Dealing With Plagiarism

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Hierarchy of suggestions

• Preventing it (Mano Singham)
• Detecting it if you suspect it is happening (Katie Skapin)
• Dealing with it after detecting it (Jeff Wolcowitz)
Why might students plagiarize?

1. May not think (for cultural or non-cultural reasons) that it is wrong
2. May realize it is wrong but view it as a trivial offense
3. May resort to it as an ‘emergency’ solution to a time-crunch problem
4. May use it as a deliberate strategy to avoid work

Variation of point #3

Students fear that they are expected to say something that is interesting and original on topics about which they often have little or no interest.

Few can reach such a high standard of originality and this is why they immediately hit a wall, lose a lot of time trying to find and say something ‘new’, and in desperation end up looking for others who have said something interesting or relevant and "borrowing" their work.
Timothy Noah:

“Most often . . . the plagiarist has started out with good intentions but hasn't left enough time to do the reading and thinking that the assignment requires, has become desperate, and just wants the whole thing done with. At this point, in one common scenario, the student gets careless while taking notes on a source or incorporating notes into a draft, so the source's words and ideas blur into those of the student.”

Suggestions for prevention

• Have a discussion on the nature of academic discourse and why academics cite

• Design assignments that make plagiarizing harder than doing original work

• Writing assignments carefully structured to develop good writing habits have the *incidental* benefit of making it harder to plagiarize. Conversely, writing assignments that allow for bad writing habits also tend to make plagiarism easier.
Discussion points

Academics cite for the following reasons (Hunt):

• To establish their own *bona fides* and currency
• To advertise alliances
• To draw attention to the work of others
• To assert ties of collegiality
• For tactical reasons
• To exemplify contending positions or define nuances of difference among competing theories or ideas
• To avoid repetition

*Scholars do not use citations as a defense against potential allegations of plagiarism.*

“The clearest difference between the way undergraduate students, writing essays, cite and quote and the way scholars do it in public is this: typically, *the scholars are achieving something positive; the students are avoiding something negative.*” (Hunt, my italics)
What students should know

• Make students aware that in most academic work, knowledge is added incrementally. Heavy dependence on the work of others, with citations, is the norm, not the exception.

• When you extensively cite the works of others, you are not devaluing your own work. You are in fact strengthening your own argument because you are making the sources (and their allies) into your allies.

• When you quote and cite reputable sources or credible authorities for facts or ideas, you become more credible, even if you personally are not a recognized authority.

Explicit suggestions

• Tell students to cite all information that is not the result of their own research or common knowledge.

• Whenever possible, use a direct quote (with citation) instead of a paraphrase.

• Paraphrase only to sharpen, clarify, or focus a point but still cite the source.

• When in doubt, cite!
Discouraging plagiarism

- Provide students with choices of topics
- Avoid topics that are general/generic
- Ask for a distinctive point of view
- Help students get started on writing by asking for outlines, early versions, bibliographic notes, etc.
- Monitor progress of writing and give feedback and assistance along the way

How develop good writing habits

- Break up assignments into smaller units that have different due dates
- Have students start writing projects well ahead of due dates
- Teach them to consciously identify the three distinct phases of writing:
  - pre-writing, writing, post-writing
- Ask students to maintain and submit a journal on research and writing progress
- Require an annotated bibliography or notes
- Allow/require multiple versions of papers