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1 Cheating Trends

“Who will not be deceived must have as many eyes as hairs on his head.”
Proverb

Instructors often are reluctant to take many precautions against cheating. They fear this will undermine the comfort and trust they want to foster in their classrooms. So, perhaps after taking the most basic precautions, they cross their fingers and hope for the best.

This is unwise. An abundance of research shows that academic dishonesty is epidemic. Gregory Cizek, author of the comprehensive book Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It (Erlbaum, Mahwah, N.J., 1999), summarizes the body of research this way.

“Nearly every research report on cheating — whether the data were obtained by a carefully designed study, a survey of self-reported behavior, an RRT (randomized response technique) approach, or questionnaire regarding perceptions of cheating on the part of another — has concluded that cheating is rampant.”

Evidently such cheating begins early. In 1986 sixth graders attending 45 California elementary schools were asked whether they had ever seen other students cheat on a test. (Brandes, B. 1986. Academic honesty: A special study of California students. Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education, Bureau of Publications.) A surprising 86% said that they had seen
cheating; and 30% said they had witnessed cheating “many times.” Only 14%
said they had “never” observed cheating. The following chart summarizes all
1,037 responses from the survey.

Have you ever seen other students cheat on a test?

- 30% Many Times
- 40% A Few Times
- 16% Once
- 14% Never

The situation worsens in secondary school. When Brandes (1986) surveyed
over 2,000 California public high school students, for example, almost 97% said
that they had seen others cheating. Here is a summary of the behavior reported
in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Reported</th>
<th>Percent reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeing another student cheating.</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying from another student.</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using crib notes.</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining prior access to test questions.</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using signals to cheat on a test.</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trends over time also are discouraging. Schab (1991) (cited in Cizek,
Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It (Erlbaum, Mahwah,
N.J., 1999), surveyed thousands of high school students in 1969, 1979 and 1989,
asking them if they agreed or disagreed that three-fourths of the students in
their high school were guilty of cheating. The results reveal a depressing trend that is summarized in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent Agreeing that 3/4 of their classmates cheated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1994 Who’s Who Among American High School Students conducted a survey that asked thousands of the nation’s best high school students if they cheated. Nearly 4 out of 5 of these very successful high school students said that they had. When asked, “How common is cheating at your school?” Ninety percent said that it either was “common” or “nearly universal.” The following chart details their responses.

**How common is cheating in your school?**
College cheating research results are similarly gloomy. For example, McCabe and Bowers conducted a 30-year longitudinal survey of cheating on tests in college. During the 1962-63 academic year McCabe and Bowers administered surveys to over 5,000 students from 99 US colleges and universities. Then they followed up during the 1991-92 school year by surveying 6,096 students at 31 schools.

To make sure they were matching apples with apples, McCabe and Bowers compared only male juniors and seniors attending small to medium-sized selective residential colleges. The following chart summarizes their disquieting findings. Note the dramatic increases in cheating in just thirty years and that in the more recent sample over half the students surveyed reported copying from another student on a test. (“What We Know About Cheating in College: Longitudinal Trends and Recent Developments,” D.L. McCabe and L.K. Trevino, 1996, Change, Vol 28, No. 1, p. 31.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Cheating</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1991</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copied from another student during an exam</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped another student cheat on an exam</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used crib notes to cheat on an exam</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In his excellent rundown of the research on college cheating Cizek summarizes the results by saying that dozens of studies made at different times by a wide variety of researchers in dissimilar places all concur that more than half of college students responding admit to having cheated. (Gregory Cizek, Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999) Of course, it is reasonable to suppose that many cheated but did not admit it.

Interestingly, college cheating seems to vary by major. When, in 1992, Meade surveyed 6,000 students attending 31 different universities, business types reported cheating more than any other majors. (Whether they are more larcenous or simply more honest in reporting their dishonesty we can only speculate.) The chart below summarizes the reported rates by major. (Meade, J., 1992. Cheating: Is academic dishonesty par for the course? Prism, 1 (7), 30-32.) Note well that taken collectively the students self-reported cheating rate in this 31 university study is a startling 74%.
High Tech Cheating

Contemporary technology makes cheating a great deal easier. Students use web-based cheat sites to plagiarize with ease. They use powerful calculators and technical trickery to secretly store equations they will need on tests. They ask to be excused to go to the lavatory then use their cell phone to get outside help. They get answers from a test file or someone who took the test earlier in the day, then store them in easily retrievable form in their Personal Digital Assistants (Palm Pilots, Visors, etc.). They also beam answers to one another using their machine’s infrared transmission capabilities. One instructor even discovered a student using her numeric pager to have answers phoned in to her while she was taking his test.

In most cases the high tech cheater’s confident expectation is that the instructor will be at least one step behind them. They might be right. The young often take to high tech quicker than adults.
Cheat Merchants

In the “good old days” cheating schemes spread by word of mouth. Today there are web sites specifically intended to aid academic swindlers and how-to cheat books are routinely sold over the web. Michael Moorer’s Cheating 101: The Benefits and Fundamentals of an Easy A is one of the most successful. The New York Times, (Sunday, April 4, 1998), reports that Moorer, a middle-aged former journalism student, has sold tens of thousands of copies of his handy guide to academic larceny.

There also are hundreds of plagiarist “paper mills” on the World Wide Web each offering thousands of different papers on hundreds of topics. Swindlers search files of previously written papers for one that suits their need, download the paper, add their name and print it out. Some of these papers are free, making them easier to trace. Others can only be accessed for a fee, making tracing extremely difficult. For still more money, plagiarists can hire papers custom written for them by experts who boast of Ph.D.s.

