

# Academic Integrity Matters

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## Instructional Note

### Teaching about Plagiarism in the Age of the Internet – by Jeffrey Klausman

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*The Internet provides new opportunities for teaching about plagiarism and how to avoid it.*

#### Introduction

Things have changed since I began teaching research writing ten years ago. I used to require students to use at least one electronic source; now, I require that students use at least one paper source. Students used to start their search at the card catalog; now they log onto the Internet. Of course, the change has been gradual, but I have begun to ask what this shift from paper to electronic sources means to academic integrity.

It may mean that as full-text articles become easier to access with such retrieval systems as *EbscoHost*, students will have the opportunity to plagiarize more readily: by blocking and copying a text directly into their

own documents, student writers are no longer required to write or type out the author's exact words. Perhaps future research can focus on whether this ease will short-circuit student writers' sense of academic integrity, but my experience suggests that students working with Internet sources are just as likely if not more likely to plagiarize.

Already, some research suggests that working with electronic text may contribute to incidences of plagiarism. Nick Carbone, et al. and Colette A. Diaute, in studying the impact of word processing on student writers, suggest that electronic texts seem to writers to be less personal, authorized, or bounded. It is not implausible, therefore, that a connection exists between these effects of word processing, the proliferation of and access to Internet sources, and the blurring of the issue of text ownership. So as a precaution, I've incorporated into all of my classes a fuller instruction about plagiarism that requires students to work with texts. I try to clarify the different kinds of plagiarism, how easy they are to spot and how to avoid

them. To accomplish this, I use handouts with definitions and brief examples and overheads with paragraph-length examples.

## Overview of Methods and Materials

I begin by introducing the terms. For many people, plagiarism has only one meaning: taking the exact words from a source and presenting them as one's own, *direct plagiarism*. This kind of plagiarism occurs on college campuses, of course, but only occasionally. Two far more common kinds of plagiarism are *paraphrase plagiarism* and *patchwork plagiarism*. These kinds of plagiarism are usually not deliberate but occur because of an error in writing methods. *Paraphrase plagiarism* occurs when a writer takes the ideas of another writer in nearly the exact words as the original. *Patchwork plagiarism* occurs when a writer takes the ideas of another writer and "patches them together" as his or her own.

I follow this discussion of terms with an overhead slide showing an example of one student's problems. I tell the students to imagine that a student is working on a research paper that reviews the literature on fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) for an introductory psychology class. As part of the research, the student wants to explain how much alcohol a pregnant woman must drink (her "threshold") for FAS to be likely. This is the paragraph the student writes using APA style (I've numbered the sentences):

[1] There are many theories as to how and why the fetus can be damaged, but most FAS researchers agree on the premise that there is a threshold for fetus damage. [2] Finding a threshold is an important part of fetal alcohol research, yet relatively few researchers have studied this aspect. [3] Threshold can be defined as the level of exposure to toxin below which average group performance is not adversely affected (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 1994). [4] How much alcohol makes the threshold is the gray area. [5] Exactly how much is uncertain, but animal and human

testing has given scientists a ballpark figure as to an approximate amount of drinks before fetal damage begins. [6] Human studies indicate that seven standard drinks per week may be the threshold for the most sensitive neurobehaviors but may not apply to all women and all babies (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 1994).

I then walk through an instructor's response as s/he encounters the paragraph above. An instructor would scan this paragraph and immediately recognize *patchwork plagiarism*. Why? First, all of the information comes from a single source, Jacobsen and Jacobsen. The student has only taken ideas from this source and "patched them together." Sentence 3 and 6 cite Jacobsen and Jacobsen; no other sources are cited. Second, the student writer has focused this paragraph *not* on Jacobsen and Jacobsen's findings (a summary) but on the subject of thresholds; thus, the student is being intellectually dishonest: she is saying she is talking about the subject of thresholds in FAS but she is really talking about a research article by Jacobsen and Jacobsen. I then refocused the discussion on a specific, troublesome sentence, one which might alert an attentive reader. I tell the students that an instructor would also likely suspect *paraphrase plagiarism* and *direct plagiarism*. Why? I direct their attention to the third sentence again:

*Threshold can be defined as the level of exposure to toxin below which average group performance is not adversely affected* (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 1994).

This sentence does not sound like a writer in an introductory course; the instructor would likely check the original. Here is the original passage found in the magazine *Alcohol Health and Research World*:

In human neurobehavioral studies, threshold is usually defined in terms of the level of exposure to a toxin below which average group performance is not adversely affected.

