



plagiarism
advice.org

Frequently **Asked** Questions



What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism occurs when an author attempts to misrepresent as original, existing and unacknowledged material or ideas from another person, source or (in the case of self-plagiarism) their own previous work.

How much of a problem is it?

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2008) survey of 300 6th form teachers:

- » 58% said plagiarism was a problem
- » third estimated that more than 50% of student work contained plagiarism

A survey conducted by N-Learning (2004) of 114 HE institutions found:

- » 97% felt plagiarism was a significant issue

In Freshminds (2004) survey of 600 UK graduates and 1000 NUS student officers:

- » 9% had committed plagiarism once and 16% more than once

A Prof Don McCabe (2001) study of over 4,500 US high school students, found:

- » 72% reported one or more instances of serious cheating on written work
- » 15% had submitted a paper obtained in large part from a website/paper mill
- » 52% had copied a few sentences from a website without citing the source
- » 90% of internet plagiarists had also plagiarised from written sources

Why is plagiarism a problem now?

'...the internet has increased the potential for plagiarism... Coursework assignments are available on the internet at any level and in any subject' (QCA, 2005)

Plagiarism is not a new problem. It used to be a local problem, but the increase in use of the internet means that billions of documents are now freely available and the process of copying is much easier. Students may confuse freely available with 'free to use' and fail to acknowledge their sources.

Why do students do it?

Park (2003) identified the following reasons which still resonate today:

- » Lack of understanding
- » Desire for a better mark
- » Bad time management
- » Different values
- » Challenging the system
- » Lack of respect for lecturers
- » Denial
- » Temptation and low perceived risk

Is the Internet responsible for the rise of plagiarism?

- » IT literate students are familiar with a cut and paste download culture.
- » The Internet has made certain types of information easier to assimilate and certain types of assessment more prone to cut & paste plagiarism.
- » The internet has allowed 'entrepreneurs' to establish custom essay businesses
- » Many of these sites specially target secondary education and even particular awarding bodies

Are Internet sources a bad thing?

- » We can't ignore the Internet as a source of information. We have never had such ubiquitous access to poor or non-authoritative information but neither have we had such ubiquitous access to good information and e-resources.
- » Proper use of Internet content is the real concern. For example; Prof. Tara Brabazon at the University of Brighton is quoted earlier this year by Chiles (2008) of the Brighton Argus Newspaper as saying "I ban my students from using Google, Wikipedia and other websites like that. I give them a reading list to work from and expect them to cite a good number of them in any work they produce." and "The education world has pursued new technology with an almost evangelical zeal and it is time to take a step back and give proper consideration of how we use it."
- »

- » The openness of the Internet means that the content is more diverse than traditional sources. Different perspectives can be examined and important minority views discovered. It is therefore essential for learners to have an enquiring mind, to be able to assimilate diverse information, to build a case for the authority of a source and to question all information which is placed in front of them. You might say that these are the very skills that would typify a good quality education.

Is the Internet destroying traditional assessment?

- » Well designed assessment is unlikely to be undermined by the Internet, however it is possible that certain types of assessment, that at one time would have required a student to demonstrate manual research skills, may now have been made easier by online searches and e-journal resources.
- » Personalised or discerning assignments which draw on the skills needed to extract and understand information from the Internet and electronic resources can make the assessment both more relevant and rewarding for the learner. In this way assessment redesign can be an essential part of dealing with plagiarism on any given course.
- » Well taught courses with well designed assessments are less prone to plagiarism by fostering a desire to learn through the assignment process.
- » The Internet is starting to provide a more interesting means of assessment, using tools which students are familiar with using in their personal lives, such as blogs and social networking sites.

Should we stop written work?

- » Written assignments are a valuable learning tool, removing them from the education process penalises the majority of hard working students who would benefit from extended written work assignments. They just need to be well designed and thought through.

Do students understand what plagiarism is?

A survey of 3,200 students conducted by Malcolm Bell (2006) found:

- » 98% of students felt that “downloading or purchasing a piece of work from an essay bank and handing it in as your own work” constituted plagiarism.
- » 97% understood plagiarism to cover “including material taken directly from a website without referencing”
- » 93% felt that qualifications were devalued by students who used bought essays from the Internet.
- » 83% of students felt confident or very confident when asked to rate their ability to correctly reference the work of others' when incorporating it in their own work.

