# Moravian College

# (Anti-)Plagiarism Guide for Writing Teachers

This guide has 7 parts:

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- **Ethical and academic-cultural considerations**

- **Best teaching practices to avoid plagiarism**

- **Special problems with electronic sources**

- **Correct methods of using source material**

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- **Definitions and forms**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words or ideas or the presentation of another's words or ideas as one's own. It is a practice that came to be regarded as a form of theft in the wake of capitalist notions of "intellectual property" and Romantic notions of the solitary writer as "author" of words and ideas. However, earlier in Western history what we now call plagiarism was actually promoted as a rhetorical virtue, because to "imitate" and even "repeat" the classical models was to demonstrate one's knowledge of and respect for those sources. Even today, in some traditions (African-American orality, for instance) linguistic utterances are considered "community property" for purposes of reiteration. And post-modern practices such as hypertext and intertextuality have problematized the "simple" matter of who "owns" or "authors" words or ideas.

Moravian College defines plagiarism as "the use, whether deliberate or not, of any outside source without acknowledgement" (1). Further, an "outside source" is defined as "any work (published or unpublished) composed, written, or created by any person other than the student who submitted the work" (1).

Some commentators on plagiarism say that a writer's *intentions* in using material without acknowledging its source should be taken into consideration, but by the College definition "non-deliberate" plagiarism is an oxymoron. Nevertheless, in terms of the forms that unacknowledged use of source material may take, intention may be a defining characteristic of and a factor in determining an appropriate penalty for an instance of plagiarism in student work. Most commonly, plagiarism occurs in several forms:

  o Buying papers or downloading free papers from an Internet site
  o Having someone else (e.g. a classmate, friend, or relative) write a paper that is submitted as a student's original work

  o Misattribution of sources or failure to attribute or cite a source

  o Too-close paraphrasing of a source (even with attribution/citation) a.k.a.
  o "patchwriting" or "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes" (Howard 233).

The first two of these seem to indicate a writer's intention to misrepresent the work of another as the writer's own, although even in such cases a student may or may not know that such practices are considered wrong in academic contexts. The third form (sometimes considered "unintentional" or "technical" plagiarism) can be effectively headed off by means of exercises and/or instructor intervention in preliminary drafts of a paper. The fourth and fifth forms seem to have more to do with students' attempts to enter the discourse community/ies of higher education; these too may be effectively headed off by exercises and instruction during the writing process.

- **Ethical and academic-cultural considerations**

   By an ethical system that holds words and ideas as "intellectual property" and that considers "borrowing without acknowledgement" to be wrong, plagiarism in any of the above forms may be considered to warrant stern measures against students who commit it. Within the culture of the academy, using (with proper acknowledgment and citation) the words or ideas of others is not only normal practice but something that educators encourage students to do. In academic discourse especially, the use and correct citation of "outside sources" has strong rhetorical value. Doing this the right way (with disciplinary variations) is one of the important *conventions* of academic writing, something we want our students to learn and practice. If a student writer gives evidence of not knowing the convention or not observing it, we consider the student's work to be academically invalid, perhaps to the extent that it "fails" (in letter grade terms).

   Under "Best Teaching Practices" (below), I suggest that instructors discuss with students the ethicality, the rhetorical value, and the academic conventions (or their disciplinary variants) of using another person's words or ideas. We should not assume that all our students understand these dimensions of the use of source material. My research suggests that putting the question of "plagiarism" before students in a number of dimensions is the best way to treat it.

- **Best teaching practices to avoid plagiarism**

   All forms of plagiarism may be headed off or prevented by means of instructional practices. It is not enough – or effective – to merely warn students that plagiarism is wrong and will be punished; teachers should institute classroom practices, assign exercises, and design writing assignments that enable students to learn about the correct and incorrect use of source materials or that educate students about the ethical and academic-conventional dimensions of using sources.

   The following list has been compiled from several excellent sources that discuss ways that writing teachers can prevent or avoid plagiarism. Particular sources are listed in the bibliography.

   - Establish a classroom atmosphere where these practices are understood as part of the discipline of learning to write, not as a paranoid attempt to catch one or two plagiarists.
   - Define and discuss plagiarism thoroughly in class, allowing students to express their thoughts and feelings about plagiarism.
   - If teaching a writing course, consider making plagiarism the subject of a writing assignment.
   - Provide exercises in synthesizing and integrating source material into text. Practice summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting.
   - Possibly provide exercises in revising plagiarized passages.
   - Teach note-taking.
   - Require multiple drafts of essays, with early drafts submitted early, and require early drafts with your feedback be submitted along with final drafts.
   - Require students to keep a writing log where they record--step by step--the writing processes used in composing the paper they are submitting.

