

Reframing Our Task

Consider the following two studies:

1. Roig, M. (2001) Plagiarism and paraphrasing criteria of college and university professors. *Ethics & Behavior* 11(3): 307–324.

On variations in faculty standards for plagiarism: “Professors’ conceptions of plagiarism and correct paraphrasing can range widely from a very lax set of criteria for determining plagiarism to criteria that can be even more rigorous than those prescribed by traditional definitions.”

When college professors were asked to paraphrase a complex academic passage: “Thirty percent of the paraphrases contained five-word strings from the original paragraph. The percentage of paraphrases that contained six-, seven-, and eight-word strings were, respectively, 22%, 18%, and 9%.”

College professors were asked to paraphrase a complex academic passage or a simply astronomy explanation: “26% (n = 11) appropriated strings of text of five words in length, whereas 9% (n = 4) appropriated strings of eight words or longer. These findings are comparable to those of Study 2 (see Table 2). Sixty-four respondents paraphrased the easy-to-read paragraph. Of these, none of the respondents appropriated seven- or eight-word strings of text, and only 3% (n = 2) of the sample appropriated strings of five words in length; another 3% (n = 2) appropriated six-word strings.”

2. Howard, Rebecca Moore, Tricia Serviss and Tanya K. Rodrigue. “Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences.” *Writing and Pedagogy* 2.2 (2010): 177-192.

1. Does the paper contain one or more incidences of patchwriting? - In 16 of the 18 papers (89%), the answer is “yes.”
2. Does the paper contain one or more incidences of paraphrase? - In all 18 papers (100%), the answer is “yes.”
3. Does the paper contain one or more incidences of summary? - In all 18 papers (100%), the answer is “no.”
4. Does the paper contain one or more incidences of direct copying from sources? - In 14 of the 18 papers (78%), the answer is “yes.”
5. Does the paper contain one or more incidences in which direct copying is not marked as quotation? - In 13 of the 18 papers (72%), the answer is “yes.”
6. Of the 18 papers, 17 (94%) contained non-common-knowledge information for which no source was cited.
7. Of the 18 papers, 14 (78%) attributed information to a source that either did not contain that information or said something different from what the student was attributing to it. (182)

Conclusion: “These students are not writing from sources; they are writing from sentences selected from sources.” (187)

Issues for Discussion

As a profession, we have focused our attention in four areas:

- 1) Identifying appropriate sources for academic research.
- 2) Documenting those sources using academic conventions.
- 3) Alerting students to the problem of plagiarism.
- 4) Establishing consequences for plagiarism.

As this research suggests, we have been far less effective at the following tasks.

- 1) Distinguishing between *plagiarism* and *misuse of sources*.
- 2) Developing clear, interdisciplinary standards for what constitutes acceptable paraphrasing, and what constitutes plagiarism.
- 3) Helping students navigate between courses and contexts with differing standards.
- 4) Helping students establishing the authority or relevance of sources they cite.
- 5) Contextualizing sources within the essay (noting credentials of author, or date of publication, or special relevance, or other important contextual features of the source).
- 6) Teaching students when and how to summarize sources.

James M. Lang, *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*

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