Reducing Plagiarism

Why do students plagiarise?
There are many reasons students might use other people's work as if it were their own.

- They may be unaware of referencing conventions, or lack experience in referencing.
- They may not have understood what an assignment required them to do.
- They may lack confidence in their own use of language.
- If they have used others' work before, and their use of it has not been questioned, they may be under the impression that the usage is generally condoned in an academic setting.
- If such usage has gone undetected, they may assume that there are no measures in place to detect plagiarism.
- Sometimes students manage their time poorly, and copy material from another source to meet a deadline.

[Introduction to Plagiarism, its Definition and Importance]

Introduction to Plagiarism, its Definition and Importance
What Plagiarism is - A/Prof Sue Starfield

Strategies for reducing plagiarism
You can reduce the temptation for students to use others' work unfairly by taking action during the design of both course learning activities and assessments.

Course design strategies
When you design a course, take care to eliminate or at least reduce:

- chances for students to pass the course by submitting plagiarised material (e.g. copying and pasting text from a published source)
- opportunities for students to use others' work as evidence for assessment (e.g. in their portfolio or laboratory report)
- instances where students can choose and agree to assessment tasks that might make fraud easy.
Students are less tempted to use others' work as their own when courses include:

- scaffolded or linked assessment tasks in which each task builds on and confirms the previous ones
- visible methods for tracking, observing and recording student effort;
- rules for acknowledging the use of online information as well as printed resources
- ways in which students can show individual effort and create individual assessment artefacts
- authentication processes, to ensure that the student who did the work gains the credit, and
- opportunities for students to practise academic writing and referencing, to receive feedback and to improve their practice (Carroll, 2002, p.26).

Assessment design strategies

When you design assessment tasks, do the following, to reduce the temptation to make improper use of sources:

- Make sure that the students understand the instructions for each assignment.
- Include a statement of originality to be signed by the student as part of the submission cover sheet.
- Provide clear guidelines on referencing, including the referencing system the students are expected to use. See also this set of Learning Centre pages for advice on avoiding plagiarism, and guides to different referencing systems.
- Make sure that the students know the difference between quoting, paraphrasing and summarising. Provide discipline-specific examples of acceptable forms of each. See also this Learning Centre page on this topic.
- Change the assignment topic or task from year to year (or from semester to semester).
- Modify the assignment task to focus on specific (local, recent, personal) factors. This is particularly useful as a way of preventing students from using an essay mill or similar.
- Construct scaffolded or linked assessment tasks.
- Require a draft to be submitted, with your feedback (or peers') on the draft to be incorporated and acknowledged in the final version.
- For group assignments:
  - require individual students to complete a log book to record group meetings and contributions.
  - include opportunities to assess individual contributions to group tasks.
- Use (or have students use) Turnitin's OriginalityCheck tool to check their assignments for originality.

Suggested learning activities

These learning activities will help accustom your students to correct referencing practice, and reinforce its importance in academic work.

- Ask students to keep a reflective journal that includes a record of some of the sources they have referred to in their assignments, with annotations to indicate what they have learned from these sources.
- In class, ask students to discuss a completed assignment in groups, without looking at the written text of their assignment.
- In class, circulate examples of student submissions that include examples of plagiarism or poor referencing.
Ask students to identify errors and discuss how they may have come about, and how to rectify them.

Note: Although an educational approach is more effective in preventing plagiarism, where serious and/or repeated breaches occur it is the responsibility of educators to follow the formal procedures described in the
UNSW: Student Academic Integrity and Managing Plagiarism Guidelines

Strategies and Resources for Responding to Plagiarism

Associate Professor Sue Starfield explores the phenomenon of plagiarism and describes strategies and resources for responding to it

Video series - Strategies and Resources for Responding to Plagiarism

References


Gelber, Katherine (2003). Integrated researching and referencing skills project for first year students.

Learnhigher, Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning, Referencing - Resources for Staff

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