

<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/facguide/causes>

Why Students Plagiarize

Plagiarism Detection and Prevention

Reminding students of the penalties and consequences if they're caught will help students see that plagiarism really is not a "solution."*

*Portions of this section are based on "[Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers](#)" by Robert Harris and the [Penn State Pulse Surveys on Academic Integrity from 1999](#).

I. Cynicism About Grades

In a [CNN Online](#) article, some students expressed the view that cheating is necessary in order to maintain a competitive G.P.A. and be successful in life. Comments included:

- "We students know that we are almost completely judged on our grades. They are so important that we will sacrifice our own integrity to make a good impression."
- "A person who has an entirely honest life can't succeed these days."

— "[Many students say cheating's OK](#)", CNN Online

In reality though, students with higher G.P.A.'s are less likely to cheat than those with lower G.P.A.'s (1999, [Penn State Pulse Survey on "Academic Integrity"](#)). Completing assignments fully may be a better guarantee of a high grade.

II. Fear of Failure

There are two sources of fear. One is that students may feel ashamed to fail, especially in terms of family expectations. It should be noted that it is more "honorable" to receive a low grade than to be caught cheating or plagiarizing.

Other students may feel their writing or research skills are so weak, that they can only pass the course if they buy a paper written by someone else. Clear guidelines may help students put their skills in perspective

III. Demanding Schedules (and Lack of Planning)

Students who work outside school (some up to 20 hours per week) or have heavy class loads may decide there is not enough time to do the assignment properly. Guidance on organization and the assignment may show students how to better plan their time. Students should also be reminded that the assignments are providing skills and knowledge that may be needed in their future careers.

IV. Perception that Cheating is Easy

A significant percentage of students surveyed in 1999 reported that they felt cheating was easy or that instructors did not enforce the rules. A discussion of the consequences for academic dishonesty may change that perception. A few well-chosen anecdotes could also reinforce the concept that academic dishonesty is taken seriously.

V. Lack of Interest

A student uninterested in an assignment may be more likely to plagiarize. Allowing students to select topics or using real-world data/examples may add incentive for a student to complete the assignment as intended.

VI. "Economy of Effort"

Of course, some students plagiarize because they feel it's easier to copy from someone else than do the work themselves. One strategy for these students is to remind them of long-term consequences. Another strategy is to structure assignments so that plagiarism becomes more work than doing the research.

VII. Ignorance about Plagiarism

Although most students understand that buying a paper online is plagiarism, they may not see the distinction between synthesizing sources or true collaboration and certain types of plagiarism such as "cut-and-paste" or too close a paraphrase. Reviewing the different [types of plagiarism](#) will let students know what the standards are.

Also, students should be encouraged to add citations **as they write**, including drafts. This will avoid the excuse - "I meant to put in citations, but I forgot."

IX. Seeking Thrills

A small percentage of students may plagiarize just for the thrill of circumventing school policy. One way to combat this could be to present the assignment as a challenge also.