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**Outdated text or sources** – if paper contains statements which are no longer true or if all the sources cited are several years old, plagiarism may be indicated.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:**
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**See also:**
UW Madison Libraries,
*Plagiarism & Student Cheating*, http://www.library.wisc.edu/inst-services/plagiarism/

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