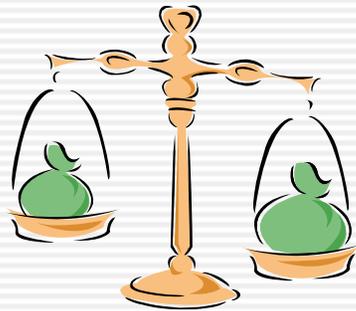
- "0" on the assignment
- Parent notification
- Referral to administrators
- Suspension or dismissal from school activities--sports and extracurricular
- Note on student record
- Loss of reputation among the school community

Is this important?

- What if:
  - Your architect cheated his way through math class. Will your new home be safe?
  - Your lawyer paid for a copy of the bar exam to study. Will the contract she wrote for you stand up in court?
  - The accountant who does your taxes hired someone to write his papers and paid a stand-in to take his major tests? Does he know enough to complete your tax forms properly?

(Lathrop and Foss 87)

Nope!

- Facts that are widely known, or
- Information or judgments considered "common knowledge"
- Do **NOT** have to be documented.

Hooray for common knowledge!

Examples of common knowledge

- John Adams was our second president

- The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941

If you see a fact in more than two sources, it is likely to be "common knowledge."
But when in doubt, cite!

You can "borrow" from the works of others in your own work!

Use these three strategies,

- Quoting,
- Paraphrasing and,
- Summarizing,

To blend source materials in with your own, making sure your own voice is heard.

Quoting

Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from a source, word for word. Quotations must be cited!

Use quotations when:

- You want to add the power of an author's words to support your argument
- You want to disagree with an author's argument
- You want to highlight particularly eloquent or powerful phrases or passages
- You are comparing and contrasting specific points of view
- You want to note the important research that precedes your own

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Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means rephrasing the words of an author, putting his/her thoughts in your own words. When you paraphrase, you rework the source's ideas, words, phrases, and sentence structures with your own. Like quotations, paraphrased material must be followed with in-text documentation and cited the on your Works-Cited page.

Paraphrase when:

- You plan to use information on your note cards and wish to avoid plagiarizing
- You want to avoid overusing quotations
- You want to use your own voice to present information

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Summarizing

- **Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) of one or several writers into your own words, including only the main point(s). Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material. Again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to their original sources.**

Summarize when:

- You want to establish background or offer an overview of a topic
- You want to describe knowledge (from several sources) about a topic
- You want to determine the main ideas of a single source

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In-text / in-project MLA documentation

- Purpose--to give immediate source information without interrupting the flow of paper or project.

- The academic world takes in-text documentation seriously.

- Inaccurate documentation is as serious as having no documentation at all.

- Brief information in in-text documentation should match full source information in Works Cited

Use in-text / in-project documentation when:

- You use an original idea from one of your sources, whether you quote or paraphrase it
- You summarize original ideas from one of your sources
- You use factual information that is not common knowledge (Cite to be safe.)
- You quote directly from a source
- You use a date or fact that might be disputed

How do I cite?

- Parenthetical citations usually placed at the end of a sentence, before the period, but they may be placed in the middle of sentence

- Cite (usually) the author's last name and the page number
- In the absence of an author, the title and the page number are given
- If you are using more than one book by the same author, give the last name, comma, the title, and the page
- If you identify the author and title in the text, just give the page number
- Note: When citing a Web source you are not likely to have page numbers.

Typical example:

"Slightly more than 73% of Happy High School students reported plagiarizing papers sometime in their high school careers" (Smith 203).

For more information and specific examples see the Research Guide

A list of paper mills

http://www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm

(Fein)

Preventing plagiarism

- Set a climate where academic integrity is valued
- Design thoughtful assignments
- Set up checkpoints throughout the process:
  - Drafts, outlines, organizers, preliminary Works Cited
- Keep portfolios of student writing
- Vary assignments, topic suggestions each semester
- Describe the degree to which collaboration is acceptable
- Require an annotated bibliography
- Shorter papers are okay

Preventing Plagiarism

- Make sure students understand what plagiarism is and how you expect them to document

- Make sure students know you are aware of how students plagiarize

- Make sure students know that you check for plagiarism

Prevention

- Ask for outlines and drafts
- Have students present research orally
- Ask student to read one or two difficult paragraphs and explain
- Have students present research orally
- Ask for photocopies of "best" sources

(Lathrop and Foss 163-166)

Prevention

- Require specific components
- Require drafts prior to due date
- Require oral defense or presentation
- Include annotated bibliography
- Require up-to-date references
- Require a "meta-learning" essay in class after papers have been submitted

(Lathrop and Foss 194-195)

When you suspect plagiarism

- **Ask librarian for help (other sources beyond free web)**
- **Pick an unusual string of words and search on Google, All the Web, AltaVista**
  - **"five or six words in quotation marks"**
- **Ask the student why certain phrases or words were used, or to identify location of a specific fact.**
- **Are all citations listed in Works Cited?**
- **Check for inconsistencies in font, bibliographic format, text size, layout**
- **Does the paper not exactly match the assignment?**
- **Examine bibliographies for "match"**
- **Chat with other teachers about the student's work**

              (Lathrop and Foss 163—166, 194-195)

When you suspect plagiarism 2

- **Ask to see drafts, outlines, etc. (Ask students to save them in advance!)**
- **Compare to other student work. Look for vocabulary, variation in sentence length, etc.**
- **Make a copy of a section, cut it into paragraphs and ask student to reassemble**
- **Discuss the paper. Ask student to defend opinions. Why he or she chose that specific evidence**
- **Ask student to read aloud paragraphs with unusual vocabulary or scholarly terms. Note fluency. Have student explain or paraphrase**
- **Does writing shift styles, especially in the middle?**
- **Ask where some items in the bibliography were located**
- **Ask student to relocate sources**
- **Ask why no recent sources were cited**

(Lathrop and Foss 163—166)

Works Cited

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