

How to discover plagiarism

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Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines plagiarism as follows:

To steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own, To use (another's production) without crediting the source, To commit literary theft and to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

Plagiarism is the use of others' published and unpublished ideas or words (or other intellectual property) without attribution or permission, and presenting them as new and original rather than derived from an existing source. The intent and effect of plagiarism is to mislead the reader as to the contributions of the plagiarizer. This applies whether the ideas or words are taken from abstracts, research grant applications, Institutional Review Board applications, or unpublished or published manuscripts in any publication format (print or electronic).

How to detect plagiarism

Taking into consideration that the best person intending to go for plagiarism is the writer him/herself, the preeminent mode is enquiring from the writer in the first place about his motives for plagiarism. Our experience frequently shows that a lot of writers do plagiarize merely to improve their writing quality, especially in non- English speaking countries. As Pan Aihua, after being accused of plagiarism, said, "Some Chinese scientists think that they can not compete equally in Western journals because of a problem with English, so they copy what others have done and then fill in what is new. They do not feel this is unethical as long as the scientific work is original". I realize this point to be applicable to other similar countries. In

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my observations some writers select a paper and base their article frame on it, stating that the core data is theirs and simply the use of superior English style to elevate the chance of acceptance of their papers besides improving the text quality. Most of them are not familiar with the scope of plagiarism and do it unintentionally. Thus it is believed that we should enquire from the writer first and the chance to detect plagiarism in this way is very high.

Strategies of detection of Plagiarism

However, how about cases that intentionally do plagiarize and consciously repeat it as auto-plagiarism or hetero-plagiarism over and over again? There are some strategies being considered in this regard which are helpful in detection. These include:

- Sudden changes in audience, tone, vocabulary, sentence structure, level of sophistication, degree of depth or understanding of topic;
- Writing that seems far more sophisticated than that you normally see or expect in writers of the same level; when you look at the Introduction it seems that it is written by Shakespeare himself but when you reach the Result or Discussion you'll be depressed and wonder if it is written by a child. As a matter of fact the Discussion section is the best portion of the article to enquire of probable plagiarism because the writer has to interpret her/him findings and compare them with others data. So the writer inevitably must use of his/her style of writing there.
- Font of paper suddenly changes (suggests copy/pasting);
- Inconsistencies in citation format or usage;
- Complete lack of citations, especially for complex material/ideas;
- Last minute change of paper topic or research focus;
- Anomalies of style. Is the prose style remarkable? Are there two-page paragraphs that remind you of a nineteenth-century encyclopedia? Is there ornate rhetorical structure? Does the introduction get in its own way and stumble around, only to give way to glowing, flowing discourse? Is there a mixture of British and American punctuation or spelling, with consistent usage within large sections?
- "Blunders of the clueless," since it includes obvious indicators of copying. Reported in the past have been labels left at the end of papers ("Thank you for using this web site").

- Unusual formatting. Strange margins, skewed tables, lines broken in half, mixed subhead styles and other formatting anomalies may indicate a hasty copy and paste job.

Use a plagiarism detector via Internet

- Because most of the web sites embrace different data in their sites, even with no permission of the owner, it is possible to detect the source of plagiarism in just one click. But it must be considered that no search engine independently covers more than one third of visible Web, so try more than one search engine to be sure of the output. Fortunately nearly all biomedical Journals are covered by free visible Web and a small portion including magazines, newspapers, reference works, and encyclopedias, are categorized as invisible free Web.

Some of these search engines are as follows:

- * <http://www.plagiarism.org>

Online service that checks submitted student papers against a large database and provides reports of results. This website, as stated by the owners is capable to discover the cases of plagiarism even if up to 50% of the sentences are altered. The mechanism by which this service is presented is using some curves and determining the situation of the examined paper above or below the plagiarism threshold. Also monitors term paper mills.

- * <http://www.m4-software.com>
- * <http://www.canexus.com/eve/>

Inexpensive software agent that searches the Web to compare a suspect paper with Internet content.

- * <http://invention.swmed.edu/etblast/index.shtml> (eTBlast)

The last website is especially designed to help the reviewers in detecting the plagiarism and is free of charge at the moment. This website according the sponsors searches in PubMed databases and presents Medline abstracts. To start the enquiring some sections of the article or whole of it, provided that has been changed to text format, is inserted into special box and clicking the specific bottom it starts to search and after about two minutes presents all related Medline abstract, i.e., something similar to “Related paper” in PubMed. Of course, it gives also a kind of Zscore form top to below and the higher the Zscore the higher the probability of plagiarism. But the reviewers must be careful in interpreting the results because

this program merely demonstrates the similar words and highlights them, so even when it declares that more than 80% of the submitted text is similar to another text, it does not imply that this is a case of plagiarism. Moreover this site is just searching in PubMed database, so if the source of plagiarism is somewhere except PubMed another method must be examined. Obviously, PubMed just covers about 5000 Journals and not all of them. As stated earlier some other website and specially Googlscholar. Com is very efficient in this regard.

- * turnitin.com

This is a commercial database, which according to its owner is especially useful for academic cheatings. Recognized worldwide as the standard in online plagiarism prevention, Turnitin helps educators and students take full advantage of the internet's educational potential.

Other Search Sites

Some search sites, which can assiste in this regard, are as follows:

- * www.google.com
- * www.dogpile.com
- * www.yahoo.com
- * www.altavisa.com
- * www.webcrawler.com
- * www.excite.com
- * <http://www.northernlight.com/>
- * <http://www.fastsearch.com/>

Paid databases over the Web

Even some commercial database sell ready papers in many aspects and have a look at them now and then lends a hand to the reviewer and Editor to boost the chance of finding plagiarism. Some of such URLs are listed here:

- * www.collegetermpapers.com
- * www.termpapers-on-file.com
- * www.papersinn.com
- * www.acceptedpapers.com
- * www.term-paper.net

- * www.termpapersites.com
- * www.papersbank.com
- * www.007termpapers.com
- * www.instantpapers.com
- * <http://www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm>

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4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
5. <http://www.turnitin.com/static/plagiarism.html>
6. <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/>
7. <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>