

Promoting Academic Honesty in Student Writing

Chapter 8



Don't do what I did! In less than six days, I exchanged personal integrity for dishonesty, sacrificed my reputation by attempting to take the easy way out, and in so doing derailed my ride towards an education, a Syracuse University diploma, and a successful future.

Suspended Syracuse University student
(from *Arts & Sciences Resource Guide*)

I know a lot of people that plagiarize off the Internet and from people that had the class the previous year, and they continue to do it because they never get caught.

Senior in Psychology

It's demoralizing to think that students might be taking advantage of you, and it's awful to feel like a detective . . .

Jane Halonen, Ph.D., James Madison University
(from *APA Monitor*, Feb 2002)

As teachers we expect academic honesty in our classrooms, in our departments, and in our schools. Yet forty to seventy percent of all college students have reported cheating at some point during their academic career (Gross-Davis). The Center for Academic Integrity estimates that about seventy percent of professors handle at least one case of plagiarism a year (Murray). Advancements in technology such as Internet paper-mill sites or the copy and paste functions of the computer have made it easier to plagiarize. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine methods of prevention and evaluation in order to manage and control potential events of academic dishonesty.

Prevention is the best way to attenuate the occurrence of plagiarism in writing. It is your job as a teacher to make it as difficult as possible for students to cheat in your classroom. Yet, most professors' attempt at prevention is a simple threat in their syllabus at the beginning of the semester, and nothing more. In this chapter we will consider many strategies for preventing academic dishonesty.

Ways to be proactive about plagiarism

Educate yourself regarding the TYPES of plagiarism that exist.

Understand the REASONS behind academic dishonesty.

Create an ENVIRONMENT that supports academic honesty.

Establish your own RULES and make them CLEAR to the students.

Spend time on a DISCUSSION and EXERCISES regarding academic honesty.

Teach RESOURCE USE and CITATION rules.

Design ASSIGNMENTS strategically.



Types of Academic Dishonesty in Writing

Many forms of academic dishonesty exist in writing. It is important that we continually find ways to prevent unwanted situations by building classrooms that promote honesty for the sake of a better education. The first step to prevention is knowledge. You cannot prevent something if you do not know about it. It is also important to begin by educating yourself about Syracuse University's policies and procedures in order to understand your rights in advance of any problems. Often as a teaching assistant, your advisor will assist you or will take control in a situation of academic dishonesty. Familiarize yourself with situations in which you do and do not have discretion.

**Syracuse University Bulletin Academic Rules and Regulations '01-'02
(section 1.0)**

Syracuse University students shall exhibit honesty in all academic endeavors. Cheating in any form is not tolerated, nor is assisting another person to cheat. The submission of any work by a student is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own except when properly credited to another. . . . Plagiarism is the representation of another's words, ideas, programs, formulae, opinions, or other products of work as one's own, either overtly or by failing to attribute them to their true source.

Regardless of your authority, you should take some time to think and record your own definition of academic dishonesty. The definitions vary, but typically plagiarism is defined as submitting a piece of writing as your own when the words or ideas belong to someone else. Consider the fact that plagiarism exists on a continuum from inadvertent laziness to knowledgeable cheating. Different types of plagiarism may occur more or less frequently with different types of writing. Some blatant types of plagiarism include:

- Downloading a free paper off the Internet (see Termpapers.com for list of sites);
- Copying an article from the Web or on-line source;
- Copying a paper from a local source (from a student enrolled in the course previously);
- Cutting sections of several sources and pasting them together in order to create paper.

These forms of plagiarism often occur with the student fully aware that there is wrongdoing. These papers often jump out at you as an *obviously too good to be true* type of paper, but remember that even C papers could contain plagiarized sections. Word-for-word plagiarism is the most typical type of academic dishonesty; it can be in the form of paragraph, sentence, phrase, or unique term lifting, anywhere that writing is copied without quotations or references. Also typical is plagiarism of ideas or theories without referencing the source. This can often occur when it is difficult to distinguish between common knowledge and the need to quote. Without a discussion with the student, it is often difficult to know if students are purposefully copying or if the error is due to inadvertent citation errors. Other examples of academic dishonesty in writing are:

- Quoting less than all words of a passage;
- Referencing a source they have never seen first hand;
- Using previous academic work as a new product (recycled paper);
- Faking a citation;
- Incorrect or lack of a citation of an on-line reference.

