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## More Ways to Reduce Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Courses

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### Abstract

This article summarizes key points of a presentation made at the IE Orientation and 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Faculty Development Symposium at Aoyama Gakuin University on 5 April 2014. It follows on from the article, "Ways to Reduce Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Courses," which appeared in the previous volume of *Thought Currents in English Literature*. In order to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions and students' knowledge and awareness of plagiarism within the IE Program, Professor Joseph Dias, a Coordinator of the IE Program, and the author collaborated on the design of student and teacher surveys, which were administered to IE students and teachers between December 2013 and February 2014. This article highlights particular results of the student survey, outlines ways to reduce plagiarism in IE courses in response to student feedback, and offers further recommendations.

**Keywords:** plagiarism, student survey, student feedback, skill development, academic integrity

### Introduction

This article, which provides a synopsis of key points from one part of the session entitled, "Addressing Student Plagiarism" (Dias & Bollinger 2014), presented at the IE Orientation and 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Faculty Development Symposium at Aoyama Gakuin University on 5 April 2014, is a continuation

of the article entitled, "Ways to Reduce Plagiarism in IE Core and Writing Courses," published in *Thought Currents in English Literature*, Vol. 86 (Bollinger 2013). The session was co-presented by Professor Joseph Dias, a Coordinator of the Integrated English (IE) Program in the English Literature Department of Aoyama Gakuin University and the author. In order to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions and students' knowledge and awareness of plagiarism within the IE Program, we collaborated on the design of student and teacher surveys, which were administered to IE students and teachers between December 2013 and February 2014. This article highlights particular results of the student survey (see Appendix 1), outlines ways to reduce plagiarism in IE courses in response to student feedback, and offers further recommendations.

### Results of Student Survey

While it may be assumed that most students who plagiarize do so intentionally in order to obtain better grades, this was apparently not the case for a majority of the students who reported having plagiarized on assignments in the IE Program. The two reasons cited most often were: lack of time to complete an assignment (20.2%), and failure to understand an assignment (15.3%). Only 8.4% of the respondents indicated that they had plagiarized in order to get a good grade.

In addition to ascertaining students' reasons and motivations for plagiarizing, the survey also contained a quiz which asked respondents to determine whether five short writing samples included some form of plagiarism. Although 59 % of the students reported that they had never plagiarized on assignments for IE courses, some among them indicated that none of the examples on the quiz contained plagiarism. The fact that these students were unable to identify the examples containing plagiarism clearly suggests that even conscientious students may unintentionally be engaging in plagiarism. This is supported by the research as Pecorari and Petric observed, "There is now ample evidence that students may plagiarise unintentionally, as

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a result of uncertainty about citing conventions, what constitutes common knowledge, or limited referencing skills and/or L2 resources (e.g., Sherman 1992; Currie 1998; Howard 1999; Errey 2002; Pecorari 2003; Petric 2004; Flowerdew & Li 2007; Ellery 2008a; Shi 2010; Li & Casanave 2012)" (2014). Prior to penalizing students for plagiarizing, it is crucial to confirm that they have a clear understanding of what plagiarism is and know how to avoid it.

Students' support for a plagiarism policy and the considerable volume of comments and suggestions offered by students in response to questions on the survey attest to their interest in this issue and contributed to our understanding of the need for greater knowledge and awareness of plagiarism within the IE Program. Individual students' comments revealed a lack of consistency in terms of a program-wide approach to plagiarism. For example, a second-semester sophomore noted, "The students have to know what is right or wrong. I learned plagiarism in this semester, but it was too late." A first-year student wrote, "I haven't been told about the plagiarism policy yet. It should have been told to students clearly at the beginning of the terms and classes." Certainly, IE teachers and administrators would concur with these students' observations.