Notice that the student has *copied* some of the words exactly (shown in bold) and changed some others (shown in italics). This is a perfect example of *paraphrase plagiarism* with a mix of *direct plagiarism* (so are sentence 2, 5, and 6).

Having worked through the kinds of plagiarism and how they can occur, I then focus the class's attention on correcting and avoiding the errors by synthesizing sources or paraphrasing and quoting properly using these guidelines:

To correct *patchwork plagiarism*, synthesize sources. That is, include at least two but usually three sources for each topic you discuss. So, in addition to Jacobsen and Jacobsen, the student above should include the work of other researchers.

To correct *paraphrase plagiarism*, either quote sources directly or properly paraphrase them. Sentence 3 above, for example, could be presented with a quotation as follows, with quotation marks and a page number reference:

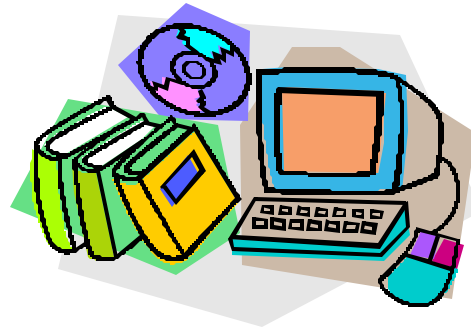
Threshold can be defined as "the level of exposure to toxin below which average group performance is not adversely age group performance is not adversely affected" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 1994, p. 1).

We then look at the same student example, again with an overhead, and discuss the changes.

Alerted to the errors with *patchwork plagiarism* and *paraphrase plagiarism*, our student rewrote her original effort and came up with the following. Notice that there are several sources presented (Klaassen and Sokol have been synthesized into sentence 6) and also notice that many of the sentences have been written in the student's own words (paraphrasing, see sentences 2 and 5, for example). Compare sentence by sentence the first attempt with this second attempt.

[1] There are many theories as to how and why the fetus can be damaged, but most FAS researchers agree that there is a threshold for fetus damage. [2] Finding a threshold is an important part of fetal alcohol research. [3] Jacobsen and Jacobsen (1994)

define threshold as "the level of exposure to toxin below which average group performance is not adversely affected" (p. 1). [4] But how much alcohol is required to reach the threshold is the gray area. [5] Testing on animals and humans, for example, have given scientists only an approximate figure for the number of drinks required for fetal damage to begin. [6] Some experts have found that "seven standard drinks per week" for an average woman may be the threshold (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 1994. P. 1), but Klaassen (1986) has found that this number may vary, with some fetuses being affected by far fewer drinks and others not being affected by more; even more confusing, one study suggests that the FAS threshold may be nearer 42 alcoholic drinks per week (Sokol, 1988). [7] Jacobsen and Jacobsen (1994) conclude that threshold figures are only approximations and may not hold true in all cases.



## The Internet and Plagiarism

Following this discussion of the principles of plagiarism, we then discuss how the Internet and electronic sources create an easy means of plagiarizing sources. To some students, this proves to be an eye opener since they did not know they could block and copy from an Internet source into a word processing program.

I use the following example to demonstrate how plagiarism with electronic sources often occurs. I explain that the sentence below appeared in one of my student's papers recently. As I read it and show it on the overhead, I tell how I felt the inner tension I often feel when I suspect that the words I'm reading are not those of the student.

Biotechnology is ushering in an age of molecular medicine, with accurate new approaches to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of illnesses ("Maps," 1998).

I then tell the students that since I had easy access to the Internet, I checked the site via the address in the student's references page. Once at the site, "From Maps to Medicine," a part of *Science* magazine's online material, I used the "Find" function under the "Edit" menu-bar item in Netscape Navigator and typed in a few key words, in this case "approaches to the diagnosis." The "Find" function took me directly to this sentence, which I blocked, copied, and pasted into my word-processing program, putting in bold the plagiarized phrase:

**It also promises to usher in an era of molecular medicine, with precise new approaches to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease.**

I explain that I had suspected that the subject plagiarized unwittingly, due to the difficulty of the material and, thus, paraphrased it. Therefore, I sought to show the student why his writing as is was unacceptable. I created a new word processing document with both the language from the Internet site and the student's own writing (he had turned in his paper on disk; thus, I was able to block and copy his writing as well). We then compared the two. In fact, the student admitted to having at first quoted the sentence but then, feeling he had already used too many quotations, had removed the quotation marks; he said he "thought" he had paraphrased it.