A Tension

Despite the abundance of research evidence confirming that cheating is rife, many instructors are still reluctant to acknowledge the full extent of the problem. Perhaps this is because of the tension between the teaching many of us aspire to and the suspicions one has to entertain in order to effectively deal with cheating.
Most educators want to foster comfort and trust in their classroom; and they want to eliminate obstacles that interfere with the joy of learning. They worry that taking precautions against cheating, might confound these goals. Some reluctantly resolve this tension by trusting their students and hoping that they will repay that trust with honesty. Too often that doesn’t work.

**Positive Preventative Strategies**

We see, then, that many students will cheat given half a chance. For those on the cusp, however, how we teach and assess can be decisive. That’s where positive prevention pays off.

Teaching as Coaching

One preventive strategy involves putting greater emphasis on what we’ll call the coaching dimension of teaching — a paradigm shift that’s a lot more radical than it sounds.

Teaching as coaching requires the development of deep understanding of core concepts at the expense of “coverage.” It makes little sense to move ahead when learners haven’t mastered the fundamentals. Yet, given the pressure of an ever-expanding knowledge base, teacher after teacher does just that. “I covered it,” they’ll say, with dubious conviction. But what does “covering,” mean? From the point of view of student understanding, it often means nothing at all. But pushing for coverage at the expense of understanding does mean that the probability of cheating is increased.
Teaching as coaching also requires greater attention to student needs and concerns. Figuring out where students are “coming from” helps the teacher tap their intrinsic motivation; and it cuts down on cheating too. Students whose needs and concerns are ignored are far more likely to cheat. If nothing else, it’s a way of “getting back.”

Variety in Assessment

Using different types of assessment can also reduce the temptation to cheat. For one thing, students who do poorly on one type of test question might be able to do better on others. And one cheating method won’t work for all types of testing.

Variety in assessment is limited chiefly by the teacher’s imagination. We know of a creative teacher, for example, who asks “make it true” questions. Here students have to change one or more words in order to make a false statement true. This teacher also asks “it ain’t necessarily so” questions. In this case students have to briefly explain why a teacher-crafted statement isn’t necessarily true. Another inventive teacher gives a final test that requires students to create their own concept “map” of the course’s core ideas. Students are told what they will have to do and typically spend weeks reviewing and preparing.

There are many other ways to generate variety in assessment. The point is that it makes cheating less necessary because it better accommodates
different learning styles and types of intelligence. It also makes cheating more difficult.

Another test-related preventive strategy is to include test items that chiefly require effort, rather than deep understanding. In addition to conceptual questions, for example, a geography test might include the identification of place locations (nations, rivers, mountain ranges, etc.). Students having a tough time mastering concepts, like the causes of precipitation, might still salvage a passing grade if they memorize these locations.

Effort items provide a safety valve for highly motivated students with limited ability or meager background. Some purists might not like this sort of thing. But remember that when kids must chose between failure and cheating, they often chose cheating. Besides, the test can always be designed to require whatever level of deep understanding the instructor desires.

A number of books offer practical suggestions for developing variety in assessment. We particularly like Bellanca, J., Chapman, C., and Swartz, E., Multiple Assessments for Multiple Intelligences (Skylight, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1994.) This book’s suggestions are practical and easily used.

More Authentic Assessment

More authentic assessment also minimizes cheating. An assessment is authentic if it evaluates performance in as close to a real world context as possible. Granted, this is easier to do in the practical or performing arts than it is
in traditional academic subjects. But academic tests can be more authentic too. In fact, they can be remarkably genuine once motivated educators see the need for them. Marzano, R., Pickering, D., and McTighe, J., Assessing Student Outcomes (Alexandria, Virginia, American Association for Curriculum Development, 1993) offers particularly useful suggestions regarding how to do this.

Criterion Referenced Testing

Another way to discourage cheating is to measure how well students meet specific learning goals (criterion referenced testing), rather than how one student’s performance compares to another’s (norm referenced testing). Norm referenced testing sets up an each against all competition where students are forced to play a zero sum game. Some inevitably lose when others win. This fosters cheating. But with criterion referenced testing, everyone can get a good grade if everyone meets the goals. In other words, no one need lose.

Summing Up

No positive preventative strategy guarantees student honesty. But positive measures can and do minimize temptation. And unlike other cheating counter measures, positive strategies actually improve one’s teaching.

Now let’s learn more about how students cheat and some practical countermeasures.
2 Cheating Methods and Countermeasures

Some of the ways students cheat are laborious and truly ingenious. In fact one can’t help but wonder why these cheaters don’t just put the same effort into studying. Anyway, what follows briefly describes some of these methods and suggests possible countermeasures. First, though, we would like to note the closest thing there is to a universal antidote

A Versatile Antidote

Few of the cheating methods we describe here would be as useful if the instructor simply avoided using the same test item twice. In the same vein, using two or more forms of a test also makes it much tougher for students to cheat. While reviewing the cheating techniques that follow, consider how many of them are of lesser utility if these precautions are taken.