## Responding to Student Feedback

### *Increase Awareness of Plagiarism*

Based on the results of the student survey, it is apparent that increasing students' knowledge of plagiarism and raising their awareness of the issue are important priorities. Consequently, Professor Dias and I collaborated on a Plagiarism Policy Statement, and other IE teachers have also made valuable contributions (see Appendix 2). A version of the IE Plagiarism Policy Statement can also be found on the IE Program Web page (<http://www.aogaku-daku.org/2014/07/14/new-plagiarism-policy/>).

In addition to making students aware of the IE Plagiarism Policy, it is necessary for students to be able to recognize various forms of plagiarism and learn to differentiate between what is and is not plagiarism. Plagiarism guides

and materials such as *Is It Plagiarism Yet?* (Purdue University Online Writing Lab), *Using Sources: A Guide for Students* (Plagiarismadvice.org), and *APA Style Tutorial* (APA.org) can be used effectively to provide an introduction to plagiarism and an orientation to proper citation usage and formatting. In order to reduce the incidence of plagiarism in the IE Program, both intentional and unintentional, students must be well aware of what constitutes plagiarism and well versed in ways to avoid it.

Now, let's consider the two items cited most often by students as reasons for plagiarizing: lack of time to complete an assignment and failure to understand all or part of an assignment. What underlying factors may be involved, and how can these be addressed?

#### *Focus on Time Management*

Because university students have many demands on their time and many distractions, as well, organizing their work and managing their schedules in order to complete academic assignments in a timely fashion often proves challenging. Students' comments on the survey regarding ways to avoid plagiarism included having fewer assignments, less homework, and more time to complete tasks. While such suggestions may be wishful thinking on the part of some students, having a limited amount of time in class to begin homework assignments, write in journals, read library books, etc. may serve to relieve some of the pressure that students feel. However, to significantly impact their ability to complete homework and assignments in the time allotted, students need to improve their organizational and time management skills.

Focusing on time management is a way to approach the issue of plagiarism with a class as a whole and with students individually. One way to do this is simply by using materials related to time management in class activities, for example, "Easy Time Management Tips" (NHS 2014). These encourage students to focus on priorities, set goals and identify the steps necessary to achieve them, create a timeline for completion of the steps and eliminate distractions in order to remain focused on the process. Students can practice



some of these skills, in pairs or in teams, by listing the steps necessary to complete a task that they are currently working on, estimating the time required to complete each of the steps, and creating a timeline that would allow them to complete the assignment by the deadline. Showing a model or samples of the completed task may help students visualize steps in the process. By acquiring better organizational and time management skills, students can avoid a last minute "time crunch" that could lead to plagiarizing.

Discussing with students the value of doing their own work and focusing on long-term goals such as improving English proficiency, expressing ideas and opinions fluently in English, studying or traveling abroad, using English in future careers can also serve to motivate students to make better choices regarding time management, which may involve reducing or eliminating certain outside commitments such as part-time jobs or club activities, in order to devote more time and attention to academic endeavors.

#### *Clarification of Tasks*

Comprehending the requirements of a given assignment communicated in a foreign language can also prove challenging, even in streamed classes, and Japanese students often hesitate to ask for clarification. Therefore, providing explicit instructions, in both written and oral formats, is crucial and can serve to facilitate the successful completion of tasks without reverting to plagiarism. A simple technique that can aid students' comprehension is the use of "tips" lists (e.g., "10 tips for making a good presentation," "20 tips for writing a good book report"). Such lists help students focus on specific elements or aspects of an assignment by breaking it down into steps. If there are any steps or tips that a student does not understand, the lists can facilitate requests for assistance from peers or the teacher and can also simplify the process of providing feedback to students.