In Freshminds (2004) survey of 600 graduates and 1000 NUS student officers:

- » 97% felt plagiarism was cheating.

Are institutions taking it seriously?

All HE institutions in the UK have plagiarism prevention approaches in place. 95% use Turnitin as their solution of choice.

A survey of 3,200 students conducted by Malcolm Bell (2006) found:

- » 4 out of 5 students felt that Institutions dealt with plagiarism seriously
- » 47% felt their tutors would be able to spot plagiarism from the Internet

In Freshminds (2004) survey of 600 graduates and 1000 NUS student officers:

- » 21% believe plagiarism policies aren't strictly enforced by their institutions
- » 26% believe policy is not effective in deterring students from plagiarising

How are plagiarists penalised?

A survey of 3,200 students conducted by Malcolm Bell (2006) found:

- » 34% felt that students should be made to re-sit either their module or course
- » 39% suggested a zero mark should be given.
- » 1 in 10 felt that the guilty party should be 'kicked off their course'

A survey of penalty regulations across 153 HEIs conducted by Tennant, Rowell & Duggan (2007) for the Plagiarism Advisory Service found;

- » HEIs take into account the following issues when considering a penalty;
 - Previous student history
 - Academic level
 - Intention to deceive
- » The survey identified 25 different types of penalty available in HEI regulations
- » The actual penalty administered from this list is dependent on the case under review.
- » The top 6 penalties available in UK HEI regulations are given below:
 - 99% Expelled/Failed
 - 78% Assessment Mark Reduced to Fail / 0 (Re-sit for Pass)
 - 67% Assessment Mark Reduced to Fail / 0 (No Re-sit)
 - 66% Module Mark Reduced to Fail / 0 (Re-sit for Pass)
 - 61% Formal Warning / Reprimand
 - 59% Module Mark Reduced to Fail / 0 (No Re-sit)
- » 13% of institutions allowed fines (£100-£1000) to be imposed
- » Almost a third of HEIs use guidelines that fail to advise academic staff which penalties are appropriate for particular cases

Report : <http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/amber/ExecSummary.pdf>

What is electronic detection?

Electronic detection systems (eg Turnitin) analyse student written work by comparing the submitted text with the Internet and/or databases of stored materials and producing a report highlighting content that is not original.

Why is electronic detection important?

"...candidates plagiarise the work of others because they think their production of coursework during the course will not be monitored" (JCQ, 2005)

- » It enables institutions to demonstrate that they take the issue seriously and that they are checking student scripts for cut & paste plagiarism
- » Electronic detection operates as a driver for students to engage in good practice
- » In the UK electronic detection has been the key catalyst for driving change as part of a well-defined plagiarism prevention strategy by:
 - Encouraging tutors to monitor and teach about correct attribution
 - Working as a quality check for screening assignments
 - Operating as a platform for discourse between students and tutors
 - Producing evidence of malpractice for review boards

Who is using electronic detection in the UK?

- » All awarding bodies represented the JCQ use Turnitin
- » 95% of Universities use Turnitin in the UK
- » A significant growing number of colleges, and now Schools, use Turnitin to detect plagiarism in the UK

What do student think of detection software?

A survey of 3,200 students conducted by Malcolm Bell (2006) found:

- » 87% of students supported the use of electronic detection tools like Turnitin
- » 76% felt that the use of such software would help address the issue by discouraging the submission of unacknowledged Internet content

Why Turnitin?

