

**The Problem of Plagiarism**

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### **Abstract**

Plagiarism can be defined as taking someone else's ideas and written words and claiming them as your own without giving credit to the original author. The topic of plagiarism is such a hot topic within the writing field and is a huge and ongoing problem. A lot of people are told and taught that plagiarism is a bad thing and, if caught, academic consequences will happen. But why do people still perform the act of plagiarism? If they know the risks, why do they still take it? In this essay, I will be analyzing what exactly plagiarism is and if all plagiarism is genuine? Along with these questions, I will also tie in how this affects the writing field and how these things can be solved within the field itself.

### **Introduction**

Plagiarism is the act of taking someone else's work or ideas and claiming them to be your own without giving credit to the original person. The issue of plagiarism has been around for a long time and is a raging topic of issues within the field of writing. Many people have been told at a young age by teachers and schools that plagiarism is a very bad thing for people to perform and that if caught, consequences will be brought upon the participating individual. Even in universities and the workforce the topic of plagiarism is still prevalent and the consequences of plagiarism are still real and if not even more punishable. But what exactly is plagiarism and what can be defined as plagiarism? When it comes to originality, it is hard for someone to have their very own original ideas without it sounding very similar to someone else's. Considering this, it brings up the issue that many people may not know that they are plagiarising and that the term 'plagiarism' may be thrown around too easily and labeled on pieces of work that may just be a coincidence.

### **Background**

People have been taught about the topic of plagiarism since the beginning of their education. Everyone was taught that it was a very bad thing for one to plagiarize and if one is caught, then there would be punishable consequences. Especially in a university setting, the punishment for being caught plagiarizing is much greater than it was in grade school. For example, in Bowdoin University's Office of the Dean Students website, they have a designated section dedicated to the consequences if one is caught plagiarizing. In this statement, it explains, "Students who plagiarize or otherwise engage in academic dishonesty face serious consequences.

Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, failure on an assignment, grade reduction or course failure, suspension, and possibly dismissal” (Bowdoin 2021). Syed Shahabuddin also points out in his journal *Plagiarism in Academia* that, “Plagiarism is unethical and may be illegal in some cases” (Shahabuddin, p.357). With knowing the consequences, students have taken it upon themselves to learn the different ways to do when writing a paper to avoid plagiarism. However, the topic and act of plagiarism is one that is not completely avoidable. Sometimes, without being aware, someone may have elements of plagiarism within their paper or their writing piece, which causes them to get in trouble. According to Kidney International, when it comes to one being caught for plagiarizing, “some may have been naive mistakes resulting from a lack of knowledge of the rules of the game, so to speak, whereas others seem to have been more premeditated” (Al-Awqati, p. 91). This is a problem within the writing department because of the possibility of mislabeling one's work as plagiarism when it turns out it actually is not makes the department look bad. To go into more detail, when looking at the statistics, let's say there are a lot of cases of plagiarism within the writing department. Having a large number of plagiarism cases within the department makes the department itself look bad. But, if half of those cases were mislabeled and are not genuine cases of plagiarism, then that lowers the number of cases immensely.

But how can you tell if plagiarism is being done intentionally? How can one tell if it is genuine? Rebecca Howard explains that when it comes to determining plagiarism, “when teachers make judgements about whether a student has plagiarized, those judgements are supposedly made solely by examining the plagiaristic text and the sources it appropriates. College regulations against plagiarism typically exclude the author and his or her intentions from the adjudication of cases” (Howard, p. 474). Along with that, thanks to the rise of technology,

there are a lot of websites and a lot of bots that professors, university officials and even students can access and these websites can determine if the paper is plagiarized or not. On the surface level, these kinds of websites may be a very helpful tool, especially for universities and professors, because it does the work for them of telling if a paper is plagiarized or not. However, these websites can have their flaws. When looking at the efficiency of a plagiarism checker, “The results are often hard to interpret, difficult to navigate, and sometimes just wrong. Many systems report false positives for common phrases, long names of institutions or even reference information. Software also produces false negatives” (Weber-Wuff, 2019). Even though these systems and websites may be beneficial and very helpful, there are cases where they have proven to mislabel and provide false information when it comes to analyzing written work. Thus, making the reliability of these plagiarism detectors questionable.

### **Analysis**

With all of this considered, the question we should now ask is how can we improve this problem? How do we determine if the plagiarism found within a paper is genuine or if it is coincidental? Well, some scholars, universities and professors are already taking action on improving this problem within the writing field. The faculty within the writing field have, “learned through experience how to help students avoid plagiarism and, if students plagiarize, faculty have access to tools to catch them” (Shahabuddin, p.356). Though some staff members rely heavily on using plagiarism checkers on their students' papers, I propose that, if they decide to do that, they should also go through the paper themselves to see if the checker was accurate in detecting plagiarism. Seeing how unreliable plagiarism checkers can be, it is hard for staffers to just rely on that to determine plagiarism. “Software cannot determine plagiarism; it can only

point to some cases of matching text. The systems can be useful for flagging up problems, but not for discriminating between originality and plagiarism” (Weber-Wuff, 2019). By the staffers using both the plagiarism checker as well as going over the paper themselves, that would ensure that the plagiarism, if detected, was intentional or unintentional. When discussing the consequences of plagiarism, staffers should sit down with the student and go over why their paper was labeled as plagiarized. This way, if the plagiarism was purely coincidental, the student would then learn their mistakes and would know the knowledge of how to avoid that on the next assignment. If they were punished for plagiarism and given the harsh consequences without being told why, then they will not learn from their mistakes and improve on future assignments. Therefore, it is important for the staff to take a more gentler approach when trying to teach the students the right and wrong of writing, and how the wrong could lead to plagiarism.

### **Conclusion**

Plagiarism is a prevalent issue that needs to be addressed and solved within the writing field. However, for one to be able to solve the issue, one has to be able to accurately detect the problem. If one is detected to plagiarize on their writing piece, it is up to the professors and faculty of the writing field to accurately determine if the labeling of plagiarism is accurate or not. Plagiarism checkers may be helpful and quick, but have been proved to be unreliable. By professors and writing field faculty checking the validity of plagiarism, they are able to really analyze how the writer wrote their work and are able to tell through the context of their writing if the writer meant to plagiarize or not. Once determined, then their staff can go from there and determine the next steps. Doing all of this would help lower the plagiarism cases within the writing field, which would lead to the problem of plagiarism becoming less prevalent. Even

though plagiarism may never go away, the members of the writing field can try their best to make the problem minimal enough so that it is not as major of a problem as it is now. This would be a beneficial thing to the writing field because instead of worrying if the writer has plagiarized within their work, people could start admiring the writer's work and the writer's thoughts behind their piece.

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