Crib Notes and Variations

➢ Traditional crib notes — this is an ancient but effective form of skullduggery. (The very first crib notes might well have been scribed on small fragments of clay tablet and concealed on the person of student scholars in ancient Sumer.) Students put notes, formulas, answers from previous semester tests or tests given earlier in the day, on small pieces of paper, conceal them somewhere on their person or in a folder taped beneath the desktop. Then they sneak them into view in their palm, between their legs, inside their hat, and so forth. Close surveillance, random trips up and down the aisles and pre-test inspection of desk undersides puts a damper on this type of cheating.
- **“Snappling”** — in this form of crib note fraud students carefully remove the label from a clear beverage, such as Snapple. They put their notes on the back of the label, then paste it back in place using transparent glue. During the exam the student takes slow “thoughtful” swigs out of the bottle. Ban beverages entirely or watch for this specific technique.

- **Skin writing** — written on forearms, palms, the inside of thighs, and so forth, skin writing is a variation on the crib note theme. Inside forearm crib notes are a favorite because a shirtsleeve can be unrolled on the writing arm and the gaze cagily shifted to the inside of the forearm while writing. If necessary, the sleeve can be quickly rolled down. A variation involves writing the crib notes on the inside of the thighs and then wearing a skirt or baggy shorts of the right length to permit stolen glances. Utilize the same controls as for paper crib notes, and watch for body part gazing.

- **Crib notes on cap bills** — this technique involves putting crib notes on the underside of the cap bill. Maybe young eyes can read such notes just by looking up, but we tried it and can’t. Anyway, it’s probably wise to be leery of cap wearers who seem to be beseeching heaven. And pay particular attention to students who take their hats off and look like they might be reading their cap bills. They probably are.

- **Crib notes on classroom furniture** — this as another oldie but goodie. The student gets into the classroom prior to a test and writes crib notes on the desktop or the back rest of the seat in front. Examining classroom furniture for crib notes immediately prior to a test is an effective countermeeasure.

- **Crib notes in a pen** — the idea is to conceal crib notes on a pullout retractable scroll that can be accessed during a test. That sounds a bit far-fetched to us; but who knows. Watch out for pen fiddlers, they may not just be nervous.
- **Crib notes on an electronic organizer** — these things now fit into the palm of the hand and will hold a semester’s notes. Respect the capabilities of all such organizers and be leery of allowing students to use any electronic aids, including cell phones, during a test.

- **Tape-recorded crib notes** — a mini tape recorder can be fitted with a tiny earphone that can be hidden by combing hair over the ear. If students look like they’re hearing voices, they might be — and helpful ones at that.

- **Crib notes on programmable calculators** — students can use these super calculators to store answers, notes, vital formulae, and so forth. Because calculators are often permitted during tests, this is a tough one to stamp out. Some teachers permit only certain types of calculators. This is another reason to vary tests from year to year and section to section. It’s also an incentive to walk the room at random intervals and maintain close scrutiny.

- **Crib notes in the lavatory** — students stash crib notes in stalls, lavatory trash receptacles, inside toilet paper rolls, and so forth. The use of a cell phone in a lavatory stall to call a co-conspirator also has been reported. Consider inspecting lavatories prior to, and possibly during, tests. But unless you happen to be trans-gendered, there still is an obvious problem. (We enlist the aid of the concierge to search lavatories prior to comprehensive examinations when a graduate degree hangs in the balance. Otherwise, we just hope for the best.)

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**NOTE**

Don’t underestimate student resourcefulness. We know of clever students who inserted barely audible clicks onto music tapes that were used for composer recognition tests. Two clicks, it’s Scarlatti, three clicks it’s Bach!
Other Gambits

- **Clandestine signaling** — a variety of secret signals are used to share answers and bamboozle the instructor. Keep an eye out for the rearrangement of items on desktops, coded body movements, hand signals, and so forth. They can be used to communicate answers to objective test items.

- **Exam smuggling** — a student who has postponed a test or who takes it in a later section, enlists a confederate to smuggle an extra copy of the exam out of the test room. The recipient looks up the answers at his or her leisure. Then he or she either smuggles the completed test into the session to turn in at the end of the test or relies on their prior knowledge of the test to do better. Use different forms of the test for different sections or even within the same section. Use different exams for make-up tests.

- **Exam files** — students with access to test files routinely bamboozle instructors who use tests more than once. Here is a typical strategy. Smuggle a copy of the test from the room at the end of the test, note the answer sequence when the test is reviewed then keep both the test and the answers on file. We know of a football-oriented fraternity that has elevated this process to an art form. A member confides that there are several filing cabinets of carefully catalogued tests in the basement of the frat house. Altering tests after every use and randomly using different forms of the test are effective countermesures.

**NOTE**
More authentic assessment badly disrupts many exam cons. Consider a car repair exam that requires actually fixing a car with instructor-induced problems. Cheating on such a test is not impossible, but it certainly is far more difficult. Make tests more authentic and cheating will diminish.
“Lost” exams — in this clever gambit the student sits for the exam, pretends to be taking the test, but completes nothing. Then they turn in the blank exam. The perpetrator hopes the instructor will not be suspicious when he or she finds the blank exam. They might think, for example, that they inadvertently handed out an extra copy. When the tests are graded and the villain gets a zero because they didn’t take the test, he or she complains bitterly (or sadly) that their test has been lost. The cheater hopes to be awarded a passing grade or to at least gain time to learn more about the test and/or study before retaking the test. Take roll separately and compare the results to the submitted tests. Make certain each student hands in an exam and that you make sure it isn’t blank. Take methodical precautions to stop extra tests from being smuggled out of the room.