Showing models or examples of assigned tasks such as samples of previous students' work (e.g., news report, presentation, journal) is particularly effective for learners who are visually-oriented or prefer a hands-on approach. Students

can easily grasp the format and requirements of a particular task and visualize its completion. The models and samples contained in IE Program materials are excellent examples. While asking students to read all of the sample book reports in *Integrated English Core and IE Writing* (Strong 2013) or all of the sample essays in the *Academic Writing Students' Booklet* (Strong 2012) may seem an overwhelming task, assigning a particular sample book report or sample essay for homework and using these models for group discussion or a class activity can be an effective way to highlight specific features or provide explicit instructions, and students may be more likely to refer to the other samples for clarification as needed.

The *IE Discussion DVD* (Rucynski & Strong 2008), which features a sample news report and model discussions, is also a valuable teaching tool that presents the various steps involved in preparing a news discussion report and demonstrates techniques ("dos and don'ts") for leading a group discussion. Watching the DVD provides an excellent introduction to and overview of a task that students new to the IE Program can initially find rather complicated.

Providing individualized instruction and feedback on assignments such as book reports, news discussion reports, essays, projects, etc., through individual student/teacher conferences can greatly facilitate a student's comprehension of these tasks. In reviewing feedback on a book report, for example, an instructor can discuss written feedback on the report with a particular student, focusing on what the student did well and which elements need improvement. The student can then ask questions to confirm his/her understanding of the teacher's remarks and/or clarify any questions regarding the assignment. This one-to-one format allows students to request assistance without fear of humiliation. Moreover, by opening a direct line of communication between student and teacher, such exchanges can make the teacher seem more approachable, thereby facilitating future requests for clarification or assistance on other assignments.

#### *Scaffolding & Skill Development*

In addition to increasing students' comprehension and clarifying tasks through the means mentioned above, additional scaffolding and skill development can also contribute to a reduction in plagiarism. To illustrate this point, let's consider several skill-building tasks that can be used in conjunction with two IE Core assignments: compiling news discussion reports and making oral presentations.

While much emphasis is placed on developing discussion skills and students' ability to express opinions and exchange views in preparation for the news group discussions that students do in all IE Core courses, greater focus on the skills required to prepare the news discussion report could benefit students in both IE Core and writing courses. Most Japanese high school students may have limited, if any, experience summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting or citing information from a print or online news source. Incorporating additional tasks to develop these skills, particularly in the first IE Core course, along with continued practice in subsequent IE courses, can provide a solid foundation for writing essays in IE 3 Writing and Academic Writing that require the use of information from outside sources. (For an outline of sample skill-building tasks, used in compiling a news discussion report, with links to relevant, online course materials, see Appendix 3.)

Oral presentations in IE Core courses are often done at or near the end of a semester, and some students invariably wait until late in the semester to begin preparations for their speech. Many students have never made an oral presentation in Japanese, and perhaps most of the students in the IE Program have never given an individual presentation or any presentation in English prior to entering university. Consequently, these students have no idea of the time-consuming process involved in preparing, practicing, and making a presentation, or the stage fright that often accompanies one's initial foray into public speaking. Panic-stricken and faced with yet another "time crunch" situation, some students may resort to plagiarism.

To provide an opportunity for students to "experience" the act of presenting prior to giving their "real" presentations, they do "impromptu" speeches or mini-speeches early in the semester. For these, students select the topic(s)



(e.g., volunteer or club activities, hobbies, hometown, part-time jobs etc.) and speak for two minutes, during which they can choose to talk about one or two of the topic(s). The purpose of the task is to practice making eye contact with the audience while speaking without notes. An unstated purpose is to get through the initial bout of stage fright by doing a relatively simple, unassessed task. Surprisingly, students sometimes find the task enjoyable, and classmates are often interested in hearing about the experiences of their peers.