By understanding the difference between plagiarism, paraphrasing, and direct citation, you can begin to set upon your own definition of plagiarism. This definition will be used to create an environment of honesty in your classroom, as well as to direct your attempts to prevent, and, if necessary, react to the continuum of dishonesty.

Understand the Reason

Why and how do students come into situations that are considered dishonest? Just as the definitions of dishonesty are on a continuum, so are the reasons. There are often behavioral signs that you can learn to recognize that will prevent an academic dishonesty situation from occurring. For example, ensuring equal access to research materials and sources or making students feel that they can succeed in class without dishonesty can prevent academic dishonesty. Understanding and continually reminding yourself of these reasons will help you to create an optimal situation in your classroom that will promote academic honesty. Some examples of how to do this are provided in the following sections.

Some reasons that students plagiarize

- *Don't know they are cheating*
- *Shortest route to be finished*
- *Pressure for good grades*
- *Citation errors*
- *Topic doesn't interest them*
- *Don't care about academic honesty*
- *Peer pressure to help a friend*
- *Poor time management*
- *Fear that writing is inadequate*
- *Don't know how to find resources*
- *Consider situation unfair/too demanding*
- *Thrill of rule breaking*

(source: adapted from Harris, 2002)



Create an Environment of Academic Honesty

Take some time to consider the type of environment you would like to create in your classroom. Most of us desire an environment that is open, supportive, and safe. The environment should not be any different regarding academic honesty. There are several ways to create an atmosphere in your classroom that supports academic honesty. Many teachers present their academic honesty rules through a harsh, threatening note in their syllabus such as:

Plagiarism and cheating will NOT be tolerated. Students shall exhibit honesty in all academic endeavors and adhere to the rules stated under the heading of Academic Standards in the *Syracuse University Bulletin: Academic Rules and Regulations*.

By doing so, students may understand that they will be severely punished for incorrect behavior, and may be afraid to ask if they do not know or understand the policy. In this environment it is not atypical to find papers with too many quotes! One way to create an environment that supports academic honesty is to allow for a discussion regarding rules of honesty.

Syllabus

Most likely the syllabus will be the first time you present your academic honesty policy (see following section to make decisions regarding your rules). The syllabus can be used as a chance to begin a conversation about academic honesty. Instead of the typical syllabus statement try instead to provide students with a list of what is and is not acceptable in your classroom. The information provided in the academic honesty statement is intended to clarify what you as the teacher expect of them and what they can expect from you. Consider any specific situation that may arise in your class and try to address what is/is not allowed. If nothing else, add,

At any time you ever have any questions or concerns regarding academic honesty or other policies in the class, please come and talk with me.

See Chapter 2 for ways to engage students in a discussion of course materials.



The Do's and Don'ts of Academic Honesty

What to do:

- Do** help each other
- Do** ask questions
- Do** edit and rewrite your writing and others
- Do** take care when citing sources
- Do** use sources wisely
- Do** discover your own voice and opinions
- Do** enclose quoted material with quotation marks
- Do** cite direct source of quotation

What not to do:

- Don't** cheat, lie, steal
- Don't** use papers that you did not write
- Don't** make up fake quotes
- Don't** paraphrase without source credit
- Don't** procrastinate
- Don't** use another's ideas as your own
- Don't** forget to cite web sites and speeches
- Don't** be afraid to talk to the teacher!

(source: Bedford Martins Web Site:<bedfordstmartins.com/technotes/techtiparchive/ttip102401.htm>.)

Academic honesty contract

Some professors include a contract at the end of their syllabus containing academic honesty rules and signed at the beginning of the semester by all students in the course. The contract can contain a short statement regarding what is and what is not allowed in the classroom as well as a space for the student to sign and date the contract. Specific rules regarding collaboration and take-home assignments and exams can be stated explicitly on the contract as well.

Academic Honesty Contract

A Contract to Uphold Academic Honesty at Syracuse University

I, being a student of Syracuse University, have read and understand the information contained in this Resource Guide. I agree to uphold the Syracuse University Compact and, in so doing, to maintain the highest standards of personal integrity and academic honesty in all endeavors. I understand that any violation of these principles is likely to result in sanctions from course instructors, the Student Standards Committee of The College of Arts and Sciences, and/or the Dean of Arts and Sciences. These sanctions may include but are not limited to receiving an “F” in the course, administrative withdrawal from the course, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University.