Post-test machinations — when tests are returned students either alter their answers from wrong to right or fill in answers they deliberately left blank. Then they complained that their test was marked incorrectly. Mark all answers, both right and wrong. Fill in unanswered questions with the correct response or at least draw a line through the areas left blank.

Feigned illness or injury — students fake both injury and illness to postpone tests for which they are unprepared. Insist on medical verification.

“Misunderstandings” — students sometimes avoid test or assignment deadlines by simply not showing up or turning things in late. They then show up late, feign surprise and claim that they misunderstood when the test was to be given or the assignment handed in. Make test dates and deadlines unmistakably clear. Permit make-ups only for excused absences. Exact a pre-announced weighty penalty for late submissions.

Stolen word processing files — students sometimes “borrow” another student’s paper, usually by stealing their word processing file. Should you
receive very similar papers do not conclude that it necessarily evidences collusion. It might be evidence of thievery. Alternatively, both students might have inadvertently plagiarized the same paper written by a third person.

**Summing Up**

Best teaching strategies and more authentic assessments diminish the impulse to cheat. Nevertheless, the classroom remains forever east of Eden. Some students will cheat no matter how capable the teaching or how legitimate the assessments. For that reason we’ve described a broad variety of cheating methods and an assortment of counter-strategies. The best of these are those that are preventative. Essentially, this involves not using the same test twice and making tests as authentic as possible.
Defining Plagiarism

Defining plagiarism is central to dealing with it. An actual incident involving a teacher in a private academy makes this clear. When some of her eighth grade students copied encyclopedia articles verbatim and turned them in as their own, the teacher gave their work a failing grade. She said they had plagiarized.

Some of the kid’s parents appealed to the school’s Headmistress. Overruling the teacher, she decreed such copying was not plagiarism — at least not when done by 8th graders.

Urged to change the grades, the teacher refused. She insisted the kids had cheated. She had cautioned them about verbatim copying, she said, and they knew better. Unfortunately, she had nothing in writing. Ordered to change the grade, she still refused. Then the Headmistress dismissed the teacher for “insubordination.” Since the Academy’s teacher’s contracts gave management carte blanche, there was no appeal.

Who Is Vulnerable?

Instructors have frontline responsibility for defining plagiarism. Sometimes when they don’t do it, no one will. But without administrative backing they can’t make their definition stick. Organizational support is more likely if the teacher has established a clear-cut written policy – particularly when some respected authority backs it. Still there are no guarantees. When administrators are more
interested in pleasing parents than supporting instructors, teachers can still be left twisting slowly in the wind.

Administrators also risk a lap full of trouble if their school fails to define plagiarism in writing. Even when such cheating is obvious, resourceful parents, or any competent attorney, can be relied on to demand to know where plagiarism is spelled out and how this definition is communicated to students. If there is any definitional wiggle room, everyone in authority is vulnerable. And that is an unenviable position in our litigious society.

**The First Rule**

The first rule in dealing with plagiarism, then, is to develop and publish a detailed definition of plagiarism and a clear-cut policy to accompany it. If school administrators fail to do this, instructors should create and distribute their own policy — perhaps in their course syllabus. And they should make sure their definition of plagiarism comes from an authoritative source.

**Dictionary Definitions**

A dictionary definition is better than mere assertion. Remember, though, dictionaries typically lack vital details. Here are three examples.

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**NOTE**

Accused students often claim, “I didn’t know *that* was plagiarism.” Frequently they are lying. Nevertheless, if they can establish “plausible deniability,” they escape unscathed. Carefully define plagiarism and this loophole is eliminated.
Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd edition, defines plagiarism as, “to take and pass off as one’s own (the ideas, writings, etc. of another).”

The Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. XI, Second Edition describes it this way, “the wrongful appropriation or purloining and publication as one’s own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another.”

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, unabridged edition, says that plagiarism is, “the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas or thoughts of another author, and representation of their work as one’s original work.”

The problem with all three of these definitions is that key terms can be variously interpreted. For instance, there is a sense in which most student authors “appropriate or imitate the ... ideas and thoughts of others?” Only the most advanced students have wholly original ideas, particularly in technical disciplines. Novices learn by appropriating and imitating to some degree. When that becomes plagiarism is a matter of interpretation. And when that interpretation is unsupported by some external authority, such as a clear-cut school or departmental policy, the instructor is particularly vulnerable.

Upon reading the first edition of this book a librarian took offense at the claim that definitions of plagiarism vary. Her e-mail of protest insisted that, “Plagiarism is plagiarism!” She is dead wrong. The same standard of originality is not used to measure a business report and poetry, for example.
Style Manuals

Since dictionary definitions lack the specificity necessary to effectively combat plagiarism, instructors might better rely on discipline specific handbooks, such as the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers or the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. These publications are more detailed and are widely accepted as authoritative. Be careful, though, handbook plagiarism statements sometimes aren’t complete enough for full protection. Students using them sometimes can still plausibly claim, “I didn’t know that was plagiarism.” — particularly when on-line references are involved.

Two Alternatives

Sometimes schools write their own plagiarism definition. Done well, this is the ideal solution. Done poorly, such homegrown definitions are worse than useless.

There is an easy alternative. The Plagiarism Book, an inexpensive student workbook by this text’s authors, fixes the limits of plagiarism and teaches students, step-by-step, how to avoid it. Adopt this text and plausible deniability is a thing of the past.

