

Plagiarism Prevention Strategies

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In preventing plagiarism, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—and supports other important aspects of your teaching, too!

Chasing or "cracking down on" plagiarists can be counterproductive to good teaching: it eats up your time, causes you (and any student who is "caught") some emotional distress, and often creates a climate where students seem to be presumed guilty before any wrongdoing occurs. Some simple strategies for preventing plagiarism—for reducing the ignorance, fear, poor time-management abilities, and opportunities for easy plagiarism that most often lead to students plagiarizing—are often congruent with and reinforce many teachers' best practices and most enjoyable experiences in teaching, and do so without extravagant "costs" in terms of class time, preparation, or grading.

Prevention Strategy	Costs or Challenges	Additional Educational Benefits	Examples/Suggestions
<p>Teach explicit guidelines: Remind students what general academic/disciplinary conventions require of them as they use sources, and telling them about your own specific expectations and boundaries. (Reduces student ignorance, lessens student fears)</p>	<p>Cost: 15-20 minutes of class time for presentation and/or discussion</p> <p>Cost: Time for preparing written instructions or examples</p> <p>Challenge: Helping students understand the reasons for and benefits of using sources this way, not just the consequences</p>	<p>Increased student awareness of broader discipline and course expectations: Citation styles and expectations often reflect and can reinforce a discipline's other research values, as well as your own values</p> <p>Whole class discussion can help students who (incorrectly) thought they understood what they were supposed to do, and save you time later in the grading process</p> <p>Discussion of how/when to cite necessarily involves discussion of the role of the student writer's larger goals: when and where are his/her own conclusions expected? what is his/her overall audience or purpose?</p>	<p>Ask students what must be quoted and what constitutes a "legal" paraphrase—gather a range of answers to start with, and discuss options and disciplinary rules</p> <p>Have students work in pairs for five minutes to paraphrase a difficult passage and/or use a citation style; discuss 2-3 examples</p> <p>Have students glance over 1-2 journal articles in the field to see how often, at what length, and in what style outside sources are referenced; discuss apparent "rules" or expectations</p>
<p>Require early commitments: Ask students for mostly-firm topic choices several weeks before an assignment is due; require additional written requests and/or a new paper-trail for major topic changes. (Assists with time-management, lessens last-minute panic, lowers opportunity for paper-buying or mass-downloading)</p>	<p>Cost: Time to review (and possibly, though not necessarily, to note down or comment on) topic choices</p> <p>Possible cost: Class time for discussion or peer-review concerning topics</p> <p>Challenge: Providing enough detail about the assignment early enough for students to make an informed choice</p>	<p>Student engagement (and more interesting papers to read!): Students who choose a topic early are more likely to pick something they are engaged with rather than whatever's "easiest"</p> <p>Teachers can nudge students toward more complex or interesting approaches to a topic</p> <p>Identifying poor topic-choices and requiring changes is most efficient for both teacher and student at this point</p> <p>Class lectures, discussions, and activities can refer to or ask students to build on their individually-chosen topics for several weeks, linking general concepts to topics with which students have their own connections</p>	<p>Topic-choice assignments can range from one-liners to more developed pieces of writing: short paragraphs on why they've chosen this topic or what the major issues related to it are, tentative theses or outlines, memos, initial bibliographies, short proposals</p> <p>Students can peer-review these assignments before or instead of teacher review: they can suggest expansions or narrowings, ask questions, imagine contradictory or alternative views to investigate, suggest evidence</p>

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<p>Assign problems, not topics: Create assignments that require students to (begin to) solve a problem: to choose a best or most important idea, to recommend an action to a specific audience, to answer "how" and "why." (Lowers fears about presenting a "right" answer, lowers opportunity for buying or mass-downloading)</p>	<p>Cost: Assignment preparation/revision time Challenge: Developing a problem that matches course content and student-abilities Challenge: Helping students to move from a "report" mode to an analysis mode and to narrow a large problem to a manageable one</p>	<p>Increases engagement and critical thinking: Students can be alerted to "real world" questions or issues in the field that need expert attention—or, alternately, to local or personal implications of larger issues Students begin to develop advanced reasoning strategies: synthesis, analysis, evaluation Students' research is driven by the question rather than the required number of sources, and may require interdisciplinary research or consulting a range of source-types Students can learn tolerance for ambiguity, partial answers, and/or small steps toward solutions</p>	<p>Add an evaluative component to a question: which item or aspect is better or most important, & why? Require a recommendation for (local) action: who should take the next steps, and what are they? Ask students to translate ideas from one setting, time period, genre, or audience to another Describe a large problem and ask (groups of) students to investigate different aspects of it</p>
<p>Emphasize a theme or angle: Choose an idea or question relevant to class materials and require students to address it in some way in their writing. (Lets students develop expertise and lower fear; helps with time-management; lowers opportunity for buying or mass-downloading)</p>	<p>Cost: Syllabus and/or assignment preparation or revision time; some class time spent on discussion Challenge: Developing an angle that is specific and intriguing without limiting topic-choice too much Challenge: Helping students see both the limits and the options available to them</p>	<p>Increased depth of study; common ground during individual project work Students may have several assignments through which to gather and analyze relevant information Students may approach an issue or question through several angles or points of view Students are asked to contextualize knowledge, to integrate facts into a larger conversation Students learn to choose or create connections that they can see, not just respond to a topic Students working on individualized projects can continue to contribute to (and take advantage of) in-class conversations and workshops</p>	<p>Choose a question or two to integrate through an entire term Ask students to vote on an issue or theme to address in a larger project, or allow clusters of students to choose their own Require one class reading as a "home base" to be referenced in all essays Define how closely the the paper and the theme must/may be related: will you allow imaginative or "stretched" connections?</p>
<p>Go step by step: Break the writing process down using interim deadlines and/or multiple documents; collect all pieces at some point. (Allows confidence-building, helps with time management; lowers opportunity for buying or mass-downloading)</p>	<p>Cost: Time to verify (and possibly, though not necessarily, review or grade) multiple steps Cost: Possible time for peer review sessions or presentations Challenge: Defining and/or rewarding steps so that students see benefits rather than just "busy work"</p>	<p>Increased time for discovery, reflection, and revision; more learning from one assignment Students have time to change their minds or adapt to newly found questions or information Students can practice representing the same information in different ways (proposal, speech, abstract, report, white paper) Students may have time to review each other Students have time to address multiple skills: gathering ideas/information, then comprehending, organizing, presenting, and polishing their work</p>	<p>In addition to the topic choice assignments listed above, consider asking for freewriting or rants, summaries, paragraphs, annotated bibliographies, one-minute speeches, white papers, letters, early drafts, research logs, progress reports, etc. Remember that peer reviewing can verify and give feedback on a step, increasing student engagement and decreasing instructor grading time</p>