- o Consider requiring students to submit photocopies of documented material.
- o Control and monitor topic selection for papers and don't allow last-minute topic changes.
- o Be careful to give specific, non-generic instructions for papers. An assignment to "write about AIDS," for example, might tempt students to use one of the three AIDS papers at a paper mill such as schoolsucks.com. A more specific assignment will make plagiarism much more difficult.
- o Also try to give writing assignments which will capture your students' attention. If they can develop some interest in the subject, they'll be less likely to cheat.
- o Require specific components for the paper. Develop a set of requirements that allow flexibility but that also prevent a canned or downloaded paper from fitting the assignment. Examples:
  + At least two sources must be less than a year old.
  + Include a table of data collected by the student in a survey or experiment.
  + Include a discussion or analysis of a specific book or article named by the instructor.
  + Make use of at least two books, three articles, two Web articles, and an interview.
  + Require other specific components, such as theoretical, professional, or disciplinary vocabulary learned in course readings; interviews with experts; recent sources.
  + Include specific instructions about bibliographies, such as requiring all students to include material from required readings among their sources.
- o Require process steps. To prevent a student from handing in a paper downloaded or borrowed the night before the assignment is due, require that you see evidence of ongoing construction of the paper. Points should be given to each piece of the process, so that a student who hands in a paper without turning in the pieces will not pass the assignment.
- o Consider requiring some of these steps, spread out over the time allotted for creating the paper.
  + Explanation of topic chosen
  + Research plan
  + Preliminary bibliography
  + Annotated preliminary bibliography
  + Prospectus (the problem, possible approaches or solutions, writer's proposed approach)
  + Outline
  + Rough draft (on which you make suggestions for additional sources or rearrangement)
  + Final draft
  + Have all this material turned in with the final draft.
- o Require substantial changes between rough and final drafts.
- o Watch your students write. Ask them to bring notes or drafts to class, have short conferences about the assignment, use peer groups to comment on drafts, ask for drafts to be submitted with the final paper.
- o Require a letter of transmittal. On the day papers are due, ask students to write a letter to you reflecting on their process, the features of their papers they're proud of, the things they had trouble with, and the things they learned by writing the paper.
- o Require original copies of final drafts rather than photocopies.
- o Keep papers on file, if you assign similar topics year after year.

To sum up "best practices," plagiarism has to be confronted and taught about on all fronts; it's not enough just to punish students for committing it. Better understood, plagiarism can be handled

conscientiously and largely prevented.  The cases that do need to be "prosecuted" can be better identified and so treated.

- **Special problems with electronic sources**

The development of the Internet and the World Wide Web – and the current generation of students' familiarity and comfort with electronic sources – has no doubt contributed to, if not increased, the kinds and numbers of plagiarism cases appearing in higher education.  Some students assume (innocently if incorrectly) that because material is freely available on the Web that it is the "property" of no one and anyone, that using it without citation is not plagiarism.

That's one problem.  Another is the existence of "papermills" that sell papers or make them available for free.  The Moravian College policy on Academic Honesty specifically prohibits students from using papers from such sites unless they "fully disclose such activity to the instructor and are given express permission" (1).  However, that statement of policy may not necessarily prevent or deter students from using such services.  Some of the suggest "best practices" listed above (especially those dealing with course-specific topics, readings, and vocabulary and with process pedagogy) should go a long way toward heading off this kind of cheating.  Some additional suggestions are as follows:

- o Talk to students about using electronic sources; teach them that the *medium* in which material appears makes no difference in the academic requirement to acknowledge and cite its use.
- o Let students know that you know about web sites that provide or sell papers. Then *do* actually check some of them out. Students will be less likely to submit a paper that they know you may have seen on the web (or that a classmate might also submit).
- o Go a step further and take students to one of the sites. Have students look at a weak paper (there are plenty of these on the Web!) and analyze its failures. They will learn something about writing and also see that what's available for downloading may not impress their teacher.
- o Alternately, teach the class to use the papers on the web as sources for their own papers (along with the multitude of other web sources). Show them how to correctly cite electronic sources.
- o If appropriate, use the issues raised by the papermill web sites as a writing assignment on ethics.
- o Have a look at *The Columbia Guide to Online Style* (Columbia UP, 1998).  The following website provides valuable guidance: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html

At the same time, there are some easy ways to *find* a suspected plagiarized paper on the Web:

- o Use a search engine to search for the source. Entering key words or a string of words in quotation marks will lead you to any web sites with those words. Since not all search engines index the same sites, it's best to try the search with two or three different engines. AltaVista, HotBot, and Lycos Pro work well in finding such strings.
- o Use the Google-Plus-Four method. Find a four-word phrase that appears to be unique to the paper or paragraph you suspect. Take the phrase to Google and perform an exact phrase search by typing the phrase into the search window, and surrounding it with quotation marks.

