

WAC resources for faculty

Teaching New College Students to Use Sources and Avoid Plagiarism in Their Writing

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New college students display a range of experiences with understanding academic honesty, using primary and secondary sources in their work, and knowing the definition of plagiarism and examples of it. Devoting at least one class to demystifying these is an opportunity for an MCC instructor to openly discuss plagiarism with students while cultivating their college writing and research skills. Following this page are three plans that can be used as a sequence or individually. You are free to adapt them for your own classroom use.

Plan A: Experiences and Expectations combines a free-writing assignment and discussion that prompt students to link their earlier school (in)experiences as writers to the challenges of academic writing. In addition, the instructor offers a definition of plagiarism and her/his own expectations for how students will use and document sources.

Plan B: What Must Be Documented? is linked to a reading assignment, in which students are asked to examine how the author of an article (from your syllabus) handles the use of sources in her/his text. Class discussion expands students' reading experiences by asking them to describe and critique the author's use of the sources.

Plan C: One Source, Several Skills uses writing and peer workshop exercises to help students examine and critique each others' skills in summarizing, engaging with, and documenting a source.

Faculty who would like to think more about pedagogical approaches to academic integrity and explore ways to teach good practices that help all students avoid plagiarism can read more fully in the sources cited in the "References" section of this document, on the last page.

Developed by: Jane Kokernak

Plan A: Experiences and Expectations

1. Begin the class with a ten minute focused free-write on the following prompt:

Describe a research and writing assignment that you recall (from high school or another college you attended). What steps did you take to complete the research? Which parts of the writing challenged or frustrated you? Which parts did you feel confident about?

2. Invite students to share anecdotes about their research paper experiences. Get the ball rolling by giving prompts and asking questions like these:
 - Who can describe a research paper she wrote on a current event or issue? (Or... historical event or figure? biography? health or medical issue?)
 - What kinds of information sources did you find? How did you find them?
 - What kind of help advice or assistance did you seek from your teacher or a librarian?
 - Did anyone have to write a research paper as a group project? How did you divide the tasks?
 - What steps did you take to avoid plagiarizing your sources in your final paper?
 - Did you think about avoiding plagiarism when conducting your research and taking notes?

Prod the students who nod or raise their hands to “tell us more.”

3. Focus the discussion by asking students how they were **taught** to incorporate outside sources and how comfortable they felt/feel with the rules. Encourage them to describe their notions about what constitutes plagiarism.
4. Define plagiarism. (Use one from a reference work that you like or the one provided in the Simmons College *Student Handbook, 2004-2006*, p. 170). See if they notice any difference(s) – if there are any -- between the definition for plagiarism and their own notions about it.
5. Outline your expectations for how students will handle the use of sources in their work for your class. What **citation style** do you expect them to use? (Point specifically to a source, like *LB Brief*, that is a resource for them.) What are the **consequences**, in your course, for not providing a Works Cited page on a paper, or for not providing parenthetical references for sources?
6. (Optional, if time allows:) Discuss with students *what they see* and *what you see* as the **benefits** of using the works of others in their own work.

Plan B: What Must Be Documented?

1. Anticipate this class with an assignment that directs students to read a short text on the syllabus, noticing especially how the writer of the article or chapter handles the use of sources in her/his own work.

Suggested wording for assignment:

Read "Title" by Author Name. What is this article/chapter about? What are the main points? What do you think is the purpose of this article/chapter: to inform, entertain, persuade, or affect the reader in some other way?

Author Name uses several sources in this article/chapter. Notice where she uses them in the text, and how. Where is s/he using a **direct quotation**? Where is s/he referring to **an idea or concept or argument** that is not her/his own? Where is she including **statistics** or **a statement of fact that is not common knowledge**?

Prepare at least one page of informal notes on your observations and be ready to talk about them in class.

2. In class, first elicit students' comments and questions on the text's overall meaning, main points, and purpose.
3. Next, working chronologically through the text, ask students to identify in the text several instances where the author is incorporating sources into her/his work. As each instance is identified, ask students to label and discuss how the source is incorporated. You might even want to have written on the board something like this:
 - Cite words and ideas --
 - direct quotations
 - ideas, concepts, and arguments
 - facts that are not common knowledge
4. At various points in the text, ask students how they as readers are responding to the author's use of the source. For example, does the use of the source strengthen the author's position? Does it provide special data? Does it introduce an opposing position and does the author respond effectively to it?
5. (Optional, if time allows:) Give students a chance to discuss the challenges (and worries) of using sources in their writing. They might have some concerns you can answer; you might also find a relevant way to acknowledge that these are challenges that face every writer.

Plan C: One Source, Several Skills

- i. Anticipate this class with a brief assignment that gets students to develop their skills at summarizing, quoting from, documenting, and responding to a source from any medium (print, digital, Web, e.g.).

Suggested wording for assignment:

Read "Title" by Author Name. Write a two-page response to this article, beginning with one paragraph that summarizes the author's main idea and then using your writing to enter a discussion with one or two of the author's assertions or questions that interest you.

In this piece, refer to the author by name. Use direct quotations to capture any phrases, sentences, or passages that you are using word-for-word from the original. Whenever you use a direct quote or refer to an idea, concept, argument or fact from the original, indicate the source in your text according to [MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.] style guidelines.

Cite the author, title, and publication information for this source at the end of your summary, according to [MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.] style guidelines.

Due in class (date). Two copies.

Note: *LB Brief*, pages 449-469, provides tips on summarizing and using sources like "Title" in your own work.

2. Begin class with a peer workshop (20-30 minutes). Assemble students into pairs, ask them to exchange their summaries. Encourage each student to notice how her peer introduced the title and author of the article. How did the writer integrate quotes, ideas, or facts in her summary? How did she indicate them? Did she provide sufficient publication information at the end? Each pair should work together to improve each person's integration of the source into her own writing.
3. Reconvene the group. Ask students if they had any more thoughts about their own work, after exchanging work with their peers. What did they observe as common challenges in dealing with a source?
4. (Optional, if time allows): Encourage students to talk about the response portion of their writing. How did they choose to respond to the original author's text? To the overall point? To a detail? What kinds of words did they use in responding?

References

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