In any case, a clear-cut plagiarism policy is a must. And it should be published in such a way that every student is, or should be, aware of it. Ideally, such a policy is school-wide. Failing that, educators should write there own —
making sure to cite authoritative sources. Remember, when it comes to litigation having things in writing is very important.

**Summary**

Dealing effectively with plagiarism requires definitional clarity and an accompanying published policy. Dictionaries offer minimal definitional help. Discipline specific style manuals are usually better, though they can still be inadequate. A homegrown definition, authoritatively referenced and fitted to the circumstances, is desirable. A specialized publication like The Plagiarism Book offers a solid alternative. In addition, an enforceable published plagiarism policy is always required. There is no safe substitute.
4
Deterring, Detecting and Tracing Plagiarism

Discouraging and detecting plagiarism is an unpleasant business. Instructors don’t want their classroom to turn into a security state. But at the same time they know that, given half a chance, some students will not be honest. And they certainly don’t want principled students doing the work, while their unprincipled classmates steal the same grade. What is to be done?

Deterring Plagiarism

Let’s begin by considering the student perspective. For them things can seem a bit confusing. Disciplines require different types of citation. What one discipline considers “common knowledge” another does not. What one instructor requires, another waives. What one prefers, another abhors. Such variations, particularly when coupled with misunderstandings and inexperience, can lead to actions that look like plagiarism, yet are quite innocent.

With this caution in mind, here are some tested methods for deterring plagiarism.

General Procedures

Preventing plagiarism is clearly preferable to having to deal with it after it happens. Here are some general procedures that deter plagiarism.

- Make sure students know what counts as plagiarism in your class. (The Plagiarism Book helps with that.)
Indicate in writing the penalties you are prepared to assess for plagiarism. But make sure you don’t go out on a limb that might get sawed off.

Imagine students maintain files of your past tests and take the necessary precautions.

Enforce the same due dates in multi-section courses and be wary of granting extensions. James Brown (http://www.yorku.ca/admin/cst/pla.html) reports that one of his students repeatedly asked for deadline extensions. The reason? He was secretly waiting for a friend who had a different instructor in another section of the course to get her paper back. Brown’s student stalled because he didn’t want his plagiarized paper and the original to simultaneously be in the hands of instructors.

Let your students know that you are aware of the cheat sites on the Web. (The Plagiarism Book cautions that you have been provided with detailed information on these sites.) Initially, we worried about acknowledging such sites even existed. But the thousands upon thousands of hits these sites record suggests that students know about them already.

Assignment Sequence and Design

Here are assignment sequencing and design tips that deter plagiarism.

- Have students write an early in class assignment, grade it, and keep it on file. (This provides a baseline to compare with work done out of class and discourages nascent dishonesty.)

- Require a topic proposal, rough draft and, possibly, an interim working bibliography. (Keep in mind that if they’ve “shopped” early and already have a paper they plan to plagiarize, they can work backwards from it to create these things.)
Require specific application of things taught. (Suppose, for instance, you taught them to distinguish between informal, formal and technical levels of culture. Assign a paper that requires them to put these distinctions to use.)

Require personal reflection. (Students can still tack that on at the end of something they plagiarized; but at least they have to write something and you might pick up the difference in styles.)

Require narrative or descriptive writing, rather than argument or exposition. (This limits the usefulness of free term paper files because they tend not to stock these types of papers.)

Require students to list where they found their references. (Did you find The Idiot’s Guide to Successful Alchemy in our library?)

Referencing Strategies

Referencing strategies can be a significant plagiarism deterrent. Try some of these.

Offer students practical advice on keeping track of their sources while doing research. Because of its volatile nature, this is particularly important to students using the Web. Remind them to note the sources of their facts and ideas as they go along. Retuming to find things you’ve decided to use is often difficult.

Require distinctive references in papers. You can, for instance, require at least one Web source, one source from journal X, and so forth. (The more distinctive you make things, the less likely a free Web paper is to fit.)

Require an annotated bibliography. (This will nonplus “scholars” planning to use free papers from the Web.)

Require students to photocopy their references, highlight relevant sections and turn them in with the assignment. (This is a highly effective tool but you get an awful lot of attachments to look through.)
Detecting Plagiarism

Here are some of the better detection techniques we gleaned from the web, interviews with educators and personal experience. Some might be obvious to veteran instructors, but not to novices.

- Look for uncommon fluency, or varying fluency, in a paper. That can be an indicator that the work was copied in whole or in part.
- Be alert for vocabulary that seems too advanced for that student or for technical language the student is unlikely to know.
- Be suspicious of papers with sections that don’t seem to match. It might be a patch job.
- Double check doubtful papers by seeing if they use non-web based references that are unavailable locally. (A librarian who is death on academic fraud shared this one with us. It seems obvious now, but we never thought to check it.)
- Be dubious of papers with a referencing style different from what you require. If you asked for APA, but got Chicago it might be because that was the style used in the purloined paper. Remember, though; write for hire shops customize reference styles.

Tracing Plagiarism

To nail a plagiarist you often need the original he or she counterfeited. Finding that can be quite a challenge. You might get lucky and remember

Note
We know a student who was accused of plagiarism because she used “virtuoso” in a middle school paper. The teacher discovered, the hard way, that the student was a music academy student and something of a virtuoso herself.
where you originally saw the work in question. That’s happened to us. But it usually isn’t that easy. Here, then, are a few tracing strategies.