- » Turnitin is first choice for 450,000 academics in 100 countries at 6,500 institutions with over 60 million student papers processed!
- » Turnitin is also the number one choice here in the UK where Turnitin UK it is the de facto; 95% of UK Universities (inc. Oxford and Cambridge) and the top five major awarding bodies use this award winning technology. Turnitin was selected by JISC in 2001 as the best solution for UK institutions (Bull 2001)
- » Turnitin is also number one in effectiveness because of the sheer number, size and breadth of the text databases against which each student paper is compared. Turnitin UK looks for matches in over 9.5 billion pages of indexed web content, over 60 million papers in the student paper archive, and over 10,000 professional, academic and commercial journals and publications. And we're adding new content through partnerships all the time; our newest partner, CrossRef, boasts 500-plus members that include publishers such as Elsevier and the IEEE, has already added nearly 5 million pages of new content to our database. And this is just the beginning – new content will be added as more CrossRef members choose to participate.
- » Turnitin is number one in trust with customers because of the reliability and speed of paper processing and generation of Originality Reports and came top in the recent JISC funded independent review of plagiarism prevention technology in Sept 2007 you can download the review here: <http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/nccgroupreport.php> (Scaife 2007)
- » Because the originality reports in Turnitin are so easy to understand it can be used formatively as a teaching and learning tool
- » Although often categorised with other more basic search engine based systems as a 'plagiarism detection system' it is really a decision support tool - the tutor always makes the decision about plagiarism cases.
- » Turnitin reports are a tangible way for staff and students to discuss the issues surrounding writing and research skills as well as operating as a deterrent.

What are so called 'Cheat Sites'?

- » Sites selling essays to students fall into two broad categories:
 - Existing bank of pre-written essays or
 - Bespoke, custom essay written to order
- » You can buy an essay on any subject at any level either 'off the shelf' or 'as a bespoke development'
- » Costs range from £12 to £400

Are sites offering 'model essays' an issue?

- » If used correctly 'model essays' can be a powerful study aid
- » As with all content it can be abused by plagiarists
- » Responsible companies, such as Acumen PI, which has the largest repository of model student essays in the UK, place their content in Turnitin to prevent it being submitted as original work

Are bespoke essay sites an issue?

- » Most academics view them as dangerous because they claim to be providing students with anonymous access to original work that could be submitted in place of the students own work
- » Many such sites state that they actively discourage plagiarism arguing that essays are provided for research purposes only
- » Students are not always aware of the risk they run using these sites

What risks do students run using custom essay sites?

- » The work they buy may not be original (McGrath 2006) (BBC 2005)
- » The quality may be poor (BBC 2005a)
- » Most of these sites now have to use their own 'home grown' plagiarism detection solutions because they cannot be certain of the originality of the work produced by their own authors.
- » NCC Group (Scaife 2007a) surveyed 45 essay mill and custom sites and found
 - 11% had no plagiarism detection solution
 - 35% had detection but refused to say what it was
 - 17% MyDropBox (now Safe Assign)
 - 2% Viper and 2% Eve
 - 33% Didn't comment
- » There is no guarantee that the actual author of a purchased essay is ethical.

- » If these sites can't trust their own authors, should the students?
- » The student is putting their reputation in someone else hands.
- » The original author may sell the same work to multiple sites.
- » Some sites allow reuse of essays by their authors after 2 years.
- » We bought an essay for £125 and it was 68% copied from the Internet
- » Some sites attempt to legitimise themselves by stating that it is okay to buy work for research purposes. This is very misleading for students. It is ok to buy research papers; it is not ok to pay someone else to do your specific research assignment for you. The research itself is clearly part of the assessment; outsourcing this to a third party is cheating even if the student only uses it as a basis for their own piece.
- » Sites sometimes offer financial guarantees of originality (£5,000 pounds). However these guarantees are vacuous as the £5,000 is provided by the author not the essay company. In our test case the author simply said they would declare themselves bankrupt in order to avoid paying this guarantee.
- » Turnitin adds new essays to its existing database and could detect a plagiarised essay retrospectively when the 'original' is added to the database. No one wants that hanging over them.
- » More importantly, not 'doing the work' will almost certainly lead to failure and exposure later in their course or career when the costs are much higher. For example, recently Durham University fired the dean of their Business School for plagiarism dating back 20 years (McKay 2008)
- » The message for students is clear; it is easier and better to do your own work and keep your integrity. There are no real short-cuts

Is the Google ban on advertising significant?

- » Google's ban on advertising for bespoke essay sites is an indication of both the public's view of these sites and the amount of business conducted online.
- » It certainly appears to have the sites concerned. Coughlan (2007) reported for BBC News online that Mathew Wilson of www.essaywriter.co.uk "... is angry at the threat to its business - with 80% of its customers coming through Google."
- » Since the ban there have been many more custom essay stories in the press from the custom essay sites which now need an alternative means of advertising.

