



# The Writing Lab at Bristol Community College

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## What Faculty Can Do to Prevent Plagiarism

Howard Tinberg

### The Costs of Plagiarism

While responsibility to avoid plagiarism rests primarily with the student writer, the consequences or costs are more widely distributed. The plagiarist is likely to receive a failing grade and, in some cases, may be dropped from a course and, in the worse case scenario, suspended or even expelled from academic programs. But faculty face consequences as well: cast in the unattractive role of policing plagiarism, faculty spend time and energy “googling” suspect passages and relying on “turnitin.com” to discover the “smoking gun,” rather than determining the extent of the student’s learning. I don’t know a single faculty member who feels comfortable playing the role of plagiarist detective.

### The Role of the Assignment

What else can faculty do in the light of rampant plagiarism? While plagiarism cannot be completely eliminated, faculty can create conditions in their classrooms that make plagiarism less likely. The role of the assignment is crucial. **Please note, again, that responsibility for the misuse of sources lies squarely with the writer**, not with the faculty members. Nevertheless, faculty can design assignments that make inappropriate use of sources less likely, in my view. For more information, please consult “Preventing Plagiarism in Research Papers.” *Change*. 36.3 (May/June 2004). 18-20.

### Strategies for Preventing Plagiarism

- *Design staged assignments*  
Breaking assignments down into units or stages allows faculty to determine what progress has been made by the writer from the start and to make certain that the student maintains ownership over the writing.
- *Intervene with comments at various stages*  
Providing commentary at each of the stages allows you to monitor the writer’s progress, while at the same time spelling out to the student your expectations at each step.
- *Tie assignments to local activities*  
Tying assignments to local events or activities may dissuade the student from going beyond the community of class and institution (to the web, in other words).
- *Require that students hand in photocopies of source material, with relevant passages highlighted*  
I like this approach in part because you get a glimpse of how students read source material: what they consider important by virtue of their highlights.
- *Have students present their “findings” orally in class*  
Giving students the opportunity to bring their written research to the class promotes the idea that the project is not an “outside” project but integral to the course.
- *Provide opportunities for creative and innovative writing*  
Having students write in non-conventional forms (dialogues, letters, chapters in a novel) may mean that students are less likely to turn to the web, which contains so many conventional essays.