- The Web not only facilitates plagiarism; it aids tracing it too. We advise using a meta-search engines such as www.metacrawler.com, www.dogpile.com or www.profusion.com to look for a distinctive text string such as a characteristic phrase or misspelling. This works surprisingly well.
- Heyward Ehrlich, Rutgers University, Newark Campus, http://newark.rutgers.edu/~ehrlich/ says check on plagiarism from subject discussions in listservs and newsgroups on www.dejanews.com.
- Ehrlich also recommends checking electronic encyclopedias both online and CD based. (He observes that Encarta was given away to millions of Microsoft customers as Microsoft Bookshelf. Many school libraries also purchase rights to Britannica online or a similar resource.)
- Compare the student’s “work” with the original texts of listed references. (Surprisingly, it’s not unusual to have students reference their plagiarism.)
- Get a top-notch librarian to help you track the suspect paper down. (This really works if you have access to as competent and hard working a librarian as we do.)
- Try a bluff. Tell the student that you know it isn’t their work and demand to know where it came from. (Darsie Bowden, in the English Journal, high school edition, Vol. 85, Issue 4, April 1996, p. 82, tells a tale that should inhibit this practice. An instructor suspected that a student copied her paper on anorexia from several popular girls’ magazines, though he could not find a source. So he tried a bluff. Under pressure the young lady

Note
Even if you use meta-search engines, try more than one. Each of them indexes different search sites.
admitted to academic thievery. However, it turned out she was no such thing. Her paper was really her own personal story, her “confession” a measure of her insecurity.

Unfortunately, none of this will work if the plagiarizing student has paid to access special parts of cheat sites that are available only for a fee. Search engines cannot access these files without paying the same fee, and they aren’t going to do that. So it’s nearly impossible to trace student larceny if the have “invested” in a purloined paper.

**Phony References**

Here we’re not dealing with plagiarism but something that goes hand-in-hand. Students use inaccurate and concocted references to lend an air of authority or an appearance of substantiality. The trouble is, bad references are often difficult to detect because of the labor involved. Here’s a suggestion for dealing with that.

The chart below summarizes a procedure by which pre-verified good and bad references are given to students to check out. The instructor can use this as a gradable activity since he or she knows which references are good ones. By incorporating into this activity references from actual student papers, the students themselves will end up doing your checking for you while all the time not knowing whether it is merely part of the activity or an actual reference verification. The educational justification is that it is a means to teach library research procedure and care in scholarship.
The first step is to develop a file of verified references. These might include actual samplings of texts—some deliberately rewritten with mistakes in them, such as the wrong year or edition indicated.

The set is broken up and a few items given to each student for them to verify. Providing each student with only one reference to check might be sufficient. You could duplicate entries so students would act as a check on each other. The initial difficulties to be overcome would be compiling the original list and regular updating. (This manual provides an initial set of real and mistaken references for your consideration.)

Our thought is that if several instructors adopted this procedure, each could provide references for the other to check. Certainly if students knew that reference checking occurred from time to time, this would discourage carelessness and dishonesty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference-Check Procedure</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Educational Justification</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A file of verified references</td>
<td>To be used to verify researchers skill and honesty</td>
<td>To teach research procedure</td>
<td>Initial compiling is a task. Update regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research sheets containing source options, etc.</td>
<td>Given to research as a task</td>
<td>Class or homework assignment</td>
<td>A simple common form will do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A rubric for plagiarism</td>
<td>One of the judgments to be made about reference</td>
<td>Teach meaning of plagiarism</td>
<td>Will need consensus among instructors working together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References to be tested</td>
<td>Taken from real research papers</td>
<td>To acculturate to &quot;reference-honesty.&quot;</td>
<td>Can be used as service among instructors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These are the best tactics we’ve found to date. Of course, prevention is preferred. Even when you prove plagiarism beyond doubt, dealing with it is messy and unpleasant. Besides, if precautionary measures keep students on the straight and narrow, they just might end up learning something worthwhile. That’s far less likely if they become cyberspace patrons of something like The Evil House of Cheat.

**Summary**

Few educators enjoy flunking plagiarists or hauling them before disciplinary boards. You often can avoid such unpleasantness with preventative strategies. Those we’ve just reviewed can be thoughtfully brought together into potent formulations that usually make sanctions unnecessary.
5

Plagiarism and the Web

Nothing makes research easier than the Internet. And nothing makes plagiarism easier either. Students can pilfer articles from a bewildering variety of sources. There are thousands of legitimate articles to purloin and more than one hundred online sites brazenly offering pre-written papers for free. Worse still, Web-based entrepreneurs, some of whom claim to be professors with Ph.D.’s, write papers for hire.

How can an instructor mount an adequate defense against this onslaught? Primarily by using the hair of the dog — the Web itself. Here’s how to do that effectively.

Searching the Web for Plagiarized Material

Let’s say you have a student paper that looks suspicious. You think it was plagiarized, probably from the Web. To prove that you have to have to find the original that was plagiarized. This requires skillful use of search sites.

Search sites are colossal, constantly updated databases of Web sites that have been indexed. The search site sifts through tens of millions of pages, creating a database of what it finds.

There are a variety of ways to search these search site databases, all of require using logical operators to structure the search. Unfortunately, all search site logical operators don’t work the same way. For example, Alta Vista, a popular and powerful search site, requires you to use a plus sign in front of

NOTE
Some write for hire sites provide plagiarists with what they deserve. Consider this confidence-inspiring Internet ad.

CHEAP TERM PAPERS AND ESSAYS
I will create and write term papers for very cheap!

