

WHY YOU SHOULD NEVER PLAGIARIZE AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DO

The paragraph below is from the syllabus, so you may already have read it, but it won't hurt to read it again.

PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: The college catalog outlines a clear policy on academic integrity: "Violations or attempted violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions, or facilitating academic dishonesty" (Cañada College Catalog, 2017-2018; see canadacollege.edu/policies/academicintegrity.php). All writing must be your own work. If you use any ideas, summaries, or exact words that were produced by someone else, you must give them credit for it in your paper. You must participate in forum discussions and complete pre-writing assignments so that the development of your essays is evident to me. If you plagiarize a paper or any part of a paper, you will get a zero (0) on the paper, and/or you will be referred to the division dean for further discipline as appropriate depending on the egregiousness of the offense and your attitude toward correcting it. You will be given an opportunity to rewrite the essay once you have turned in another essay without plagiarism. If you plagiarize a second time, you will not be allowed to rewrite either essay and will receive an "F" for the course. We will be using Turnitin.com to help you to avoid plagiarism. Do not submit plagiarized work unless you want to see (and you want me to see) that you have plagiarized.

WHY AM I PUTTING SUCH AN EMPHASIS ON THIS ISSUE?

Last semester, several people in my online class failed individual assignments because of plagiarism and two failed the course as a whole, which was upsetting for them and demoralizing for me. So one reason why you should not plagiarize is that you run the risk of getting caught and failing. I will read your essays carefully, and I care if you master the skills that I am supposed to guide you towards mastering. I will get to you know your writing, and I will be able to tell when you don't sound like you. We will also be using Turnitin, which does a pretty good job of catching plagiarized material.

But that is not the main reason that you should not plagiarize. The main reason that you should not plagiarize is that this is a critical thinking class. The precise skill that I am entrusted with helping you to cultivate is *thinking for yourself*—drawing your own conclusions. You cannot draw your own conclusions if you are copying someone else's. This means that if you go online and look at *Shmoop*, or *SparkNotes*, or *GradeSaver* to "get ideas," you are directly undermining your own education because the point is for you to have your *own* ideas. In addition to undermining your education, you will deny yourself the possibility of experiencing the rush that comes from drawing an original conclusion—from making new meaning by putting together specific details in a way that *only you can*, because only you have your unique set of experiences, sensibilities, and neural pathways.

It is difficult to interpret literature. But you can do it. You can examine a set of details and draw an original conclusion about what they mean. Furthermore, if you learn how to make that leap here, in the safe space of a literature class in which the stakes are very low (that is, the worst thing that can happen—besides you plagiarizing—is that you won't convince me or your classmates of the validity of your argument), imagine what you will be able to do as a lawyer making a case in a courtroom, a scientist designing an experiment in a laboratory, a research and development person trying to justify a new product, a politician trying to solve a problem and make a better world—you name the career path, and there is an application for critical thinking awaiting you there. That is, this class is not really about literature as much as it is about you developing the capacity for independent, critical thought. There are other ways you could do this, but this course is required, so why not make the most of it?

Are you unsure of what counts as plagiarism? Turn to the next page.

WHAT DOES PLAGIARISM LOOK LIKE? Here is a list of the different instances of plagiarism I have discovered recently:

1. Two essays with first paragraphs that were exactly the same with the exception of a quotation.
2. Two essays that were over 90 percent copies of essays written by students who took the class during previous semesters.
3. Three essays with arguments and examples that exactly followed the order of arguments and examples given by online cheating sites (*SparkNotes*, *Shmoop*, or *GradeSaver*). Note that these essays also did not address the essay prompt and so would have failed even if they had not contained plagiarism, which is usually the case when someone cheats in this way.
4. Three essays and one presentation in which quotations from online sources were neither enclosed in quotation marks nor cited.
5. One essay in which a review of the text in question had been copied and pasted from an online source and then edited so that every third or fourth word was different—usually a synonym, which I have to say is both a lot of work but still easy to catch. Like the essays described in No. 3 above, this essay also failed to address the essay prompt.
6. Quotations that were cited as being from an assigned reading but were actually from an online source. That wasn't really plagiarism, exactly. But it was still unacceptable.

CONVERSATIONS THAT WERE HAD ABOUT THESE INSTANCES OF PLAGIARISM:

STUDENT: "I looked at [the other student's] paper and some of it must have gotten stuck in my mind."

ME: "It must be difficult having a photographic memory. Hopefully those ideas have faded now, so that when you rewrite the essay you will have access to your own ideas."

STUDENT: "I looked at [those cheating sites] to get ideas and some of them must have gotten stuck in my mind."

ME: "It must be difficult having a photographic memory. Hopefully those ideas have faded now, so that when you rewrite the essay you will have access to your own ideas."

STUDENT: "I didn't know I had to cite things that are common knowledge."

ME: "You have to cite everything that is not your own original thought. And any time you take three words in a row directly from a source, they should not only be cited but in quotation marks."

STUDENT: "I don't know how that happened!"

ME: "If you don't know how that happened, I can't help you. You will have to talk to the dean. Here is his email and phone number."

STUDENT: "The book assigned for the class was too expensive, so I used a similar source instead."

ME: "The book assigned (which in this case was *Reading Lessons*) is available on Amazon for \$1.40 and for free in the college library. If you have problems getting the assigned course materials, you should talk to your instructor. I will help you to find a solution."

Hopefully most of you are offended by this whole discussion because you would never plagiarize. And despite the crisp tone of this handout, I want to make clear that I don't judge people who plagiarize. I assume that they did it for one of three reasons: 1) they didn't know the rules; 2) they ran out of time to write the paper and did what they thought was the best thing to do in the time that they had; or 3) they got away with it before and assumed they would again. In the first instance, ask; in the second, talk to me and get an extension. In the third? Please know that I am paying attention.