

Creating Assignments that Increase Learning and Decrease Plagiarism

Working to reduce academic dishonesty in the classroom has always been a challenge, but the ease with which we can find and share information on the internet has increased both students' ability to plagiarize and the temptation to do so. Students cheat for many different reasons, such as pressure to succeed, lack of interest in the material, and ignorance about academic standards (Davis, 2009). However, creatively designing your course assignments can not only reduce your students' desire and ability to plagiarize, it can also lead to greater student investment in learning. When designing assignments, you may find it useful to:

Create assignments that focus on personal reflection and self-evaluation.

If you challenge students to answer open-ended questions about their own learning (ex: an essay that asks students to reflect on class material and chart the way their thoughts have changed on a particular topic), not only will it prompt students to integrate course content into their own experience, it reduces the usefulness of plagiarism (Lang, 2013).

Incorporate an interdisciplinary focus into your assignments.

If possible or appropriate for your course, ask students to draw on their knowledge from other courses or events for their assignments. This will encourage original thought and synthesis and discourage cheating by narrowing the requirements for the assignment (there will be less room for generic, single-field content) (Lang, 2013).

Require specific sources that cannot easily be plagiarized.

This can be a specific combination of sources (three from the web, three from the library, etc.) or a unique source—for example, requiring a personal interview with documentation (Nilson, 2010).

Incorporate early drafts into your assessment process and course requirements.

This will give you the opportunity to see student work in progress and to provide feedback and assistance to students who need it, decreasing the likelihood that they will resort to plagiarism (Nilson, 2010).

Try to find the right balance of challenge for your assignments.

Both assignments that are too difficult and assignments that can be seen as boring or trivial discourage student investment and encourage cheating (Davis, 2009).

Require that students keep a research journal.

This can be as simple as a list of web searches, journal databases consulted, books checked out, etc., accompanied with a note regarding how helpful this action was to their writing process. In addition to promoting transparency and academic honesty, it can be a useful tool for teaching effective research methods (Davis, 2009).



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Use in-class writing assignments.

By incorporating in-class writing assignments into your course structure, you both create an exercise that is difficult to plagiarize and give yourself an opportunity to become familiar with your students' writing style and abilities, allowing you to detect suspect writing later on (Indiana University's Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning).

Get students involved early.

Talk about the assignment in class and create a space for open discussion. Encourage students to share strategies, ideas, and questions. This allows you to become involved with the process early on and discourages the kind of procrastination that can lead to cheating (Davis, 2009).

Additional Perspectives

- *Why Students Plagiarize and What Teachers Can Do about It*, *The International Educator*.
<https://www.tieonline.com/article/2266/why-students-plagiarize-and-what-teachers-can-do-about-it>
- Guide to Advising International Students about Academic Integrity, from *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, by Gabriela M. Gillespie.
<http://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2012/03/guide-to-advising-international-students-about-academic-integrity/>
- Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices.
http://wadsworth.cengage.com/english_d/special_features/plagiarism/WPAplagiarism.pdf
- Promoting Academic Integrity and Dealing with Academic Dishonesty in the 21st Century, BYU's Center for Teaching and Learning, by Christopher Price.
<https://ctl.byu.edu/tip/promoting-academic-integrity-and-dealing-academic-dishonesty-21st-century>
- Understanding Plagiarism with Help from Dr. Seuss, by Stephen H. Fox and Ray Huang.
<https://www.plagiarism.org/video/understanding-plagiarism-with-help-from-dr-seuss>

Citations

- Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching* (2nd ed., pp. 315-362). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Indiana University's Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (2011). *Designing assignments to encourage integrity*. Retrieved from <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/academic-integrity/designing-assignments-encourage-integrity/>
- Lang, J. M. (2013). *Cheating lessons: learning from academic dishonesty* (pp. 74-82). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nilson, L. B. (2010). *Teaching at its best: a research-based resource for college instructors* (3rd ed., pp. 86-87). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.