In order to further develop their presentation skills, students do another unassessed task, with a partner, midway through the semester. The theme of these team presentations varies depending on the particular course; however, students always select the topic of the presentation with their partner. For this task, students research their topic and prepare a short speech, make PowerPoint slides, and practice the presentation with their partner prior to giving the presentation in class. It is important that both team members participate in writing the speech and making PowerPoint slides in order to gain proficiency in the requisite skills. By going through all of the steps involved in the process of making a presentation and having the experience of giving a PowerPoint presentation in front of their peers, students gain confidence in their speaking ability prior to doing the assessed task. Through the use of scaffolding and skill building tasks such as these, which serve to clarify both the requirements of an assignment and the length of time necessary to complete the steps involved, students are better prepared to complete assignments in a timely manner fashion and are, thus, less likely to resort to plagiarism.

### **Further Recommendations**

#### *Provide additional support*

Plagiarism is a complex issue, and this complexity is compounded when students are reluctant to ask for assistance. A relevant finding from a study involving first-year university students who completed an Academic Honesty Questionnaire containing 21 items, the majority of which pertained to some

form of plagiarism, was that students seldom mentioned consulting a faculty member if they were in doubt about whether a particular behavior was acceptable (Higbee, Schultz & Stanford 2011). As professional educators, it is crucial that we find ways to facilitate students' requests for assistance by providing individualized feedback and instruction and by creating cooperative learning environments where students can feel confident requesting assistance from peers and the instructor.

The new IE Plagiarism Policy Statement and the new program-wide plagiarism reporting system will serve to reduce the incidence of plagiarism in the IE Program. However, further measures are necessary. One way to provide additional support for students is through the use of plagiarism policy statements and relevant course materials that are level appropriate to aid comprehension and to facilitate the process of reintroducing the concept of plagiarism each semester in a manner that will serve to increase a student's knowledge base incrementally in order to meet higher level challenges at each stage of the IE Program. Resources such as *Authenticity: A Guide for Teachers* (Plagiarismadvice.org), *Preventing Plagiarism* (Purdue University Online Writing Lab), *An Assessment for Intervention: Plagiarism* (Plagiarismadvice.org), and *Avoiding Plagiarism* (Purdue University Online Writing Lab) offer relevant information and course materials that could be used effectively at various levels within the program.

#### *Shield students from peer pressure*

Plagiarism not only affects the students who plagiarize; some forms of plagiarism involve pressuring peers to "borrow" their work. Some students' comments on the survey referred to students who compel other students to show their work or assignments and friends who ask to copy homework, writing and reports. It has been suggested that the IE Plagiarism Policy specify that students who allow their work to be copied by peers could also be penalized. (This is not stipulated in the current IE Plagiarism Policy Statement.) Although this stipulation may seem unfair to some, the risk of

being penalized could strengthen the ability of conscientious students to resist peer pressure.

Teachers have an important role to play in this regard, as well. In their article entitled, "Student Perspectives on Behaviors that Constitute Cheating," Higbee et al (2011) assert, "Faculty members who ignore incidents of cheating are devaluing the work of students who are honest in demonstrating their acquisition of knowledge. Cheating hurts everyone." Ultimately, efforts by IE teachers to educate students about plagiarism and to consistently report incidents of plagiarism within the Program will provide the strongest deterrence to such peer pressure.

### *Academic Integrity*

Addressing student plagiarism will benefit all of the students in the IE Program. "Educating students about academic honesty is a critical function in higher education and in preparing students to be honest, trustworthy citizens," (Higbee et al 2011). Moreover, reducing plagiarism and requiring students to do their own work will serve to maintain the caliber and safeguard the reputation of the IE Program as a whole. This, in turn, will be a considerable advantage to students when they begin the job-hunting process.

In her article entitled, "Challenges in Addressing Plagiarism in Education," Tracey Bretag (2013) concludes that a "multi-stakeholder approach" is necessary to ensure academic integrity.

Recent research has demonstrated that plagiarism is a complex issue, with many stakeholder groups requiring much more induction, information, training, and support to ensure that they have the necessary understanding and skills to fulfil their academic responsibilities. Educational institutions therefore need to recognize that addressing plagiarism requires a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach which aims to foster a scholarly community based on shared understandings and practices of academic integrity.

