

Preventing plagiarism

Understand plagiarism

- Familiarise yourself with local and University guidance on plagiarism.
The University's guidance is online at www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism
- Develop a better understanding of the causes of plagiarism.
These may include:
 - ignorance or misunderstanding about what constitutes plagiarism;
 - cultural preconceptions of appropriate referencing (particularly for international students);
 - lack of clarity in what is expected from the student;
 - lack of clarity about the role of the individual in group work;
 - over-assessment;
 - poor time management, or work overload, leading to 'shortcuts';
 - laziness or a fear of failure.

For further information, please see:

- HEA Economics Network: www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/plagiarism/24.htm
 - JISC reference Material: www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/publications/pub_plagiarism.aspx
 - UC Berkeley teaching guide: <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/conduct/causes.html>
- Recognise that ideas of acceptable academic practice vary between cultures.
In some educational systems, it is appropriate to include or copy material from experts without citation. Therefore, students used to these systems may not understand the need to reference.
For further information, please see:
 - Jude Carroll, 'Suggestions for teaching international students more effectively', Learning and Teaching Briefing Paper, Oxford Centre for Learning and Staff Development, June 2002: www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learnth/briefing_papers/international_students.pdf
 - Guide 3, 'Inform students about institutional policies and programme expectations (reinforcing understandings of definitions for particular groups)', JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service: www.jiscpas.ac.uk/apppage.cgi?USERPAGE=6264

Create a local culture that discourages plagiarism

- Develop local (faculty or department-specific) advice or guidelines on plagiarism.
The General Board expects Faculty Boards to issue discipline-specific guidance on good academic practice to include information about: correct citation techniques (of printed and web-based material), plagiarism avoidance, and how to distinguish between acceptable collaboration and unacceptable collusion.
All guidance must be consistent with the University-wide statement and should ideally be published on an open access website.
All teaching staff and associated Directors of Studies and Supervisors should be aware of the guidance.
- Encourage discussion in your faculty or department about plagiarism and how it can be prevented.
- Set a good example.
 - Reference sources in lecture slides, handouts and other learning resources.
 - In formative assessment, highlight careless referencing and promote good academic practice.

Design assessment to minimise opportunities for plagiarism

- Design individualised or specific assessment tasks and set a range of assessment tasks.
 - Ensure that assignments or essay topics are not re-used every year.
 - Revise projects and assignments, using local situations or current examples as context, to reduce the likelihood that answers can be downloaded from the Internet.
 - Design questions that focus on interpretation and reflection, rather than a body of knowledge.
 - Assess the skills and knowledge used and the context in which they are placed, rather than the end result (i.e. process vs. product).

Further reading:

- Guide 2: “Designing out opportunities for plagiarism” JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service:
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/apppage.cgi?USERPAGE=6232>
- Incorporate checks and balances during the assessment.
 - Ask students to submit (non-assessed) first drafts of their work.
 - Ask students, as part of the assignment, to comment on the sources used and how relevant or useful they were.
 - Ask students to submit, along with their finished work, a brief commentary about how they wrote the assignment (e.g. what research methods they used, how the work progressed over time).
 - Ask students to retain drafts and key sources and check a random sample.
 - Use formal or informal vivas to question students about their research methods and understanding of the subject.
- Integrate course work and examinations.
 - Design courses where success in examinations depends upon the successful completion of other assessed or non-assessed work.
 - Review whether knowledge and understanding are being assessed appropriately. Generally, knowledge and understanding can be assessed through unseen examinations, whereas skills and application are more usually assessed through coursework.
 - Ensure that students understand the links between skills, knowledge and assessment by linking aims and learning outcomes to methods of assessment.
- Ensure that marking and classing criteria are available to students, and that students understand what they are being assessed on.

Ensure that students understand what plagiarism is and what the penalties are.

- Work with students to ensure that they understand what plagiarism means and its consequences.
 - Ensure that students are reminded, in lectures and in supervisions, about what constitutes plagiarism, and why it is unacceptable.
 - If it is your policy, inform students that submitted work will be randomly or regularly checked for plagiarism using specialist software.
 - Ask students to identify plagiarism in class using examples of correctly referenced work and plagiarised work.
 - Examples of online resources for students can be found on the good academic practice and plagiarism website: www.cam.ac.uk/plagiarism
- Provide guidance about good academic practice.
 - Produce guidance on local referencing conventions, and remind students of these when you set an assignment.

- Give students (particularly first-years) the opportunity to practise subject-specific citation and referencing by developing an in-class exercise or building referencing skills into an assignment.
 - Discuss with students how to use and reference web sources responsibly.
 - Advice for students on referencing and study skills is online at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/referencing/
- Include advice on plagiarism as part of student induction events.
 - Follow it up later in the year.
 - Students can be tempted to plagiarise through panic or desperation when they fear they will not meet their deadline. Emphasise the importance of time management and careful planning. Ask students to show you an essay plan shortly after setting an assignment.
 - Include information on plagiarism in student handbooks and relevant websites.
 - In the Faculty of English all students are invited to attend an induction day and a course on study skills: advice is given on writing essays and how to use the web. Each student is provided with a hard copy booklet called *Essay Writing and Presentation*.
 - The Faculty of History run a Study Skills Programme designed for first year students on key study skills and academic writing: www.hist.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/generalteaching.html
 - Ask students to return signed cover sheets with their assignments stating that their work is their own.
The Faculty of Economics requires students to sign a dissertation certification form declaring the originality of the work:
http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/intranet/undergraduate/DISS_Submission_Form-Plagiarism.pdf
 - Ensure that students know who to ask for guidance.
 - Is information and guidance available at every point in the student's academic career? Who do they ask?
 - Are supervisors briefed on how to tackle plagiarism?
 - Is plagiarism discussed with students at the outset of each assignment, including dissertations and research projects?
 - Ensure that students are aware that you know about plagiarism and how to identify it.
 - Let students know what measures you will be taking to scrutinise their work.
 - Demonstrate how plagiarism can be detected (e.g. by electronic searches or even by typing a "plagiarised" phrase into Google to identify the unattributed on-line source - if you use the 'cached' option Google will highlight the search phrase in the document returned.)
 - Highlight that you are aware of both the traditional and alternative literature sources that they are likely to have to use.

Useful links and resources on plagiarism

- JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service: www.jiscpas.ac.uk/
- JISC Plagiarism forum/email list: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=plagiarism>
- Guidelines on the use of digital resources in teaching and research: www.caret.cam.ac.uk/copyright/Page58.html
- 2nd International Conference on Plagiarism 2006 (see the event proceedings for many interesting presentations on various aspects of plagiarism preventing and detection): <http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/conference2006/proceedings.html>