... My e-mail address is:
everything you want linked together. Other sites require you to type in the word “and.” Still others require users to link words by using a pull down menu. In short, there are many differences in search engine logical operators. The search sites themselves tell you what to do. Take the time to find out.

A Simple But Powerful Strategy

Fortunately, you don’t have to be a logical operator virtuoso to trace plagiarized papers. Just use a search engine to search for distinctive phrases or unique words. Enter either of these in the search engine’s find box. Many times the engine will find the exact source of the plagiarism. Remember though, to avoid getting thousands of bogus hits reported back, the word or short phrase has to be highly distinctive.

If you enter “dyslexia,” for instance, the search program will report back thousands upon thousands of references. But if you enter a distinctive word or a strange misspelling, you just might find exactly what you are looking for. Students often plagiarize entire papers written by somebody else simply by copying them verbatim off of one or another of the over one hundred available web cheat sites. That makes them easier for you to trace.

Keeping the phrase short is the key. Search sites don’t work well with long phrases but they won’t tell you that is the problem. If you search for an excessively long phrase they only report, “NOTFOUND.” If however, you enter only a very short distinctive portion of the phrase, that same search engine may well find what you are looking for.

Consider a paper on dyslexia we borrowed from the Evil House of Cheat. This “masterpiece” contains the following distinctive (and illiterate) sentence. “Dyslexia is not any ones (sic) fault it simply occurs when the barrier in the language center of you (sic) brain cracks.” Let’s say one of your students plagiarizes this classic. To prove the theft you have to trace it back to its source.
Can search sites do that for you? They sure can. If you are a novice at searching for things on the Web, you can easily just use your browser. (Most people use Netscape or Microsoft Explorer and both have search functions.) You might also try using any of the search sites listed in the upcoming table.

We checked to see how easily we could find the dyslexia paper offered for copying by the Evil House of Cheat. First we searched for “it is not any ones fault it simply occurs when the barrier in the language center of you brain cracks.” As we suspected, nothing turned up. The phrase was too long. But when we shortened the phrase to “language center of you brain cracks,” two of the eleven search sites we tried took us right to the Evil House of Cheat.

Here are the sites we used and whether or not they found the plagiarism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Site</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>Search for Evil House of Cheat Text String</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AltaVista</td>
<td><a href="http://www.altavista.com/">http://www.altavista.com/</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.Yahoo.com/">http://www.Yahoo.com/</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About</td>
<td><a href="http://www.about.com">http://www.about.com</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoTo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.GoTo.com">http://www.GoTo.com</a></td>
<td>Found it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excite</td>
<td><a href="http://www.Excite.com">http://www.Excite.com</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infoseek</td>
<td><a href="http://www.infoseek.com">http://www.infoseek.com</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycos</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lycos.com">http://www.lycos.com</a></td>
<td>No results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zap</td>
<td><a href="http://www.zap.com">www.zap.com</a></td>
<td>Found it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE**
You might think that papers plagiarized from cheat sites would be well written. This isn’t necessarily so. We found remarkably illiterate papers offered for copying. The morale of this story is don’t assume that a paper is original just because it is inept.

Meta-search Engines

We think a plagiarism search should be as speedy and painless as possible. That’s why we suggested using meta-search engines. These powerful tools put
the capabilities of many individual search engines to work simultaneously. Meta-search engines vary in the number and type of search sites they index, so try several. We tried our five favorites (listed below) to see which ones could spot that Evil House of Cheat paper. Three sites found it: DogPile, Profusion and Savvy Search.

Here are some free meta-search engines you might want to try.

- **www.dogpile.com** — searches twenty-six different search files, three at a time.
- **www.profusion.com** — indexes nine popular search engines and you can ask it to select the three best or the three fastest if you like.
- **www.SavvySearch.com** — quick, powerful and easy.
- **www.whatUseek.com** — indexes four of the top search sites

We also put Apple’s Sherlock II to work. It’s a built-in meta-search engine first installed in Mac Operating System 8.5+. True to its name, Sherlock quickly detected our text string’s cheat site source.

There also are commercial or for-fee meta-search engine supermen. Here are three you might consider:

- **Quest 99.** This site indexes 200+ search sites. You can specify which ones and look for information in specific categories such as discussion groups. Quest 99 costs $25 to download and $30 for the CD version. Schools can request a free copy. The program is Windows only.  
  [http://www.inforian.com](http://www.inforian.com)

- **Mata Hari.** This site indexes about 140 search sites at present count and a fifteen-day free trial copy is available. The full program is $35 to download and $50 for the CD version.  
  [http://thewebtools.com](http://thewebtools.com)

- **BullsEye.** This powerful site indexes some 450 online search engines and databases that cover more than 60% of the Web. Bullseye costs $50.
For $150 you get BullsEye Pro. It permits scheduled updates and has other advanced features. Both Bullseye and Bullseye Pro are Windows only applications, though a Bullseye technician says they run fine on Macs that have Windows emulation. Educators get a 25% discount.

http://www.infoseek.com

**Plagiarism Defined and Discussed**

Here are some Web sites that define and discuss various aspects of plagiarism. They provide helpful general reading, insights and workable suggestions.

(These are listed in approximate order of quality.)

- [http://www.rbs2.com/plag.htm](http://www.rbs2.com/plag.htm)
  This is Ronald Standler’s “Plagiarism in Colleges in USA.” In 28 pages he offers an excellent overview with lots of detail. Usefulness not confined to college teachers.

