

CRAFTING ASSIGNMENTS THAT SCAFFOLD ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: MAKING PLAGIARISM DOWNRIGHT DIFFICULT

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Presentation Description

Using the workshop model, participants explore elements of assignment design that create a framework for students to successfully navigate the cognitive demands of research writing without plagiarizing. After analyzing an assignment, participants discuss revisions that implement design strategies presented in the workshop.

Presentation Summary

Many students are often woefully underprepared for college writing. Some of them have not read or written a paper requiring the integration of multiple research sources: they have not developed a system for researching, keeping track of sources, integrating a quotation or paraphrased information, organizing ideas, writing, or editing. These students who lack skills in planning a writing project are more likely to plagiarize.

Academic plagiarism can be classified into four main types: Some students, intentional plagiarizers, focused on the product (the grade) and not what they might learn through the reading and writing process, will attempt to purchase or “borrow” papers. Rarely, students unconsciously plagiarize; their studies have blurred the lines between what they have read and what is common knowledge. More often, students unintentionally plagiarize out of ignorance (lack of experience) and careless note taking and writing. Finally, some students who have good intentions at the beginning of the project run out of time at the end and become intentional plagiarizers; the paper is due and they don’t have the time or energy to complete the project with fidelity, so they fabricate or incorrectly attribute sources.

Although it helps to understand the variety of plagiarizers that an instructor may encounter, more important are the ways that an instructor can prevent it.

1. It’s important for instructors to take class time to discuss academic integrity. It is not enough to post the school’s policies and expect students to read it. Most won’t. Students should understand that, through research and writing, they are participating in an academic conversation. They are building their authority and credibility as writers, their own

academic integrity. Although a conversation about “cheating” is not always an easy one, the instructor who takes the time to clarify his expectations signals that plagiarism is a serious offense. This discussion should include a definition of plagiarism (some students have an incomplete understanding of the term) and stipulate the difference between acceptable collaboration and plagiarism. Students should know how easy it is to recognize and prove plagiarism has occurred; this becomes clear when an instructor explains the process she uses to detect it and requires students to submit papers electronically. Intentional plagiarism is deterred by stories of how plagiarism was revealed and what happened to the student who submitted plagiarized work.

2. Instructors who create specific, original assignments make it more difficult for students to purchase or reuse others’ work. Providing explicit research topics and precise assignment instructions help novice writers to successfully achieve the assignment goals without the temptation to plagiarize. And when students know the purpose of the assignment and how it connects to them, their attitudes about writing improve, and their motivation to complete the task accurately increases.
3. Instructors who require students to meet process targets not only provide support for their neophyte writers, but they also make it almost impossible for a student to use another’s work. Asking students to submit a topic, a research question, a summary of early research, an annotated bibliography, an outline, and multiple drafts also allows the instructor to spot-check and suggest fixes for errors before the final copy is completed. Although some students may have difficulty settling in on their topic early on, instructors who do not allow a late change of topic are less likely to receive a purchased or re-used assignment. Many instructors find a brief meeting with the student during the writing process helps to keep students honest and improves the final product.
4. When instructors require students to visit the school’s writing center, they are enlisting a second set of eyes that help prevent plagiarism in the final copy. While working with students, writing coaches recognize unintentional plagiarism, identify it for the student, and suggest editing solutions. They model correct use of quotations,

paraphrases, summary, in-text citations and bibliographical citations. In addition, many writing centers offer webinars, video lessons, or in-class visits to assist in delicate aspects of academic writing such as integrating quotations, using signal phrases with paraphrased material, formatting in-text citations, and proofreading.

5. Finally, requiring students to write a reflective essay after the final paper has been submitted gives the student the opportunity to make connections between the process and the product. Students who have not done the work cannot write a metacognitive reflection of their research, writing process, and new learning.