

Understanding Plagiarism

Informative Research

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Throughout school, each student is told many times per year, especially when instructed to write various types of essays, to be sure not to plagiarize. However, students are not given detailed descriptions of what plagiarism is or how to properly avoid it when obtaining sources and writing papers. As each student progresses further their education, teachers begin giving more details about plagiarism and how it affects the authors of the information and the students themselves. Once students reach college level education they are expected to understand plagiarism and its consequences, but most students still do not have a complete grasp on the concept or how to avoid it (Hansen & Tesdell, 2011, pp. 188-191). Being well informed about plagiarism, particularly online plagiarism, its definition, what the effects is, who it effects, how it effects people, and the associated punishments will help students, authors, and editors be better at their assigned tasks and prevent future mistakes.

Plagiarism is using or portraying another author's original concepts and phrases as one's own without giving appropriate acclaim to the author. Plagiarizing occurs most commonly with online resources, but can also happen with written or spoken text. When someone commits plagiarism it is a violation of the U.S. copyright laws which guard the author's possessions of knowledge. The U.S. copyright laws make it against the law to reproduce or reuse another person's unique, written knowledge as their own without prior consent. Not all works are original, however. Common knowledge or widely known facts are not protected by the U.S. copyright laws. For example: the sun is bright; this is a fact that most people will know without question, and therefore, it would not be protected by the U.S. copyright laws. People are allowed to borrow various ideas and pieces of information from author's, but this borrowed information must be correctly cited, used with quotations, or given credit to by clearly mentioning the author

and their contribution of information. Degree of plagiarism is weighted by severity on a scale of reasonable usage. Directly copying information from a source is considered very unreasonable. However, if someone takes this information and further develops it with analytical or real world applications then it may be considered much more reasonable. If a large amount of another author's information is used without quotations or a citation, it is also considered to be very unreasonable usage. Plagiarism happens every day and negatively effects those whose are plagiarized ("What Is Plagiarism?" n.d.).

The act of plagiarism effects everybody involved: student, teacher, and author. Being accused of plagiarism may impact a student's reputation and their future academic performance. The author is also at risk of compromising their integrity. When an author's information is plagiarized, the reader of the plagiarized work may think that the words in that work are one of the false author's, when in reality, the true author is the writer and they have not been given credit. Plagiarism has a wide variety of consequences and repercussions (Hansen & Tesdell, 2011, pp. 188-191).

Students can be suspended, expelled for a specified amount of time, or possibly removed from their place of education permanently due to plagiarism of an author's written works from various online or written sources. When applying for college or graduate school, the student may also be denied entry due to plagiarizing done in the past. Plagiarism can also appear on a student's criminal record and affect their ability to obtain a desired job in the future. Authors have the ability and right to prosecute offenders in a court of law depending on the severity of the crime and the concern of the author. Results of this prosecution could be, if the plagiarist is found guilty, facing prison time and/or the criminal be required to pay fines upfront or pay a series of fines over a certain period of time. Because of the harshness of the punishments for

plagiarizing another author's work, it is important to understand how to avoid getting into significant legal trouble because of simple, preventable, plagiarism mistakes (den Ouden & van Wijk, 2011, pp. 196-200).

Avoiding plagiarism is relatively simple as long as students understand some basic rules and regulations when writing using sources. Students should write about subjects that have already been researched so that they can apply their own knowledge, experiences, and insight to the topic without copying the original author's belief. Even if the student chooses to use this method they must still be sure to give the author the appropriate credit for their information by citing sources correctly. If the student agrees with the author's opinion, then they must clearly show that they are not the person who initially thought or expressed this outlook. When writing, the student should use key words and their own voice that reflects their specific attitude, not the author's. Most importantly, the student should be positive that they properly cite each source that they use in their paper (Grif, 2014, pp. 12-16).

Understanding the definition of plagiarism, depicting another author's unique ideas and phrases as one's own and lacking the suitable praise the author deserves, is only the first step to evade becoming a plagiarist ("What Is Plagiarism?" n.d.). Because the consequences associated with plagiarism can be extremely severe, taking the proper precautions when writing a paper and using research material is the most important part of constructing a paper. Students must follow correct citation rules and use quotations when appropriate in order to avoid modest errors that can lead to plagiarism when using written, vocal, or online information (Grif, 2014, pp. 12-16). Knowing the meaning, penalties, and the people that plagiarism can effect will help all students avoid the various forms of plagiarism in the future (den Ouden & van Wijk, 2011, pp. 196-200).

References

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