Signed

Date

(Please sign and return this copy)

(Contract example from Syracuse University’s College of Arts and Sciences Web Site: <<http://www-hl.syr.edu/advising/honestyguide.html>>.



Honor code

A similar method of prevention and education is the use of an honor code in your classroom. Instead of creating the rules yourself, you and your students can come to agree upon a constitution regarding academic honesty through collaboration. The rules can be formally written into a code of conduct document. A ceremony can be held in which each student signs and dates the document. Both the contract and honor code create an environment in which students understand that academic honesty is an important component to a working classroom. These formal possibilities make students aware that there is room for open discussion while at the same time suggests the gravity of academic honesty.

Establish Your Rules

What do you do if you catch a student cheating? There are many plausible situations to consider. If you are a TA, remember that you may not be fully in control of the rules, but you can still control how you will respond to the situation, and you should be prepared to consult with your advisor and other teachers. Even with years of experience and all the preparation you can imagine, each situation is different and needs to be considered on an individual basis. Since the penalty must fit the offense. Since academic dishonesty exists on a continuum, the penalties must as well. In addition to considering what you will do for situations on the opposite ends of the continuum, many teachers will consider the number of offenses when developing penalties for academic dishonesty. For example,

Plagiarism will result in an F on the paper with no possibility of make-up or other credit, and the second act will result in an F for the course.

There are three common penalties when an act of plagiarism is found:

1. Fail the course,
2. Fail paper, but not course (some also require signature of confession), and
3. Rewrite the paper and be penalized by a full grade.

Institutions and professional associations may dictate other consequences as well. Each penalty has its own pros and cons. When developing your own rules, talk to other faculty who also are trying to use writing more effectively in their classroom by preventing academic dishonesty. Remember to incorporate the specific situations that students will encounter in your class, such as if students will be allowed to collaborate and in what capacity it is or is not allowed. It is also important to consider your policy on citation of information from the Internet and your position on make-up exams. Regardless, it is important to make the penalties of academic dishonesty clear and specific to your students from the beginning of the course. Some teachers feel that it is helpful to show students an awareness of Internet sites that sell papers. Others disagree, fearing that it could provide students with more resources for cheating in the future. Making your

Internet Paper Mill Sites

The paper store: <http://www.paperwriters.com/intro.htm>

LazyStudents.com: <http://LazyStudents.com>

Genius Papers: <http://www.geniuspapers.com/index.htm>

Evil House of Cheat: <http://www.cheathouse.com/>

Research Papers Online: <http://www.ezwrite.com/>

All Free Essays: <http://allfreeessays.com/>

School Sucks: <http://schoolsucks.com>

students aware that you do not tolerate dishonesty will dissuade them from attempting it in your classroom; at the same time, making it explicit that asking questions and discussions of honesty are welcomed at all times will promote an open and honest environment.

Discussion of Academic Honesty

In addition to a lesson on resource use and citation rules, an open discussion regarding academic honesty allows for students to ask questions regarding what is okay and not okay to do. If given an opportunity many students will ask about collaboration. Let the students know that you value good writing individual and collaborative—and discuss the implications of collaborative writing projects. The discussion should always suggest that questions are welcomed at any time but that blatant disregard for academic honesty is never tolerated. There are several ways to organize the discussion some of which are:

- Discuss the range of plagiarism distinguishing between mistakes and deliberate cheating.
- Examine the philosophical reasons why plagiarism is unfair to peers and oneself.
- Discuss the benefits to citation such as the ability to strengthen writing by revealing the knowledge of using and synthesizing sources.
- Discuss tips to avoid problems such as time management issues.
- Discuss the difficulties of writing by letting them know that you understand the anxiety and frustration involved in the writing process.
- Discussion regarding information that counts as common knowledge.
- Discussion of implications of academic dishonesty.
- Allow for a question and answer period after dispensing the academic honesty policy.
- Discuss how to properly cite web sources and how to properly locate information on the Internet.
- Utilize several exercises available to discuss academic honesty (see “Academic Honesty Classroom Exercises” on the next page).

