

## Identifying plagiarism in student work

Student plagiarism varies in form and extent from the inclusion of an unattributed phrase or sentence in a written assessment to the purchase and submission of an entire essay or report from an essay bank or ghostwriting service. Despite the implementation of plagiarism detection software in universities and colleges often the first indicator of potential plagiarism is a sense of unease on the part of the marker, arising from some or all of the following:

**Changes in writing style** - Students who are not confident in their ability to marshal an argument or present a coherent paper may resort to including large passages of text from a number of authors with linking sentences of their own. Distinct changes in writing styles and terminologies with minimal attribution should alert markers to the possibility of plagiarism in the paper.

**High quality prose** - Whilst high quality prose on a given topic is precisely what is hoped for in an assessed piece of work, the inclusion of such text without acknowledgement in an otherwise unremarkable written assignment merits some investigation.

**American spellings** - Numerous instances of American spellings throughout a written assignment might indicate that text has been downloaded from a website.

**Sources not available locally** - Where a piece of work relies very heavily upon sources that are not available locally or electronically, and there is no reason to suggest that the student might easily access these resources, further investigation may be needed.

**Out of date sources** - Reference lists and bibliographies that do not contain recent work on a topic may indicate that the work has been copied from a published source, or from earlier work by another student.

**Heavy reliance upon non** - UK examples - Depending upon the topic, work that relies heavily upon illustrative examples outwith the local context may suggest wholesale copying from a website or journal database.

**Mark discrepancies** - Although different forms of assessment are favoured by different types of learners, a marked deviation from the norm in a particular assessment could be due to the submission of copied work.

Individually some of the indicators above will merely highlight inappropriate or sloppy academic practice, but where a combination of these are present in a single piece of work further investigation may be warranted.

(For further information on this topic see Cox, D. (2002)

*How to identify when your students are using websites to plagiarise: the problem of 'mouse-click' plagiarism.*

Available at: <http://escalate.ac.uk/1059> (Accessed: 12 November 2007)

*For details of more tip sheets in this series see [www.jiscpas.ac.uk](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk)*