All lecturers have surely experienced something like this: taking the next essay from the slowly diminishing pile, you start to read the half-hearted introduction and get a feel for the lacklustre quality. Then, suddenly, the style changes and there is a sentence, a paragraph, or even a couple of pages of careful analysis and precise English. You know in your gut, that it is not the student's own work.

The instantly searchable global library that is the Internet is a boon to academics worldwide; but it is also an irresistible attraction to all the students who, hard-pressed for time, or simply unconcerned, succumb to the deceptive easiness of 'copy-and-paste'. When I was an undergraduate, the idea of copying out large chunks of text never really occurred to me, and even if it had, it would have seemed like too much hard work. Nowadays, nothing is simpler than a quick Google search and subsequent copy-and-paste. Plagiarism has morphed into 'cyberplagiarism'.

Victimless crime?

A 2006 study of American high school students by the Josephson Institute of Ethics confirms what most educators know: 33% had copied an internet document in the previous 12 months, and 18% had done it twice or more. The Internet increases opportunities, and may make plagiarism more acceptable: McCabe argues that students often act as if Internet content "is public domain, and they [don't see] copying it as cheating." It's not only students who plagiarise, but also educational staff. In an incident recounted by Manzo, the chairman of a school admitted to plagiarising most of his commencement speech, "saying he had lifted the material from the Internet because it was not attributed to anyone."

This raises an interesting question related to electronic crime: the fact that the victim is usually invisible, and in any case disembodied, may make it easier for someone to commit crime or socially deviant acts online. For students, used to widespread internet practices of copying material, sharing music and videos, and 'mashing' – for example creating a music video by mixing together various copyrighted material – being told to keep track and reference everything they use from the internet is counterintuitive.

Cultural causes

However, laying the blame for increased plagiarism on the Internet does not give us the full picture. Studies of technology advise us to avoid 'techno-determinism' – i.e. seeing technology as the root cause of social change. The way technology is used today is rooted in cultural practices – it is a symbiotic process that some anthropologists call 'socio-technology'.

In Malaysia, early schooling emphasises rote learning, and by the time students arrive in university many are trained to seek and reproduce model answers, rather than develop their own – cyberplagiarism corresponds well to this approach. It is tempting to argue that this relates to an Asian cultural tradition that traditionally emphasised the virtues of skilfully copying the work of masters, whereas in Europe the individuality of the

Hopkins, J., 2007. Cyberplagiarism - technology in education. Prospect Malaysia, (4), 24-26.

artist's production was the most valued aspect. But we have seen that in America –where individualism is central to their culture – cyberplagiarism is also rife. Perhaps some factors go beyond national cultures? For example, large class size, brought on by economic pressures, also encourages rote learning.

Mangan reports that cheating is higher in both undergraduate and postgraduate American business courses – perhaps 'outsourcing' is the obvious choice for such students. Kopp's "consumer model of education" highlights an administrative need to quantify student progress and meet market demands often promotes conformity in student work. The market-driven approach to education also promotes an instrumental approach to education whereby it is seen to a means to an end (i.e. a degree and a job), meaning there is less motivation for students to adopt the traditional academic values of knowledge for its own sake. On a wider level, in Malaysia, one only has to look at the business section in any newspaper to see the tell-tale signs of copy-and-paste being applied to company press releases.

Proving plagiarism

Dealing with cyberplagiarism in an educational institution requires an understanding of the technical aspects, and how to detect them, as well as addressing the underlying social practices that support it. Spotting plagiarism is often the easiest part; usually it is obvious at a glance. Barring the odd clueless student who forgets to remove hyperlinks, or header information identifying the source website, the more time-consuming problem is – how to prove it?

Do a quick search on the internet and you will find a multitude of articles discussing this: mostly recommending the use of commercial software such as Turnitin, and warning about students paying for essays from online 'paper mills'. From my experience teaching in a private college in Kuala Lumpur, this kind of advice was often unsuitable. First, the software was not available, and making it available requires assigning budgets and adapting submission procedures (i.e. students need to hand in their work in soft copy). And second, Malaysian students usually cannot afford to pay the fees for online papers (e.g.

HistoryPapers.net has price per page ranging from US$ 9.95 to 19.95 for customised essays).

There is also the self-help option: frequently, it is surprisingly easy to confirm plagiarism, and the solution is the very same tool the student probably used to get the material in the first place – Google. Most plagiarisers have done little more than put a few search terms into Google, found something relevant (often in Wikipedia), and then pasted that into their work. Because of this, the easiest way to detect plagiarism is to lift a suspicious sentence from the essay – ideally one with some relatively unusual words in it – and Google it.

This is my technique: first, put quotation marks around the phrase – this means that the search will only return that exact phrase and thus you may arrive directly at the source. However, because a few words might have been changed, this may not work: if that's the case, remove the quotes and see what you get – look for the bolded words in the search results. If you still don't get anything, try another phrase. In my experience, 90% of the time, this method will reveal the source of the work.