Can we address bespoke essay sites?

- » Creating a culture of honesty and making the students aware of the risks they run to their reputation, career and personal integrity is a first step.
- » It is essential that we engage the students in the learning process and ensure that every assessment has a real purpose and always represents a genuine learning opportunity for the students. Such an approach significantly helps address the desire to cut corners, a nice analogy we have heard used on numerous occasions is “Would you play your guitar teacher a tape of someone else playing the guitar as a substitute for your own work? Would this help you learn to play?”
- » Because many of these essay sites and authors make money by providing the same script multiple times (BBC 2005) Turnitin can be used as a significant deterrent.
- » By default every item of work that enters Turnitin is stored for future comparisons by the system. By storing student papers we can, over time, build a record of contract essays and prevent their long-term value to these sites.
- » Storage of student papers also prevents work being passed down from year group to year group or distribution via social networking sites.

What can institutions do?

- » Institutions should take a strategic approach to addressing plagiarism with the aim of creating a culture of honesty through a range of measures including technology solutions, study skills, changes in teaching and learning practice and adjustments to institutional policies/procedures.
- » It is important to engage students in a debate on plagiarism, and how academic misconduct can affect not only their academic careers, but also other students' prospects by devaluing their qualifications.
- » If students don't perceive any value in the assignments they have been set we must address our teaching, learning and assessments strategies to achieve the learning objectives in ways that re-engage the students.
- » Institutions can contact the Plagiarism Advisory Service for advice and guidance in this area. We can provide training

and workshops which explore the issues and methods to address the problem.

- » Make use of the materials and tip-sheets based on best practice available at www.plagiarismadvice.org
- » Attend a Plagiarism Conference and meet with others working in the area and to share best practice. For more information please contact gill.rowell@plagiarismadvice.org and for previous conference papers see: www.plagiarismconference.com

Plagiarism Debates

The following are a list of debates that are currently common within the sector:

- » Information literacy
- » The ethics of essay writing services
- » Internet aware assignment setting
- » Effectiveness of current policies
- » When does collaboration become collusion
- » How to reengage the learner

***Disclaimer:** The issues in this document are raised purely in the interests of promoting discussion and debate on the topic of plagiarism and in no way reflect the beliefs and attitudes of either nLearning or PlagiarismAdvice.org, their customers and their business associates.*

Contact the Internet Plagiarism Advisory Service

Will Murray

will.murray@plagiarismadvice.org

Gill Rowell

gill.rowell@plagiarismadvice.org

Telephone: 0845 643 0105

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About PlagiarismAdvice.Org

www.plagiarisadvice.org

The JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) founded this national service in 2002 to provide generic advice and guidance on all aspects of plagiarism prevention and detection for academics and students to around 700 further and higher education institutions in the UK. The service promotes a holistic approach to plagiarism prevention incorporating the consideration of institutional policies and procedures, teaching practice and study skills.

The PlagiarismAdvice.org has been managed by nLearning, a spin out of Northumbria University since mid 2004.

From the beginning the service has taken a solutions based approach which has led the service to grow into areas of University policy, procedures and consistency.

Few students deliberately plagiarise and the key objective of the service is to help institutions improve the learner's view of electronic information sources and their use in learning to improve education for all.

The service runs awareness raising events, produces guidance sheets and manages the JISC Mail plagiarism mailing list. The service undertakes needs analysis research and evidence based development through case studies, surveys and conferences. As well as maintaining the websites: www.plagiarismconference.com and plagiarismadvice.org

We work with JISC, the HE Academy, JCQ, QCA/Ofqual, over 90% of Universities and large number of Schools and Colleges.

About nLearning

www.nlearning.co.uk

nLearning is a spin out company of Northumbria University. Maintaining its solid academic roots, nLearning specialises in providing plagiarism prevention and detection products to a range of academic bodies throughout the UK and Europe. As well as managing the PlagiarismAdvice.org service nLearning provides Turnitin to the education sector across Europe.

