



Plagiarism Detection Tips

Suspecting Plagiarism

Changes of vocabulary or style – if the vocabulary or writing style changes significantly within the paper, this can indicate possible cut-and-paste plagiarism. Pay particular attention to the style in the introduction and conclusion as they are likely written by the author him/herself.

Incoherent text – if the flow of a text is not consistent or smooth, this could indicate that part of the text is not the author's own work.

Amount of similarity between texts – there may be a certain amount of similarity between texts written about the same topic, but it is unlikely that independently written texts would share large amounts of the same or similar text.

Order of similarity between texts – if the order of matching words or phrases between two texts is the same in both texts, this may indicate plagiarism.

Dependence on certain words and phrases – an author may prefer using particular words or phrases. Consistent use of these words and phrases in a text written by someone else with different word preferences may indicate plagiarism.

Outdated text or sources – if paper contains statements which are no longer true or if all the sources cited are several years old, plagiarism may be indicated.

Mistakes – an obvious clue. It is very unlikely that independently written texts would have the same spelling or grammatical mistakes.

Text Size & Font – another obvious clue. If sections of the paper appear in a different font or size, cut-and-paste plagiarism is likely.

Citation style – if more than one citation style is used in the paper, this may indicate a cut-and-paste plagiarism.

Dangling references – if references appear in the text but not in the footnotes or bibliography, this may indicate a cut-and-paste plagiarism.

Confirming Plagiarism

Electronic tools – There are a number of plagiarism detection products available, but, unfortunately, they do not thoroughly check legal sources. However, they can offer a quick first check. SafeAssign is available to faculty through the LexisNexis Web Course product. Papers must be submitted electronically.

Manual database/web search – One way to confirm that a paper has been plagiarized is to search for suspect words or phrases in a database or search engine. Enclose phrases in quotation marks.

Metadata – Check the document properties. This will reveal the name of the person who created the document as he entered it when he registered MS Word or WordPerfect.

Derived from:

Paul Clough,
Plagiarism in Natural and Programming Languages: An Overview of Current Tools and Technologies,
<http://tinyurl.com/ddw7j2>

Delta State University,
Plagiarism Detection & Prevention: A Guide for Faculty, <http://www.deltastate.edu/pages/1270.asp>

See also:

UW Madison Libraries,
Plagiarism & Student Cheating, <http://www.library.wisc.edu/inst-services/plagiarism/>

QUESTIONS?

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