Software solutions

Other sources of plagiarised work can come from a journal database, or from an actual hardcopy book. For the former, try searching for phrases within the database (check how to enter the string – using quotation marks is peculiar to Google); the latter is rare, and is very difficult to prove unless you are familiar with the book in question, such as a recommended text for the class. In the latter case, I found

Some useful websites

The Center for Academic Integrity:
www.academicintegrity.org/

Turnitin:
www.turnitin.com

PlanetPapers:
www.planetpapers.com

Plagiarism examples:
wrt-howard.syr.edu/Bibs/PlagIncidence.htm

that sometimes the student had found lecture notes or other discussion of the book online, and had used that material.

Once I locate the source, I copy the relevant text and highlight the relevant sections; this is attached to the essay with a short cover letter explaining to the student that s/he was getting a zero for plagiarism and a copy was going to their student file, and one to the HoD. Being consistently strict on this matter meant that I was able to reduce plagiarised essays from about 15-20% to less than 5% over four years.

Turnitin claim that their software reduces plagiarism by up to 99% - which I suspect is mainly because students believe they will be caught: this deterrent effect is crucial, all lecturers need to be consistent, and records of plagiarism centralised. Bad habits accumulate through students' experiences: particularly at the secondary school level, and unfortunately often at the tertiary level too. All students have had the experience of submitting, or seeing someone else submit, unreferenced material that is accepted by the instructor.

It's not always deliberate

Apart from deterrence, one also needs to understand the causes: apart from those discussed above, the bulk of these are poor paraphrasing and poor research technique, time pressures, ignorance of rules, peer influence, and a lack of confidence in their own ability. To avoid students succumbing to deadline pressures, requiring them to submit drafts is one way of forcing them to prepare more in advance, and also makes it more difficult to submit work produced by someone else.

One practice that can lead to cyberplagiarism is when students surf the net and copy chunks of text for later use – particularly if, due to financial or practical reasons, they have limited access to the Internet. Later, offline, they piece together their work by paraphrasing and summarising what they have gathered. In the poorest form, paraphrasing can be a process of going through the paragraphs, and changing random words – sometimes using the thesaurus that comes with Microsoft Word, which results in strange sentences such as "the respondent would not perpetrate to an opinion" (where 'commit' has been replaced). In other cases, students may do a better job summarising the material, but overlook a small section that has been pasted, or forget to insert quotation marks and citations.

Ethics in education

Problem-based workshops that provide practical exercises covering summaries and citations address students' confidence and competence. These can also introduce time management and research techniques. The ethical dimensions also need to be explored: a short debate or role-play on the consequences of plagiarism is one memorable way of doing this. The points that should be raised are not only that one may fail a course, disappoint one's parents, or that is it dishonest to 'steal' another person's work. It should also be emphasised that plagiarism defeats the purpose of education, that the process of summarising and citing enables one to understand the material and place one's own arguments in context – in other words, it means that that information will be useful to them later on. For Muslim students, drawing a parallel with the *isnad* ('chain of transmission') in the *hadith* is a good way of providing an ethical foundation to citations.
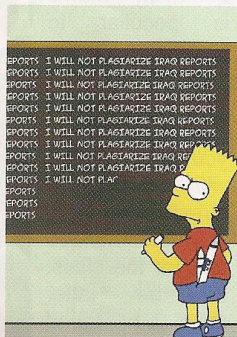
Finally, the workshop could finish with students signing a pledge not to plagiarise, this has been shown by McCabe to be reasonably effective in disseminating a non-plagiarising ethic amongst students and provides support against negative peer influence. It also means that students cannot claim ignorance if they are caught later.

Cyberplagiarism is here to stay, and as educators we need to adapt to the changing techno-social environment. We cannot depend on technical solutions alone. For example, Custom Writing guarantees that their customised paper will not be detected by anti-plagiarism software. For students of the 21st century, gathering information no longer needs to be the focus of their training, but instead enabling them to manage and analyse the surfeit of information 'out there' should become the central role of the educator.

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Note: Sources were supplied but were omitted by editorial convention.

Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism

There are no excuses for Plagiarism. Plagiarism is not worth the risk of a failing grade, a permanent record on your transcript, or suspension. So how can you avoid it?

Consider the following tips:
Time Management
Plagiarism can be mighty tempting as the clock strikes twelve the night before your essay is due. Resist the temptation! Give yourself plenty of time to plan, research, write and revise your essay.

Good Writing Techniques
Learn how to narrow your topic, write a thesis statement and develop an outline for your essay. Don't just cut and paste. Be original! Remember, professors are knowledgeable of the literature in their fields and will recognise work that has been copied. They have also been teaching and reading student essays for some time and will recognise recycled essays.

Learn How to Summarise
Learn how to paraphrase and quote properly. To paraphrase means: "To express the meaning of (a word, phrase, passage, or work) in other words, usually with the object of fuller and clearer exposition."

Accurate Note Taking and Citation of Sources
Make clear notes on exactly what you read, exactly where you read it, and where and how you used it in your essay. Whether you're quoting, paraphrasing or summarising and no matter how often throughout your essay, you must identify the source in all instances.

Record all Bibliographic Information
This includes the following: Author or editor; Title of work – book title, chapter title, article title, website, etc; Source of work – book title, journal title, website, etc; Year of publication; Page, volume, issue, edition number; Publisher and place of publication; Website address, last update, and the date you accessed the website. And use proper citation styles.

If in doubt…Cite…Cite…Cite! Better safe than sorry.

Courtesy of Trent University, California