

Designing out plagiarism

A brief guide for busy academics

Involving students in the academic process, and encouraging them in deep (rather than surface) learning is the key to avoiding alienation and averting plagiarism. There are situations which inadvertently encourage plagiarism and this handout is designed to identify and suggest remedies for some of these. Designing out plagiarism is a continuous process which needs to involve the whole course team.

Anticipating causes of plagiarism	Possible remedies
1. Do students understand what plagiarism is?	<p>Firstly, all undergraduates will be enrolled on a ULearn resource called 'Plagiarism and referencing – a guide for students'. (If you are a registered ULearn user, then you will automatically have access to this resource when you log on, if not contact e-learning@surrey.ac.uk for further details).</p> <p>Academics need to encourage students to use this resource, and the messages in it then need building upon.</p>
2. Does the assessment design encourage collusion? For example: will students work in pairs or small groups?	Ensure the assignment seeks an individualised response demonstrating the student's own understanding (avoid using words such as "Explain", "Describe" – see below). Give clear guidelines in advance. In a group project ask the group to clearly identify who did what work and who wrote what.
3. How can I help students who over-use sources on the web?	<p>Teaching a subject involves teaching the language of the discipline. However there are additional sources of help for specific difficulties:</p> <p>If language or writing is a problem, refer to the Department of Languages and Translation Studies for general and discipline-specific classes within the English Language Support Programme. For individual and small group study skills advice, refer students to SPLASH. If you suspect other specific learning needs (e.g. dyslexia) refer to Additional Learning Support.</p>
4. How can I encourage students to submit original essays/assignments rather than those that could have been purchased, ghost written or downloaded from the web?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design assignments that require an individualised approach either because they ask the student to relate the work to personal experience or current events (see examples overleaf) • Ask for drafts, lists of sources etc in advance • Allocate time for students to write something in class, collect it in for formative feedback, then you can see what level of writing they can achieve on their own • Organise oral exams • Include the opportunity for students to give presentations • Check that students are aware of the severe penalties for this form of plagiarism.
5. Could students fabricate research results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and develop teams of researchers, where students check each others' results • Introduce an ethical protocol where results have to be checked by an independent researcher • Ensure sufficient time is allocated for research supervision • Introduce articles/discussion about the consequences of fabricating results into teaching/supervision sessions • Ensure students are aware of the length of time that they need to keep their original data available for inspection if required.

When setting assessment, in general:

- Avoid the verbs 'explain' or 'describe' when setting assignments. Use: 'justify', 'create', 'rank', 'interpret', 'analyse', 'invent', 'revise'.
- Give each student unique data on which to base their assignment
- Ask students to identify their own original material (journal articles, case studies, experiments etc) to provide basic data to analyse or interpret.
- Let students know that a percentage of vivas or oral exams will be conducted
- Ensure that students are clear about the assessment criteria (see ASKe leaflets 1,2,3).
- Create 'fictional cases' by ensuring each student has a different scenario eg different 'patients' or projects, perhaps created randomly
- Ask students to illustrate theories with their own recent examples or recent data collections
- Discuss individual or group assignments so that they become personalised

Sample assignments

Questions more likely to receive plagiarised answers	Questions less likely to receive plagiarised answers
Write an essay on the effects of obesity on public health	Find three obesity information web sites and create the criteria to judge which will best improve public health Identify a recent piece of publicity on obesity and use it as a basis for drafting recommendations to government.
Write an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of x over y	Create a debate: form two teams. Each team has to argue for their case and anticipate the objections the other team will make. Rest of the class votes and writes up their personal justification of their vote.
Write a computer program for x	Students bring the computer program that they have written on x into the lab. In the lab ask students to make one of a series of modifications. (Altering coursework under exam conditions means that only those who have created their own codes will be able to adapt them).
Write a report on x	Design a poster identifying the key concepts underlying x and how they are linked
Compare elections where governments are chosen by proportional representation (PR) to those with a system where the person in each geographical area who gets the most votes wins ('first-past-the- post')	'Using the parliamentary elections in two European Union countries in the last two years, compare the methods used to decide who won. Which method delivered a more effective representative body?' 'Identify any country in the world that is using a different voting system from the one used in the country where you yourself are eligible to vote. Make a case for the selected country changing 'your' voting system. Make sure your arguments cover the reasons for changing and the reasons against, using specific examples from the most recent voting records of both countries.'
What are the key elements of a virus control strategy?	Present a hypothetical scenario (linked to reality) and then ask students to plan actions, write a report etc. For example give the properties of a virus and ask: "Design a therapy or control strategy for a) a mystery virus outbreak in racing stables; b) a new virus discovered on Mars"

Sources of further help

Carroll J (2002)

A handbook for deterring plagiarism in Higher Education Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development. Oxford Brookes

Comrie A (2006)

A Guide to Good Practice in Learning and Teaching. Guildford, University of Surrey
(copies available from the Centre for Educational and Academic Development)

University Policy Document on Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism at

<http://info.ee.surrey.ac.uk/Teaching/modguide07/APP%20I%20plagiarism.pdf>

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism. University of Illinois web site

<http://www.library.uiuc.edu/learn/research/academicintegrity.html>

Higher Education Academy pages on plagiarism

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment/plagiarism>

ASKe leaflets 123 on plagiarism and assessment, Oxford Brookes

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/resources.html>

University Calendar. University of Surrey.

Guidelines for Communications with Students Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes is at

http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/calendar/acstan/scv/index-05.jsp#P1708_77661

Procedure for the Consideration of Allegations of Academic Misconduct and Related Penalties

http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/calendar/acstan/scv/index-06.jsp#P2150_84909

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