- **Correct methods of using source material**

Any word or ideas from an outside source (see Moravian College definition, above) – or for that matter any graphics, illustrations, or other art – must be attributed to the source in which a writer found it. That holds true whether the source material is presented verbatim or otherwise exactly as it appears in the outside source, summarized, or closely paraphrased. In every case, attribution consists of direct or indirect reference to the author of the material and a complete citation of the source of the material. Different disciplinary styles offer different formats for these citations.

Rather than explain and exemplify direct quotation, paraphrase, and summary here, I will merely refer instructors to *The Bedford Handbook*, 6th ed., sections 54, 55, 59b, 59c, 60b and 60c.[1] The discussion there covers "citing sources; avoiding plagiarism" and "integrating sources" in MLA, APA, and Chicago styles, respectively. Again, however, it is insufficient to merely point students to these sections of *The Bedford Handbook*; instructors should follow some of the "best practices" listed above.

In addition to the verbal instruction and guidance, *The Bedford Handbook* offers the following exercises, in print and electronic form, that instructors may assign (graded or not) for students to become familiar with citation conventions and forms:

- o Tutorial 5: Using the directory to MLA works cited models (pp. xxviii-xxix)
- o www.dianahacker.com/bedhandbook and click on Electronic Research Exercises 54-1, 54-2, 55-1, 56-1, and 56-2. These self-paced exercises can be stored electronically for instructors to check.
- o www.dianahacker.com/bedhandbook and click on Research and Documentation Online, where may be found updates to MLA, APA, and Chicago styles.
- o *The Plagiarism Handbook*. A paperback added to the shelf of writing resources in Zinzendorf 308. This book, highly recommended from posts to the Writing Program Administrators listserv, presents "plagiarism" in an easily digestible way, yet more complete than this document. It has reproducible quizzes and exercises and other teacher resources.

It is strongly urged that *all* WRIT100 instructors assign at least one of these exercises for their students to do. Instructors of writing-intensive courses may wish to assign one or more as well.

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[1] This handbook is required in WRIT100 and is strongly recommended in writing-intensive courses in the disciplines. It provides students with brief guidelines in MLA, APA, and Chicago styles. Instructors of writing-intensive courses and other major courses may wish, of course, to require students to be familiar with more extensive discipline-specific guidelines for documentation form, such as are published in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *The Chicago Manual of Style* etc.

- **Links to websites related to plagiarism**

  - http://www.ilstu.edu/~ddhesse/wpa/positions/WPAplagiarism.pdf - a thorough statement by the national Writing Program Administrators defining plagiarism, describing some of its causes, listing responsibilities of both faculty and students, and listing best teaching practices against plagiarism.
  - http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/94jie.html - a scholarly essay about ghostwriting and the nonattribution done by academics in their ordinary writing.
  - http://www.rbs2.com/plag.htm - an overview of case law on plagiarism and opinions by a lawyer on legal issues involving plagiarism.
  - http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/wiu/plagiarism.htm - focuses on plagiarism and the web, with links to Internet papermills.
  - http://fno.org/may98/cov98may.html - "seven antidotes" for electronic plagiarism.
  - http://www.uiowa.edu/centeach/resources/ideas/termpaper-download.html - discusses the advent of Internet papermills and how a teacher may deal with them.
  - http://awpwriter.org/magazine/writers/bugeja1.htm - about using search engines to detect plagiarized papers.
  - http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm - lists and discusses strategies of "awareness," "prevention," and "detection" of plagiarism.
  - http://www.lemoyne.edu/library/plagiarism.htm -a college page that does a lot of what this document tries to do.
  - http://www.indiana.edu/%7Ewts/wts/plagiarism.html - a university page that has exercises in how to paraphrase.
  - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html - a handout from the Purdue University Online Writing Center; especially good for its list of "The Contradictions of American Student Writing."
  - http://www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html - a student-oriented page from a university with an honor code.
  - http://www.calstate.edu/centers/write_cn/plagiarism.htm - handouts showing the forms of plagiarism.
  - http://www.mtsu.edu/~itconf/proceed98/mhricko.html - a discussion of how to deal with Internet plagiarism.
  - http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/strategies - offers strategies to prevent and detect plagiarism.
  - http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/studentguide/ - a guide for students in understanding and avoiding plagiarism.

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