Despite current challenges facing those within the field of higher education, it is crucial that academic institutions and professional educators remain vigilant in maintaining the caliber of academic excellence and integrity that will ultimately ensure their continued success and survival.

### Conclusion

In addressing plagiarism within the IE Program, a balanced approach, involving implementation of the IE Plagiarism Policy and use of the program-wide plagiarism reporting system, while simultaneously promoting an increased awareness of plagiarism and providing additional support for students, will prove most effective. In order to reduce plagiarism within the IE Program, it is crucial that students be able to recognize its various forms and gain proficiency in the skills necessary to avoid it, which can best be accomplished by addressing the issue early and in greater depth and detail at every level of the program. The incidence of plagiarism can also be reduced by addressing time management issues and by clarifying the nature and requirements of tasks and assignments. The use of scaffolding through additional skill-building tasks along with individualized feedback and instruction will serve to ensure that students have a clear understanding of assignments and are better prepared to complete them without resorting to plagiarism. Ultimately, with the cooperation and collaboration of teachers and administrators, efforts to reduce plagiarism will benefit all IE students and will serve to maintain the academic integrity of the IE Program. Finally, I wish to express appreciation to the IE students who completed the survey, to IE teachers for their contributions, and to the Coordinators of the IE Program for their cooperation and collaboration.

### Appendix 1: Student Plagiarism Survey Questions

#### Background

1. In what year are you at AGU?

2. What does "plagiarism" mean to you? In other words, give your definition of "plagiarism."

**Experience with plagiarism and reasons for it**

1. Which of these have you (or your classmate) done?
  - Download a complete paper and submit as one's own
  - Cut and paste a paper together using online materials without appropriate citations of sources
  - Submit another student's work as one's own-with or without the other student's knowledge
  - Plagiarize just part of an essay or other written work
  - Use Cliff's Notes, Spark Notes, or similar resources to avoid reading a book
  - Other:
2. In what sort(s) of written work have you, or your classmates, plagiarized?
  - book reports
  - listening logs (IE Active Listening)
  - Academic Writing papers
  - journals
  - essays (IE Writing)
  - Other:
3. If YOU have plagiarized, why did you do it?
  - Felt that I needed to in order to get a good grade
  - Didn't think I would get caught
  - Because all (or many) of the other students were doing it
  - Not interested in the subject or assignment
  - Did not have enough time to complete the assignment without plagiarizing
  - Did not understand how to do all, or part of, an assignment



I have not plagiarized

4. What is your impression of the frequency of plagiarism among students in the English Dept. of AGU?

#### **Plagiarism policy and other possible program-wide options**

1. Do you think that a plagiarism policy is necessary? Describe the policy guidelines that you would recommend.
2. What else can be done in the IE Program to reduce plagiarism?
3. What do you think is a fair or reasonable punishment for plagiarism?

#### **Appendix 2: IE Plagiarism Policy Statement**

##### **What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or words without properly acknowledging the source. Generally, work done for your courses – essays, examinations, oral presentations, homework assignments, journal entries – is expected to be your independent effort. If you use information from other sources (such as books, academic journals, podcasts, or Web pages, etc.), it is necessary to cite these sources properly. In the IE Program, your teachers will teach you how to do this, but it is your responsibility to carefully follow their instructions.

##### **When is it necessary to cite sources?**

In some cases, for example, in journal writing or when expressing personal opinions, your writing may be based on your own experiences and make use of your personal background and/or common knowledge. In such cases, it is not necessary to cite sources because YOU are the source of the information or opinions. However, most academic writing requires the use of material from other sources, including dictionaries, encyclopedias, books, magazines, video streaming sites, etc. When you use information from such sources, it is necessary to clearly show what information came from which source.

