

## In Preventing Plagiarism, an Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure—and Supports Other Teaching Goals, Too!

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Chasing or “cracking down on” plagiarists can be counterproductive to good teaching: it can eat up your time, cause you (and any student who is “caught”) some emotional distress, and create a climate where students seem to be presumed guilty before any wrongdoing occurs. On the other hand, some simple strategies for preventing plagiarism will reinforce many teachers’ best practices without extravagant “costs” in terms of class time, preparation, or grading.

Prevention and Strategy	Costs and Challenges	Additional Educational Benefits	Examples and Suggestions
<p><b>Teach explicit guidelines:</b> Remind students what general academic or disciplinary conventions require of them as they use sources.</p> <p>Tell them about your own specific expectations.</p>	<p><b>Cost:</b> 15-20 minutes of class time, plus time for preparing written instructions or examples.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Helping students understand the reasons for using sources this way, not just the consequences</p>	<p><b>Increased student awareness of broader discipline and course expectations:</b></p> <p>Citation styles and expectations often reflect and can reinforce a discipline’s other research values as well as your own values.</p> <p>Discussion of how/when to cite involves discussion of the role of the student writer’s larger goals: e.g. class or discipline, when and where are his/her own conclusions expected? what is his/her overall audience or purpose?</p> <p>Whole class discussion will help students and save you time later in the grading process.</p>	<p>Ask students what must be quoted and what constitutes a “legal” paraphrase. Discuss options and disciplinary rules as a whole class.</p> <p>Have students work in pairs for five minutes to paraphrase a difficult passage and/or use a citation style; discuss 2-3 examples.</p> <p>Have students glance over and discuss 1-2 journal articles in the field to see how often, at what length, and in what style outside sources are referenced.</p>
<p><b>Require early commitments:</b></p> <p>Ask students for mostly-firm topic choices several weeks before an assignment is due.</p> <p>Require written requests and/or a new paper-trail for major topic changes.</p>	<p><b>Cost:</b> Time to review, note, or comment on topic choices. Class time for discussion or peer-review concerning topics</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Providing enough detail about the assignment early enough for students to make an informed choice</p>	<p><b>Increased student engagement can lead to having more interesting papers to read:</b></p> <p>Students who choose a topic early are more likely to pick something they are engaged with rather than whatever’s “easiest.”</p> <p>Teachers can nudge students toward more complex or interesting approaches to a topic.</p> <p>Identifying poor topic-choices and requiring changes is most efficient for both teacher and student at this point, allowing time for thoughtful revisions and re-engagement.</p>	<p>Topic-choice assignments can range from one-liners to more developed pieces of writing: short paragraphs on why they’ve chosen this topic and what the major issues are, tentative theses or outlines, memos, initial bibliographies, or short proposals.</p> <p>Students can peer-review these assignments before or instead of teacher review: they can make suggestions, ask questions, imagine contradictory or alternative views to investigate, suggest evidence.</p>

For a thorough compendium of links to sites dealing with plagiarism prevention, detection, and general information, visit “Resources for Plagiarism: Prevention and Detection” on University of North Carolina, Charlotte library website at: <http://library.uncc.edu/display/?dept=instruction&format=open&page=920>.

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<p><b>Assign problems, not topics:</b></p> <p>Create assignments that require students to (begin to) solve a problem: to choose a best or most important idea, to recommend an action to a specific audience, to answer “how” and “why.”</p>	<p><b>Cost:</b> Assignment preparation/revision time</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Developing a problem that matches course content and student-abilities</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Helping students to move from a “report” mode to an analysis mode, and/or helping them to narrow a large problem to a manageable one</p>	<p><b>Increases engagement and critical thinking:</b></p> <p>Students can be alerted to “real world” questions or issues in the field that need expert attention—or, alternately, to local or personal implications of larger issues.</p> <p>Students’ research can be driven by the question rather than the required number of sources and may require interdisciplinary research or consulting a range of source-types.</p> <p>Students begin to develop advanced reasoning strategies: synthesis, analysis, evaluation.</p> <p>Students can learn tolerance for ambiguity, partial answers, and/or small steps toward solutions.</p>	<p>Add an evaluative component to a question: which item or aspect is better or most important, &amp; why? based on what criteria?</p> <p>Require a recommendation for (local) action: who should take the next steps, and what are they?</p> <p>Ask students to translate ideas from one setting, time period, genre, or audience to another.</p> <p>Describe a large problem and ask (groups of) students to investigate different aspects of it.</p>
<p><b>Emphasize a theme or angle:</b></p> <p>Choose an idea or question relevant to class materials and require students to address it in some way in their writing over a sequence of assignments and/or from several points of view.</p>	<p><b>Cost:</b> Syllabus and/or assignment preparation or revision time; some class time spent on discussion</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Developing an angle that is specific and intriguing without limiting topic-choice too much</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Helping students see both the limits and the options available to them</p>	<p><b>Increased depth of study; common ground during individual project work:</b></p> <p>Students are asked to contextualize knowledge, to integrate facts into a larger conversation.</p> <p>Students learn to choose or create connections that they can see, not just respond to a topic.</p> <p>Students working on individualized projects can continue to contribute to (and take advantage of) in-class conversations and workshops.</p>	<p>Choose a question or two to integrate through an entire term</p> <p>Ask students to vote on an issue or theme to address in a larger project, or allow clusters of students to choose their own</p> <p>Define how closely the paper and the theme must/may be related: will you allow imaginative or “stretched” connections?</p>
<p><b>Go step by step:</b></p> <p>Break the writing process down using interim deadlines and/or multiple documents; collect all pieces at some point.</p>	<p><b>Cost:</b> Time to verify multiple steps, plus possible time for peer review sessions or presentations</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Defining and/or rewarding steps so that students see benefits rather than just “busy work”</p>	<p><b>Increased time for discovery, reflection, and revision; more learning from one assignment:</b></p> <p>Students have time to change their minds or adapt to newly found questions or information.</p> <p>Students can practice representing the same information in different ways (proposal, speech, abstract, report).</p> <p>Students may have time to review each other’s arguments and learn ideas or give feedback.</p> <p>Students have time to use multiple skills: gathering information/ideas, and then organizing and presenting them.</p>	<p>In addition to the suggestions listed above, consider asking for freewriting or rants, summaries, annotated bibliographies, one-minute speeches, white papers, letters, early drafts, research logs, progress reports, etc.</p> <p>Remember that peer reviewing on steps can increase student engagement and decrease instructor grading time.</p>