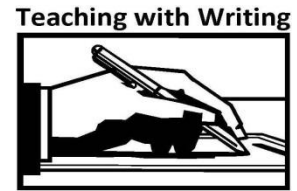# Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

Preventing Plagiarism

Rationale: Careful assignment design and targeted instruction in source use and citation can reduce the headaches of dealing with plagiarized or insufficiently documented writing.

Design an engaging writing task with an authentic purpose and audience

Canned, atomized assignments ("10-page research paper on some aspect of digital surveillance is due on the last day of class") can alienate students from the course and from genuine inquiry. See more at Designing Effective Writing Assignments.

Avoid completely open-ended topics
Offer topic choices within course-specific parameters: for instance, require use of a particular text or combination of source texts. Consider using class or Moodle discussions as opportunities for students to generate questions and lines of inquiry. Don't allow late topic changes without your approval.

Identify an audience
Require students to write for an audience that has a stake in the argument. Recommendations for effective social networking strategies might be addressed to a particular neighborhood organization, for instance.

Break large research assignments into stages
Require a brief proposal/research question and preliminary annotated bibliography. Set deadlines for preliminary drafts and peer review. Ask students to submit printouts or photocopies of their sources. Stages and checkpoints can reduce commenting time later.

Apprise students of why documentation matters, beyond "avoiding plagiarism"
Assignment instructions can include a statement about the functions of documentation systems in American academic writing: scholars build on prior knowledge and theories; methods need to be replicable; writers who don't situate their work in the scholarly conversation lack credibility. Documentation systems weren't invented to torment students, but to build knowledge within disciplines.

Spend a few minutes of instruction up front to prevent hours of headache later

Show portions of sufficiently and insufficiently cited student papers, asking students to identify why and how a passage should be cited, or why and how a bibliographic entry is insufficient. Students can take this tutorial on How to Recognize Plagiarism from Indiana

University.

Tell students what documentation style to use, and point them to resources
It's best to specify a particular style (APA, Chicago, MLA, etc.) and to direct students to links and other resources. If you're in the "any documentation style is fine, as long as it's consistent" camp, show students consistent and inconsistent examples.
Conduct a brief class discussion of an assignment in which students analyze a scholarly article in your field
Ask students to read a brief scholarly article and to highlight the citations on one or two pages. In class, have them describe what work the citation does (Provide context? Establish theoretical or methodological framework? Highlight uncertainty or problematics?). This activity also underscores that writing and documentation are about course content and knowledge production, rather than surveillance and arbitrary rules.

Comment: Academic writing is a complicated endeavor; it asks students to think for themselves in the context of what others have already said about a question. Clarity of assignment purpose, structured stages of research and writing, and clear guidance from faculty can help students manage the challenges of writing with sources.

Learn more:
• Teaching with Writing: Preventing Plagiarism
• Preventing Plagiarism (University Libraries)
• Avoiding Plagiarism (Purdue OWL for students)
• Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism (Council of Writing Program Administrators for instructors)
• The Citation Project ("The Citation Project research suggests that students' knowing how to understand and synthesize complex, lengthy sources is essential to effective plagiarism prevention.")
• If you do encounter plagiarism, see this information from the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity

Questions? Visit us online at http://writing.umn.edu/tww

See attachment for a PDF version of this tip. PDF version may also be accessed at http://writing.umn.edu/tww/resources.html#tips

Check out this semester's Teaching with Writing events: Log in to your ULearn account: ulearn.umn.edu. Use the search for C4W to view all events hosted by the Center for Writing.

Further support: Contact a member of the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) team for a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation: http://z.umn.edu/twwconsultation

Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.