Submitting an assignment with even one part that has been copied from another source is a violation of the rules involving plagiarism unless you follow the guidelines for quotations and cite the source properly. You may quote directly from a source with proper citation, but it is usually better to paraphrase or summarize information in your own words. Even when you paraphrase, summarize, or translate information (e.g. from a Japanese book or Web page), it is still necessary to cite the original source. If you see the statement, "Free use is allowed," on a Web page, be careful! Use of material from any Web page without citing the source is considered plagiarism.

### **What is the IE Program Plagiarism Policy?**

Plagiarism of any assignment in any IE course – including Academic Writing and Academic Skills – will lead to failure on that assignment, without the option to rewrite. If a student plagiarizes on a second assignment, s/he will fail the entire course.

Teachers in the IE Program are very experienced at identifying plagiarism, and all cases must be reported to the IE Program Coordinators. A database of written work submitted in IE courses is being created to discourage the re-use of reports, essays, and other assignments that have been previously submitted by other students.

### **What are other consequences of plagiarism?**

Being caught plagiarizing can have a negative effect on a student's reputation. In some cases, there are legal and financial consequences. For example, an author may sue someone who plagiarizes his/her work.

### **Benefits of original, plagiarism-free work**

These are just some of the ways that you and your classmates can benefit from avoiding plagiarism:

- \* Your English skills will develop more rapidly.
- \* You will be able to express your own ideas and opinions.
- \* You will be able to communicate better with others.

- \* You can take pride in your accomplishments.
- \* Students will not feel pressured or bullied by classmates who want to copy their work.
- \* You will carry forward the reputation for excellence in English that AGU and the English Department have built up over many years, which will help you and your classmates in your job-hunting.

### Appendix 3: **Compiling a news discussion report**

The steps below, which outline a procedure for compiling a news discussion report, include skill building tasks that provide practice in summarizing, paraphrasing, recognizing plagiarism, and citing sources. (Links to online materials used are shown in parentheses.)

- In the first class, students read a sample news article and respond to discussion questions in small groups.
- Teacher describes news group discussion activity, students refer to sample news discussion report and news article in *Integrated English Core and IE Writing* (Strong, 2013)
- Students watch *IE Discussion DVD* and rate model discussions, using criteria listed in *Integrated English Core and IE Writing* (Strong, 2013), then compare ratings in small groups
- Students receive a model news discussion report (based on sample article discussed in first class,) with five new vocabulary words highlighted in the summary
- Teacher shows a copy of the article (with information used in the summary highlighted), and draws attention to the fact that the information is NOT copied
- Students are introduced to the techniques of summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>)
- Students bring their own article and highlight main points to include in the summary

- Students read a description of how to paraphrase (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/1/>)
- Students select new vocabulary from highlighted information
- Students use *Longman Online Dictionary of Contemporary English* (<http://www.ldoceonline.com>) to find part of speech and definition for each term
- Students practice paraphrasing short texts (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/2/>)
- Students prepare news summary and use new vocabulary in summary or title (New vocabulary is highlighted.)
- Students do peer check, compare article and summary, confirm no information is copied
- Students revise summary, as needed
- Teacher demonstrates and explains proper citation formats for print and online sources
- Students do activity to practice writing citations, using information for two print and two online news sources
- Teacher shows correct citations for practice activity, students check their work and make corrections, as needed
- Teacher collects practice activity and checks to confirm understanding
- Teacher returns practice activity and meets with individual students, as needed, to correct errors and confirm understanding
- Teacher demonstrates use of *Citation Machine* (<http://www.citationmachine.net>), using both print and online sources from practice activity
- Students practice using *Citation Machine* with sources from practice activity
- Students generate citation for own news article using *Citation Machine*
- Students complete news discussion report and submit it with copy of news article (Information used in summary is highlighted in article.)
- Teacher meets with students individually following their first turn as news discussion leader to provide feedback on news discussion report

- Students have the option to redo the first news discussion report
- Teacher meets with students individually, as needed, following the second turn as news discussion leader to follow up on any points that require further clarification

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