However, since we had discussed plagiarism in class, the student was able to spot quickly the problem and correct it. I asked that he check and correct other places in his paper that he suspected he had committed *paraphrase plagiarism* or *direct plagiarism* (to his credit, he had synthesized sources properly). He did so in approximately a half-dozen places, and then the paper was awarded the grade the ideas and development deserved. He amended the sentence in question to this:

According to *Science* magazine, medicine at the molecular level may be changed drastically by biotechnology with diseases being diagnosed, treated, and even prevented in new ways ("Maps," 1998).

## Conclusion

The primary difference between what I do now and what I did before the widespread use of electronic sources is to show students how easy and quick it is for a reader to check electronic sources. I require that the references page be complete with accurate Internet addresses, and then I check a few. It takes no more than two minutes to pull up a Web page, use the "Find" function, and search for key words. If any of the addresses don't work, I return the paper to the student to correct the reference page. Moreover I always require students to turn in paper copies of sources, whether photocopied or downloaded and printed; it is surprising how often students highlight the very areas they plagiarize! This suggests that plagiarism is usually unintentional.

## Works Cited

Carbone, Nick, et al. "Writing Ourselves Online." *Computers and Composition* 10.3 (1993): 29-48.

Daiute, Colette A. "Can the Computer Stimulate Writer's Inner Dialogue?" *The Computer in Composition Instruction: A Writer's Tool*. Ed. William Wresch. Urbana: NCTE, 1984: 131-39.

---. "The Computer as Stylus Audience." *College Composition and Communication* 34 (1983): 134-45.

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## TURNITIN.COM UPDATE

Student Services will no longer be able to offer Turnitin.com services through our office. The

new pricing structure does not permit a non-academic department to serve as administrator. All subscribers must be from the same academic department. The service does offer options from \$100.00 for an individual account. Please contact Karen Kirk at 510-287-9720 x232 or [kkilk@turnitin.com](mailto:kkilk@turnitin.com) directly for additional information. Turnitin.com was helpful in thwarting plagiarism last year. Ironically, the company says that the reason it has changed its policy is that some institutions were unethically misusing their accounts to avoid payment in services rendered!

Other internet sites that you may find helpful include:

**Glatt Plagiarism Services, Inc.**

<http://www.plagiarism.com/index.htm>

E- mail: [drglatt@plagiarism.com](mailto:drglatt@plagiarism.com)

**CaNexus.com, EVE**

<http://www.integriguard.com/Default.asp>

**PlagiServe Team**

<http://www.plagiserve.com/>

**WordCheck**

<http://www.wordchecksyste.ms.com>

**The Plagiarism Resource Center at The University of Virginia**

<http://plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/>

**Turnitin.com**

[http://turnitin.com/contact\\_us.html](http://turnitin.com/contact_us.html)

E- mail: [info@turnitin.com](mailto:info@turnitin.com)

**Google.com**

<http://www.google.com>

**2001-2002 REPORTED ACADEMIC DISHONESTY VIOLATIONS BY COLLEGE**

- College of Arts and Letters 18
- College of Business and Public Administration 21
- Darden College of Education 6
- College of Engineering and Technology 6
- College of Health Science 5
- College of Sciences 9
- No College Designated 1

**Total 66**

**HONOR COUNCIL WINS TITLE OF “STUDENT ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR”**

At the Spring Student Awards Ceremony, the Honor Council was named Student Organization of the Year. We are proud of the important accomplishments of our Honor Council which include:

- Giving regular classroom presentations on Academic Integrity
- Hosting a monthly Honor Day
- Participating in the Student Leaders Conference
- Providing advocacy for students going through the judicial process
- Promotion of the Graduation Pledge Alliance
- Service on Student Judicial Hearing Panels

Congratulations to the Honor Council and best wishes for another successful year. Remember that the Honor Council is available to give in class or group presentations pertaining to Academic Integrity or the Honor System. Contact it directly at 683-4350 email at [hcouncil@odu.edu](mailto:hcouncil@odu.edu) or visit their Web Site [[http://www.odu.edu/AO/student\\_serv/hc/](http://www.odu.edu/AO/student_serv/hc/)].

**IMPORTANT CAMPUS RESOURCES TO NOTE**

Student Judicial Affairs (757)-683-3431  
<http://www.odu.edu/osja>

Honor Council (757) 683-4350  
[http://www.odu.edu/AO/student\\_serv/hc/](http://www.odu.edu/AO/student_serv/hc/)