Teach Resource Use and Citation Rules

While it is necessary to provide explicit definitions, many teachers forget that many students do not know or understand the parameters of academic honesty. Therefore, if you expect academic honesty in your classroom, it is sometimes necessary to spend time, with a lesson or a handout, teaching and/or refreshing knowledge regarding how to use sources responsibly. If you are going to require a research paper, a handout explaining how to find resources can ensure equal access to materials. Beyond teaching pure citation rules, you can also teach students good habits, such as including citation

Academic Honesty Classroom Exercises



Exercise 1: Questions

Ask students to write down their answers to questions you pose about academic honesty. Then allow for a discussion regarding each question.

Sample questions: *What is your definition of academic honesty? Do you agree with the policy as stated in the syllabus? Any questions about the policy?*

Exercise 2: Sample paragraph

Ask students to read a sample paragraph and writing based on the original paragraph. Then ask students to determine the correctness or level of plagiarism for each writing sample. The writing samples can include examples of quoting (in)correctly, paraphrasing (in)correctly, and arguments cited (in)correctly. You can also ask students to re-write the incorrect passages.

Exercise 3: Cartoon

Go to www.antiplagiarism.com and use Harris' cartoons as a handout for a class discussion regarding academic honesty.

Exercise 4: Mini-case studies

Ask students to discuss specific academic dishonest situations, such as a group work or problem set situation in which honesty is uncertain. (see Hurd & Hallock, in press)

Exercise 4: Harris' (2001) *The Plagiarism Handbook*

See Harris' book for several exercises to help with correct quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.

Exercise 5: University of Puget Sound's exercises for citing sources

(See <http://library.ups.edu/research/guides/intelown.htm> for exercises on citation)

information when taking notes for a paper. Students should be made aware of rules without being scared of the prospect of completing a paper or feeling required to quote unnecessarily. Spend time recommending tutoring services and writing centers on campus so that the students can receive help throughout the semester. Finally, remember to set a good example in your own writing, lectures, and notes! Students learn from your actions as well as your words. Citation styles are continually changing, so it is important for you and your students to take advantage of formatting handbooks (available on-line at apastyle.org, or mlaformatting.com). Whether you use MLA, APA, or another formatting style, always encourage consistency. Students come from different academic backgrounds and have experience with different citation rules. By reviewing

citation rules in your class the students will be made to be aware of their responsibilities as resource users.

Designing Good Assignments

Another effective preventative measure is to create assignments that make academic dishonesty impossible or extremely difficult to accomplish. Several options are suggested on Harris' website and book. Listed below are suggestions for crafting a good assignment, whether it be a research paper, an essay, or a short-answer quiz .

Set-up suggestions:

- Require in-class writing assignments in order to develop writing skills, as well as to get a sense of the students' ability.
- Make assignments clear with specific expectations.
- Focus the assignments so they are closely tied to course goals/topics.
- Encourage topics that provoke thought and analysis more than mere fact-listing.
- Encourage topics that students are intrinsically interested in pursuing.
- Provide choices in terms of the topic or the type of paper.
- Require specific components (e.g., use source from 2002, course text book, or incorporate information provided such as a data set, an article, or an interview).
- Limit sources used (e.g., require references to be up-to-date).
- Provide students criteria for how you are evaluating their performance.
- Change assignments and revise paper topics each time you teach the course.

See Chapter 2 for more tips on designing assignments.

Process suggestions:

- Require students to hand-in highlighted cited text.
- Require students to come in to office hours to discuss topic, and how they plan to organize and present their ideas or research.
- Require writing steps (hand-in topic/problem, bibliography/references, photocopies of articles, outline, rough draft, annotated bibliography, draft, and final draft).
- Require students to hand-in final version with earlier drafts (in order to check if previous suggestions and comments have been taken into account in the final version).

See Chapter 7 for further discussion on evaluation and grading.

Evaluation suggestions:

- Require oral reports. Have students narrate their whole process of research and writing.
- Have students complete an in-class meta-learning essay. Have students answer questions such as, “*What did you get out of the assignment?*”, “*What problems did you face and how did you overcome them?*”, “*Where did you locate most of our sources?*”, and “*What is the most important thing you learned from the assignment?*”.
- Check their writing thoroughly. If they know you are going to read their papers closely, they know the chance of getting away with plagiarism is unlikely (Tip: If you have a big class, ask students to submit their papers electronically so they know you may send papers through a plagiarism detector program).

Alert! Alert! Dishonesty Detected!

