

## Plagiarism-Proofing Your Assignments: Strategies, Suggestions, and Resources on the Web

### **General strategies for the Classroom**

More on this topic can be found at some of the web sites listed at the end of this document

1. Go ahead and talk about it. Faculty may disagree about what constitutes plagiarism, so your students need to hear it from you.  
[http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)
  - Discuss plagiarism in the context of intellectual property and academic values
  - Introduce and model the ideas of academic conversation, and a research community
  - Emphasize building on ideas via referencing, rather than the mechanical details of citing
  - Don't harp on cheating – an atmosphere of distrust may lead students to live down to your expectations
2. Cheating is lessened when an assignment is perceived as worthwhile (=connected to course goals), so make this connection explicitly in writing within your assignment.  
[http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)
3. Cheating is lessened when students believe they can get a good grade via ethical means, so: [http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)
  - Give more, shorter assignments (less of the grade depends on each one)
  - Give a clear written prompt and grading rubric
  - Build in time for multiple drafts
  - Give written feedback on drafts (students perceive they can turn in flawed work and still succeed eventually, lessening temptation to plagiarize)
4. Only assign what you have time to evaluate (students feel their effort is wasted without feedback.) You'll need to set due dates so that feedback can be acted upon.  
<http://depts.washington.edu/psywc/handouts/pdf/facplag.pdf>
5. Acknowledge and discuss purchased papers. Maybe critique one in class or as a handout!
6. Change assignments often so that a "paper bank" doesn't build up.
7. Collaboration can help you as well as your students! Make use of your colleagues, Reference Librarians, and Writing Workshop staff to get feedback and/or help with development of assignments.

### **Assignment Topics**

Try for an unusual coupling or a narrow twist to short-circuit paper-buying. The goal is to make the topic unusual enough that the students must engage with it themselves. Some of the suggestions below are more "science-friendly" than others, but remember that not all papers in science classes must follow an objective investigative format.

1. Assign a specific coupling of text/data set, text/movie, theory paper/applied paper
  - *example*: read 1 or more papers on the scientific method or the investigative process. Pick a train of investigation and have students analyze whether it follows the model(s) presented
  - *example*: watch 2 science-related movies and compare & critique their portrayal of the relevant science
2. Use current events
3. Base assignments on a combination of factual and hypothetical elements.  
[http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
4. Give students the same assignment but different data sets (encourages collaboration but allows for individual grading) [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
5. Emphasize application/comparison, not just collection of information
6. Specify an unusual audience for the paper (still requiring use of sources)
  - *example*: write an editorial for the local newspaper (environmental issue, labeling of genetically modified foods, mercury in dental fillings)
  - *example*: a presentation for a middle school class
  - *example*: a book review, comparing chapters from 2 textbooks (audience = teachers)
7. Write from the point of view of a specific stakeholder in an issue  
[http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
  - *example*: write a license or permit application (to build or remove a dam, release a GMO, etc.)
  - *example*: design and justify a protocol for testing a particular drug, pesticide, etc.
  - *example*: write about an environmental policy issue from the point of view of a local resident, an industry representative, a government regulator...
8. Require not just objective analysis, but also reasoned personal responses. Pose a situation and ask students to reason out what they would do.  
[http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
9. Give a quotation with dubious “facts” off the web. Have students find the source, critique it, and check/correct the facts, referencing properly of course.  
<http://www.gac.edu/oncampus/academics/library/plagiarism/assignments.html>
10. As a prelude to science-journal papers: have students write an Introduction based on 4-5 assigned sources, with synthesis and proper citation as the graded objectives. Seri can give an in-class workshop on how to write an Introduction.

### **Assignment Design**

Suggestions for shaping students’ writing process to encourage productive research habits. Again, some of these will be a better “fit” for your course than others.

