

How do I detect plagiarism?

Module focus

- detecting plagiarism in assignments

Module outcomes

- you will be more aware of the signs to look for that indicate possible plagiarism by students

'I realise that plagiarism by students is an ongoing issue. It may be accidental or it may be deliberate or it may be because students are not familiar enough with the strategies to use to avoid plagiarism. It is my responsibility as an academic to be alert to plagiarism and to educate our students about the seriousness of it and the means of avoiding it. It is not always so easy to detect though! What 'clues' do I look for?'

Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching?

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Possible solutions!

1. When marking assignments, watch out for:
 - a. sudden changes in the use of language
 - b. language which appears to you to be more sophisticated than the 'typical' student response
 - c. paragraphs of material which are not cited
 - d. cited references which are not listed in the bibliography
 - e. cited references which seem outdated
 - f. sudden changes of font style or size
 - g. a feeling of 'I've read this somewhere else'.
2. Search for suspect phrasing by using Google, or a combined search engine such as www.dogpile.com.
4. Submit the electronic version of the assignment (if available) to Turnitin.
5. Ask a colleague or Unit Chair for a second opinion.
6. Be satisfied if you are identifying more cases of plagiarism, but if not, remain alert for the identifiers.

Example:

Step 1: Read through this student's response.

As the experts argue increasingly that global warming is becoming a real issue, it is vital that we seek out alternative means of generating power in Australia. This essay will respond to the question: is wind power a viable alternative to Australia's current dependency on fossil fuels? It argues that whilst coal generated electricity is not ideal, there are too many problems with wind power to claim it is a valid alternative.

To begin with, there are a range of reasons why wind power is not the answer to Australia's future energy needs. One of the more significant ones is that many Australians are opposed to the idea of having large, ugly wind turbines located in their neighbourhood. This is known as the NIMBY attitude (Richman 2002) – 'not in my backyard'. Australians tend to support wind energy on an abstract level but object to specific local projects because of the expected consequences primarily concerning noise and visual impact.

There are several other reasons why wind power is not the answer. Among the most common are that bird kills are a common serious problem; wind farms don't work; wind farms are subsidised and that solar electricity could replace wind power. These are all valid arguments. It is inefficient to build huge wind farms when Australia has access to so much free solar power.

References

Richman, Barak D. 'Mandating negotiations to solve the NIMBY problem: a creative regulatory response. ('not in my backyard').' *UCLA Journal of Environmental Law & Policy* 20 2 (Winter 2002): 223(14).

Step 2: Find the evidence it is plagiarised. (Answer is at the end of this document.)

More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. http://www.turnitin.com/research_site/e_home.html - this is Turnitin's site which provides resources for students and educators as a means of better educating us all on plagiarism. For educators, there are suggestions for teaching about plagiarism, tips for creating assignments to reduce plagiarism, a discussion of why students plagiarise, help with detecting types of plagiarism and printable handouts for students.
2. <http://theguide.deakin.edu.au/TheDeakinGuide.nsf/Web+Staff?OpenFrameSet&Login&Frame=WebContent&Src=WI2.1?OpenPage&Choice=0&Access=Staff> - Deakin's policy with regard to plagiarism – follow this link to "The Guide", select 'Search the Guide', type in 'Plagiarism', select 'Plagiarism and Collusion – Operational Policy'.
3. <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/pages/plagiarism.html> (accessed 8 May 2007) - compare the 3 student responses in this example from Princeton University.
4. <http://www.iastate.edu/Inside/2005/0225/plagiarism.shtml> - suggests helpful strategies for detecting plagiarism, focusing on format, citations, style and content, from Iowa State University.

Alert !

Be confident that you have good evidence of plagiarised materials before pursuing the matter further. Be wary of accusing students directly of plagiarism. Follow Deakin's recommended procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism.

Answer:

The phrase, '*energy on an abstract level*', is probably beyond most students' writing and should arouse suspicion. A search in Google reveals that it comes from the following and is not cited:

[http://www.windpower.org/media\(485,1033\)/Public_attitudes_towards_wind_power.pdf](http://www.windpower.org/media(485,1033)/Public_attitudes_towards_wind_power.pdf)

Also, entering phrases such as, '*bird kills are a common serious problem*', '*wind farms are subsidised*' and '*solar electricity could replace wind power*' demonstrates that this student has used ideas from the following and not acknowledged the source:

<http://www.ceem.unsw.edu.au/content/userDocs/RefutingWindpowerFallacies.pdf>