

Preventing Plagiarism

According to composition scholar Reade Dornan (2003), students plagiarize mainly because they don't understand the assignment or they run out of time and get desperate. We're talking about intentional cheating here, not misunderstanding how to cite or paraphrase correctly. Of course, you can check for plagiarized work through numerous detection programs, but the goals of the writing assignment are lost by the time you get to that stage. The way you design your writing assignments can prevent students from seeing cheating as an option in the first place. Building in constraints can also give students insecure about the assignment more guidance. Here are some examples:

- Stagger due dates for different parts of a paper. For example, assign an annotated bibliography early on.
- Specify materials students can use: articles they must integrate; work published in, say, the past four years; two Internet sources, three journal articles, two monographs, etc.
- Assign narrowly focused topics or ask students to write about current events as they relate to class materials.
- As part of the revision process, give feedback on their thesis statements.
- Require students to hand in notes or outlines with their paper because you are looking for evidence of original thought.
- Print out a paper from one of the paper mills and critique it in class, showing them not only that you are aware of these products but helping them understand the assignment better.
- Give them a rough outline to follow for the paper.
- Impress on them the class goal of learning to "sound academic" by rearticulating (and citing) the language of professionals in the field.