1. Break assignments into pieces with sequential due dates (dubbed “the research trail”). You decide what pieces make sense given your goals for student learning (some possibilities: topic, annotated bibliography, critique of an article, Introduction for peer review or your comments, draft for PR or your comments.) Seri offers in-class workshops in critiquing and peer review.
  - prevents the procrastination/panic/plagiarism sequence

- gives credit for engaging in the processes that result in good research (it is not “just busy work”)
- 2. Build in an oral component (forces students to be very conversant with their subject)
- 3. “Post scripts” – have students write in class about the research/writing process when they turn in their papers (what was hard? easy? what were the “aha!” experiences?)  
<http://writing.colostate.edu/references/teaching/plagiarism/postscripts.cfm> Or, have group members evaluate the group’s work (what parts do you think are best? worst? most original?) Again, this reveals student’s familiarity with their own research.  
[http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
- 4. Base an exam on students’ papers, asking them to apply the analysis in the paper to a fresh case. “Open paper” exam. [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
- 5. Have students create and justify in detail their own grading rubrics, partway through the paper project. [http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)
- 6. Require annotated bibliographies before the first draft is due, including student’s ideas on how they might use the source.
- 7. Or help them to read critically by requiring a critique or “says/does” outline of an article (“what the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph says is that drug X is in this class and does thus-and-such; what it does is to alert the reader that drug X will be the focus of the research, possibly as a model for this entire class of drugs”.) Seri can model this in an in-class workshop.
- 8. Require several significantly altered drafts, with or without peer review. Refuse to grade any paper for which drafts are not submitted.  
[http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)
- 9. Require pre-approval of paper topics. No last-minute topic changes (a red flag for purchased papers!)

### **Use of Sources**

*Preventive medicine* - By specifying details of source usage, you can make it hard to find a purchased or copied paper that won’t require substantial extra work on the student’s part. BUT, when you do this you may also limit the honest student’s ability to engage in an unfettered search for the sources best-suited to their topic. Use these strategies only if they fit your teaching goals:

1. Require a variety of types of sources and specify numbers of each type
2. Require citation of the page numbers actually used every time a reference is cited.
3. Require only references current to a certain cutoff date (many papermill papers cite older sources), and/or have students submit an annotated copy of the older references they use.
4. List the articles students may use, so you will know them well

### **Teaching Critical Reading & Referencing –**

1. Develop critical reading skills in class by looking at some sources together and assessing their quality. Seri can help with this as an in-class workshop.  
<http://www.gac.edu/oncampus/academics/library/plagiarism/assignments.html>

2. Or do this as a graded assignment (or part of multi-part research paper) by having students briefly summarize web sources and then summarize the mission of the organization that posted them. [http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)
3. Teach research skills by having students:
  - Take notes on a class discussion, then
  - Formulate a research question, then
  - In teams, decide on key words
  - Search, and compare the resources they find, reflecting back on their choice of keywords and formulation of the original question

### **Useful Web Sites**

Bringing Out the Best in Students (Avoiding Plagiarism) – a brief outline of approaches to discouraging plagiarism and plagiarism-proofing assignments.  
<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/efc/efs2003/Ostrow.pdf>

Developing Assignments that Can't Be Plagiarized: Some Ideas – ideas for classroom culture, building sequenced assignments, and developing narrow, specific topics.  
<http://www.gac.edu/oncampus/academics/library/plagiarism/assignments.html>

Plagiarism and Anti-Plagiarism – discussion of issues underlying plagiarism, and some general countermeasures focusing on classroom culture. Plagiarism detection methods.  
<http://newark.rutgers.edu/~ehrllich/plagiarism598.html>

Deterring Plagiarism: Some Strategies – connecting writing to thinking in the course; demonstrating your expectations; use of multi-part assignments.  
<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagiarism.html>

Making Plagiarism-Proof Assignments – tips for assignment design; details of the “postscript” idea; use of multi-part assignments that model the research process.  
<http://writing.colostate.edu/references/teaching/plagiarism/assignments.cfm>

Suggestions for Developing Assignments that Minimize Plagiarism Possibilities – measures that focus on classroom culture, multi-part assignments, multiple drafts. Detailed examples.  
[http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing\\_plagiarism.htm](http://www.kirkwood.edu/wac/tips/minimizing_plagiarism.htm)

Preventing Plagiarism in Student Writing – detecting plagiarism; assignment suggestions with pros and cons for each idea.  
<http://depts.washington.edu/psywc/handouts/pdf/facplag.pdf>

Twenty-two Techniques for Designing Cheat-Proof, Plagiarism-Proof Assignments – an eclectic collection of very specific ideas and quotes from the faculty who contributed them. Many tidbits you might be able to adapt to your own course.

[http://internet.ggu.edu/university\\_library/plagproof.doc](http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/plagproof.doc)

Plagiarism Information – a collection of links to other sites, and specific information about plagiarism-detection options.

<http://www.csbsju.edu/library/research/plagiarism.html>