

Deterring plagiarism through assessment task design

Source: Jude Carroll (nd) Resource handout. Oxford Brookes University, UK.
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This is a list of many possible actions which can help. The challenge is to select one or two which are most appropriate to a particular context or situation. Often, combining actions from different sections proves most effective.

Key principles for redesigning or reorganising assessment tasks:

- Encouraging students to make answers rather than find one that already exists.
- Making sure the instructions and expectations are clear.
- Tracking/valuing the student's process in producing the assessment artifact rather than putting all the focus on the final product.
- Linking elements so cheating on one aspect means losing out on the next
- Influencing students' decisions about the risks of faking or cheating. For example, planning in authentication exercises which check 'who did this assignment'.

Less 'go find an answer' and more 'go make your own answer'

1. Change the assessment task(s) each time you teach the course. You could change the topic, change the focus, the discourse style, the intended audience etc...
2. Set tasks that refer to local or recent events, ideas, people etc
3. Add specific requirements to the assessment brief: *"use book x", "use primary data gathered from interviews", "incorporate these lecture notes/case study facts"*
4. Never use coursework to check on students' knowledge and understanding. Use a monitored exam instead.
5. Avoid 'show you know' questions (*What are the functions of the United Nations?*); go for questions that require analysis, comparison, evaluation, or reflection on practice. Consider asking about things that did **not** happen.
6. Ask for formats other than essays or reports e.g. posters, dialogues, patient information leaflets, letters, a radio play

Less use of fellow students' work

1. Ensure group tasks are assessed in ways that recognise individual effort
2. Seek individualized answers e.g. application of a common theory to different situations (*"urban design in Headington", "personality theories applied to my own", "Death in Byron's poems and Six Feet Under", "consider x legal aspect in case y"*)

3. Personalize/ individualise the task e.g. providing data unique to the student, agreeing individually negotiated tasks or use random task-creation techniques like drawing items out of a hat.
4. Link assessed tasks that produce largely similar answers (“solve these problems”) with an authentication process such as a viva or exam. (e.g. asking students to make a change to a computer programme in an observed lab situation)
5. Consider using coursework for formative assessment and examinations / vivas for summative assessment.

Less opportunities for fraud, wholesale downloads and ghost-writing

1. Don't allow last minute changes of topic
2. Tell students to keep drafts, significant articles and ask to see a random sample.
3. Record and date the writing process by visual inspection of evidence (plans, drafts, notes etc)
4. Where relevant, provide effective supervision.
5. Make the penalties for using these services clear. Penalties should be severe enough to reflect the fraudulent nature of this type of cheating.

Designing in deterrence

1. Link different assessments in the same course so cheating on one means doing less well on the next. For example, refer to the coursework in the exam and ask them to apply it, evaluate it etc. Use the coursework for learning the skills that will be tested in the exam or a requirement for summative assessment
2. Track and record the process rather than only judging the final product
3. Assess the process as well as the product

Using assessment processes to deter plagiarism

1. Provide explicit instructions: Specifically forbid duplication (i.e. handing the same work in twice). Tell students exactly where they can seek help. Explicitly instruct them in how to cite and use sources. Tell them exactly where they will cross the line between collaboration and collusion.
2. Ask for a signed statement of originality
3. Ensure the assessment criteria value attribution and wide research. Create criteria where they gain benefit from doing things correctly.
4. Ask for key references to be submitted with the final product.
5. Require drafts to be submitted with the final product

Authentication activities [to check who actually did the work]

1. Organise random or partial vivas for a percentage of the cohort.
2. Observe students doing assessment tasks, at least some of the time.
3. Use in-class tests and/or supervised tasks to monitor skill levels.
4. Set open-book tests and / or exams which test things other than memory.
5. Use meta-activities after submission such as an evaluation of the piece of work, one page summary of its finding, justification of the key resource etc