

## DETECTING PLAGIARISM -- FINDING THE ORIGINAL SOURCE

### 1. Familiarize yourself with the kinds of topics readily available for downloading

- Free Sites: <http://schoolsucks.com>; <http://bignerds.com>; <http://cyberessays.com>; <http://netessays.net>
- Paper mill sites organized by subject: Kimbel Library at Coastal Carolina University <http://www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/mills5.html>  
Sample topics: AfricanLit.com; All Shakespeare; ArchitecturePapers.com; Criminal Justice Papers; Ecology Papers; Education-Majors.com; Ethics Papers.com; Filmpapers.com; HealthPapers.net; HistoryPapers.net; MathReports.com; Music, Essays and Reports; NursingPapers.com; Philosophy Papers.com; Political Science Papers; SociologyPapers.com; <http://TheologyPapers.com>

### 2. Consider asking the student. This is not intended to be a confrontation of plagiarism, but rather an opportunity for you to engage the student in a conversation about his/her paper. Chances are you will be able to determine rather quickly how well the student comprehends the topic. If relevant, express an interest in seeing some of the sources that helped the student formulate his/her opinion or thesis for the assignment.

### 3. Conduct a search

- Select a search engine or metasearch engine to begin looking for evidence of plagiarism on-line. Using more than one search engine will likely be necessary. Currently, a single search engine only has the capacity to search about 1/3 of the internet (Harris, p. 5).
  - a) Search Engines: Google.com; Alltheweb.com; AltaVista.com
  - b) MetaSearch Engines: Dogpile.com; Vivisimo.com
- Type a phrase into a search engine. Choose a phrase that has unique vocabulary or uncharacteristic word order. Surround the phrase by quotation marks.
- Check the library databases. Identify possible databases by following the Databases/Find Articles link on the Messiah College library's home page.
- Ask your liaison librarian. They are expert searchers and will gladly work on such cases.
- Borrow the books if necessary. Explain the time urgency to Interlibrary loan staff.
- Observation: Students are typically uncreative in using sources. They tend to take their information from the first page (introduction) and/or the last page (conclusion). Many seem to "read" the article by scanning the topic sentences of each paragraph and using that information in their papers.

**Recommended:** Fain, Margaret and Bates, Peggy. "[Cheating 101: Paper Mills and You.](#)" From the "Teaching Effectiveness Seminar" held on March 5, 1999. Rev. March 10, 2003. Kimbel Library Presentation.

# DETECTING AND DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM

## DETECTING

1. **Trust your instincts.** Your sense that this “just doesn’t sound like a student paper” is one of the best detection devices. More often than not, your suspicions will prove to be true.
2. **Look for textual clues.** Do the introduction and the conclusion “fit” with the body of the paper? Are the citations perfect? Are they mixed? Are the allusions within the paper to unfamiliar people, places and things? Does the vocabulary make sense? Is the paper written in the same tense throughout? Does the paper have the same tone throughout? Does the argument flow? Is the paper on point with the assignment?
3. **Consider the dates.** Are historical events cited in the present? Does the bibliography reflect similar dates for every source? Are the sources newer than five years?
4. **Believe the obvious.** Are there formatting issues that suggest a “cut and paste” job? Are there tag lines within the paper (e.g. “thank you for using cheaterpapers.com”)? Are there additional references to the web within the text (e.g. “for more information click here”)?

## DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM

1. **Know the policy.** For the faculty, it is published in the COE handbook (§ 8.03). For the students, the policy is reviewed with all of the incoming first-year students. It is also printed in the student handbook. Note that you are not necessarily being asked to judge the student’s intentions, but rather whether or not the plagiarism policy has been violated.
2. **Follow the outlined procedure.** Gather your evidence meet with the student. During this meeting you may want to have a neutral third party sit in on the discussion. If you have concluded that plagiarism has occurred, you are at liberty to exercise broad discretion in determining the penalty for the violation. File a written report of the incident with the Dean and send a copy of that report to the student.
3. **Remember you are not alone.** Talk to your colleagues or your liaison librarian!