Dr. M's Ideas for teachers and students on encouraging scholarly habits and discouraging plagiarism

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“From-scratch” essays and documentation can prevent plagiarism

For teachers:

• Always take the time to type up clear, simple, and “achievable” assignment sheets for all assignments and papers that you require of students. Sections should include: rationale for the assignment (i.e., what academic skills or content do you expect students to learn from the assignment). a bare bones organizational strategy of the sections of the essay; physical parameters (i.e., the style of documentation you expect—MLA, APA, or other –don’t ask students “to pick”. If you teach a social science, include APA on your assignment sheet.) Parameters should also included that papers should be typed, double-spaced, include a title, page numbers, proper margins, stapled in the left hand corner, etc. Tell them how you want to see assignments presented.) Finally include a rubric or grading scale, along with what constitutes an A, B, C, or D.

• Allow students to choose their own slant or topic within the scope of your topic. Thirty years of writing research tells us that students write better if they choose areas of interest.

• DON’T allow students to write on topics which bore you, or are common topics (legalization of marijuana, capital punishment, gun control, etc, etc). Write out the list of excluded topics on your assignment sheet.

• Take 15 minutes and show your students the rudiments of the documentation style you have chosen. Bring a handout. The Writing Center has several good ones online.

• Plan the scope and sequence of your assignment to allow for students to work through the process of the paper—a date for early approval of a topic, a web or outline, the rough draft, teacher consult with the student, time for revision and a final draft. Encourage students to use the Writing Center early enough so that the center can help students organize and revise.
Yes, this is a little trouble, but all this prevents plagiarism. But the essay you receive will be better because students CHOOSE their own topic, started from scratch, checked in with you, were thoughtful about what they wrote, and DIDN’T PLAGIARIZE.

For students:

- Follow your teacher’s assignment sheet, to the letter. He or should took the time to make the assignment thoughtfully, so use it as a resource. If you don’t receive a written assignment sheet, politely ask for one and lobby your peers to ask for one, preferably on Blackboard.

- Find out what documentation style your teacher wants for your essay, and learn how to use it. If you don’t know how, check in your Simon and Schuster handbook and/or with the Writing Center. It’s all about finding the correct type of model for your source, and following the examples. That’s how we all learn.

- Don’t decide to ignore the assignment because “I don’t understand it” or “it’s too hard.” Your teacher wants you to learn something. Now is not the time to “get creative” and write something off-topic.

- Start from scratch. Within the scope of the assignment, draw out ideas of what really interests you. Seek approval for your topic from your prof (it’s good to take a web or outline to him or her) during office hours (not by email) and get to work.

- Make hard copies of the sources you want to use (particularly SCHOLARLY internet sources). Then assign a color of highlighter to each section you need to write (found in the assignment sheet). Then, as you read through your sources and see information that pertains to a particular section, which you’ve coded as yellow, highlight that little section of your source in yellow. Do that for each section in your sources. Then it will be easy to know where to cull quotes and paraphrases for each section.

- Learn how to effectively paraphrase (both quotes and paraphrases MUST be cited). To paraphrase, read your source, then cover it up and write it from memory. Check what you’ve written. If it’s too close to what the source said, cover it up and write a second time. If you do this three times, you will usually have the source in your own words. You MUST cite it.

- Make sure to carefully cite all your sources. Don’t assume knowledge about a topic on your reader’s part. If you got the information from a source, cite that source using the documentation style your teacher specified.
• Do your own work. That’s why you’re in college. It’s very unfresh and unscholarly to steal other people’s work. You can’t use the excuse, “I didn’t know.” It’s your job to know. It says so in the Student Handbook. It says so in the Book of Life. People have lost careers, have had degrees taken away, have been removed from the university over plagiarism. JUST DON’T DO IT. If you have a question about something, seek help at the Writing Center, from your English teacher, or from the teacher who assigned the paper.

• Finally, learning how to do all this documentation and your own work allows you to play in the big leagues here at college and in your chosen profession. You will advance the history of ideas, make new discoveries, cure diseases, and heal the pain of the world. You can’t do that if you are too lazy to try.