- [http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/immuno/citewell/](http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/immuno/citewell/)
  John Rogers, of the Baylor College of Medicine presents a first-rate series of related science writing pages he collectively calls “Plagiary and the Art of Skillful Citation.” Rogers discusses science writing, plagiarism, the ethics and elements of citation and policies regarding plagiarism. Nineteen high quality pages that aren’t just for science instructors.

- [http://www.chem.uky.edu/courses/common/plagiarism.html](http://www.chem.uky.edu/courses/common/plagiarism.html)
  The University of Kentucky Department of Chemistry defines plagiarism, provides examples and discusses penalties. Useful, particularly if you are worried about things like lab reports. Five pages.

- [http://www.mtsu.edu/~itconf/proceed98/mhricko.html](http://www.mtsu.edu/~itconf/proceed98/mhricko.html)
  Mary Hricko, Library Director at Kent State University, Geauga Campus, shares thoughts on deterring Internet plagiarism. Worth reading. Five pages.
Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington defines plagiarism, suggesting how students can avoid it and helping them recognize unacceptable and acceptable paraphrases. We particularly liked the help they offer with paraphrasing. Three pages.

The writing center at St. Cloud University offers some help with paraphrasing and sources. Worth looking at. One page.

Sharon Williams, of the Writing Center at Hamilton College offers helpful advice on avoiding plagiarism. Four pages.

Rutgers University’s Writing Center discusses plagiarism clearly and concisely. Two pages.

Lisa Hinchliffe, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, defines plagiarism, suggests prevention, detection and tracing strategies, and lists further reading. Useful. Four pages.

Katherine Holmes, of the South Shore Educational Collaborative in Hingham, MA, discusses plagiarism though the web, lists some representative term paper for free and term paper for sale sites as well as a few useful print references. Three pages.

Lists a couple of web cheat sites. One page.
This is Gary Galles’ Houston Chronicle article, “Copy these strategies to stop plagiarism by students.” Offers several worthwhile, but not original, ideas. Four pages.

- [http://www.yorku.ca/admin/cst/pla.html](http://www.yorku.ca/admin/cst/pla.html)

James Brown, of York University, offers a couple useful, if prosaic, suggestions. One page.

- [http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm](http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm)

Robert Harris of Southern California College discusses preventative strategies in detail. Recommended. Four pages.

**Plagiarism and Academic Honesty Policies**

We thought you might like the URL of sites that include policy statements on plagiarism. They’re from higher education sources, but could be adapted to basic education. We’ve included model ones, and one lame one.

- [http://members.aol.com/jen0sophia/plagpage.html](http://members.aol.com/jen0sophia/plagpage.html)

Jennifer Torgerson’s web site includes a plagiarism and academic dishonesty page for her Introduction to Philosophy class. She discusses and defines cheating, fabrication of information and plagiarism. She also outlines what happens when you get caught. We think this is a model no nonsense course policy statement on academic misconduct.


Harvard’s Extension School provides a hypertext version of its policy on “Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism. It’s short, but has teeth.

- [http://minbar.db.erau.edu/courses/plagiarism.html](http://minbar.db.erau.edu/courses/plagiarism.html)

This web site at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University isn’t responding as of this writing. But during an earlier visit we found this part particularly interesting. “If a professor suspects plagiarism, it is the student’s responsibility to demonstrate that he/she has carried out a legitimate writing/creative process by producing any or all of the following materials: notes, note cards,
outlines, rough drafts, copies of specific pages from sources, and/or complete sources. The student must also be prepared to answer questions about the assignment.” That makes plagiarism less inviting.

http://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/student/library2.htm
The Yukon College Library Home Page lists the school’s policy on “Plagiarism and Intellectual Dishonesty. It includes definitions, suggestions on how to avoid plagiarism and possible sanctions. A solid effort.

http://www.niu.edu
Northern Illinois University defines and lists sanctions for plagiarism. It’s short, but the specific examples of plagiarism are forceful.

http://www.nmsu.edu/~english/policy/
New Mexico State University lists its plagiarism and academic dishonesty policies. Noteworthy for admonition about submitting previously written work for a current assignment or submitting an assignment in more than one class without permission of the instructor.

http://www.strose.edu/Academic/gr_ap7.htm
The College of Saint Rose very briefly defines plagiarism and academic dishonesty. It fails to enunciate a policy. Don’t do it this way.

Collaborative Hypertexts and Plagiarism

The Internet promotes a new form of collaborative writing that’s nicely summarized by Eric Crump and Nick Carbone in Writing Online: A Student’s Guide to the Internet and the World Wide Web, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998). Teachers using collaborative hypertext as a teaching tool assign a group of students the job of constructing a cluster of links and pages united by collaboratively written text. The whole assemblage is interactive and students are expected to help one another whenever necessary.

We’ve never tried collaborative hypertext writing, but it sounds interesting. It seems to create problems for traditional notions of plagiarism. Who wrote what
becomes blurred and less consequential as the project grows. How can an instructor handle that? We think the essential message remains the same; don’t claim what isn’t yours. So if students write collaboratively, insist they share credit (or blame) for the result.

Summary

The Web facilitates plagiarism. Dishonest students pilfer articles from a disconcerting variety of electronic sources, and over one hundred online sites offer pre-written papers for free or for sale. It’s practically impossible to combat this plague of cyber plagiarism without using computerized countermeasures. But an instructor with only modest Web skills can effectively counter electronic plagiarism by using the techniques just described.