Okay, you’ve tried to prevent academic dishonesty, but you THINK you have found an instance of it anyway. First, try not to take it personally. It happens to most of us, but how you deal with it can be just as important to prevent future instances.

How to Detect Academic Dishonesty

- Look for clues such as: mixed citation styles, lack of references or quotations, unusual formatting, off topic, datedness, anachronisms, anomalies of diction, anomalies of style, web name/URL on corner (Harris).
- Search for paper or phrases from paper on-line through search engines such as: Google (Reference > Education > Educators > Plagiarism > Detection), AltaVista, Northern Light, or Fast Search.
- Use a plagiarism detector such as: Turnitin.com (\$, free trial period), Eve2: canexus.com/eve/index.shtml (\$), Glatt: plagiarism.com (\$), integriguard.com: (1) HowOriginal.com (free), (2) PaperBin.com (\$), wordchecksyste.ms.com (\$), Digital Integrity: findsame.com (\$).

The Internet has made available papers for downloading, but also has detection tools to recognize those papers (some companies provide both). New scams arise daily. There are also several legal issues related to detection software use. Periodically checking the web and academic publications, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, can provide up-to-date information (see <<http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i36/36a03701.htm>>).

What To Do (and Not To Do) If You Suspect a Problem

If you suspect you have found a circumstance of academic dishonesty, you should take action as soon as possible. The first step you should take is to talk to an advisor, an experienced colleague, or the department chair, and then review the school's rules and regulations and due process procedures since policies are different within each college. Consider the culture of your department and the specific situation. You may know your student better than your department chair. Your knowledge of your student can provide some direction regarding how you will handle the situation. Second, you (or you and a faculty member) will need to talk with the student. This can be a difficult and uncomfortable situation, but preparation and consideration can make it as calm and directed as possible. It is not necessary to deal with the problem alone. If you are uncertain of what to do, ask for assistance. Remember the student is entitled to due process and confidentiality. Do not treat the student as a criminal, but instead show a mix of sympathy and concern as well as sternness for the seriousness of situation. The following is a list of some things to consider in a situation of academic dishonesty.

- Consider if you feel comfortable talking with the student alone (which can make the student feel less threatened) or with an advisor or colleague in the room (which can protect you and the student from any misunderstanding about the situation).
- Set an appointment to talk to the student.
- Have a copy of plagiarized document in hand for the meeting and any information you have that has prompted concern for the situation.
- Objectively explain problem as you see it (e.g., “There seems to be many errors with citations. Do you know citation rules?”).
- Ask open-ended questions such as, “Is there anything you want to tell me about your paper?”
- Try to avoid words such as *cheating* and *plagiarism*.
- Listen. Give the student a chance to explain their paper (i.e. the process they went through to do it, or where they got the idea to write it).
- If the student responds with only denial, ask questions about the content, terms, and interpretations of the paper.
- If the student admits to dishonesty, give him or her a chance to explain the reason why they were dishonest.
- Be ready for tales of hardship and extenuating circumstances (suggest counseling center, if appropriate) and learn to recognize legitimate and unacceptable excuses.
- Also be ready for judgment calls since plagiarism is always a matter of

degree.

- State your policy again and explain what happens next.
- Remember to document the meeting and any conversations for your records in order to protect you and your student.
- If necessary, take official action according to your discretion and rules of the school (see action chart at http://thecollege.syr.edu/advising/AS_Resource_Guide/Actions.htm).

Writing functions as a primary currency in academic communities. As teachers and scholars, we can use writing to promote active participation and engaged learning by incorporating it into our teaching practices in both formal and informal ways. The relationship between writing and academic honesty is complicated by the advent of emerging technologies and collaborative pedagogies. The globalization of information means that our students can access new forms and kinds of knowledge; it also means that written materials are available for misuse. Similarly, innovative teaching methods challenge us to rethink our understanding and evaluation of ‘student work’ as we embrace multiple ways of learning that include collaborative classroom practices.

As we have discussed throughout this book, we continue to develop strategies and practices for engaging students through writing, and we invite you to use, adapt and transform the ideas presented here as you apply them to your own classroom. The active and open exchange of ideas that is so valued by members of the academic community—and the collaborative authors of this book—depend on a culture of engaged learning. All members of this community—both teachers and students—can contribute to it by recognizing our roles as proactive agents in the learning process.