

Plagiarism ruins careers

The Craft of Writing · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

Plagiarism . . . how it ruins careers

Although I am writing very firmly in this article, I'm really trying to help students who might not quite fully understand how ruinous it can be to fall into plagiarism.

Very occasionally I find a student has not written his or her article, but merely lifted it off the internet.

I detect this with special software.

This is plagiarism.

Some students are unaware of the term plagiarism, or the immorality of plagiarism. Plagiarism is taking another writer's words, and pretending they are your words.

In journalism (and in university life and in book publishing), there is no more serious sin than plagiarism.

You simply may NOT use another writer's words and pretend they are your own words, because that's stealing. Journalists automatically lose their jobs for plagiarism. Imagine if you'd sent a plagiarised article to an editor and he caught you for plagiarism. You'd have been black-listed for life. So I'm being kind to my students in pointing out the facts of plagiarism.

The Macquarie Dictionary says: plagiarism: the appropriation or imitation of another's ideas and manner of expressing them, as in art, literature, etc, to be passed off as one's own.

Plagiarism is a big problem in universities where students, feeling pressured to get something written or fail, yield to the temptation and ditch any research or real writing, and simply copy someone else's work.

Curtin University's official Definition of Plagiarism includes these words: Honesty is crucial to a student journalist's credibility and self esteem. It is legitimate and appropriate to synthesise the work of others, provided that such work is clearly and accurately referenced. Plagiarism occurs when the work of another person, or persons, is used and presented as one's own, unless the source of each quotation or piece of borrowed material is acknowledged with an appropriate citation. Penalties for plagiarism include expulsion from all colleges and universities, or sacking from employment.

In all my time here at, I've detected only two cases of plagiarism by my students.

We can trap such students easily. I have access to a plagiarism prevention system that lets me quickly check students' work in a fraction of a second.

Every article submitted is returned in the form of a customised originality report. Results are based on exhaustive searches of many billions of pages from both current and archived instances of the internet and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals.

So please - don't do it. You WILL get caught.

Simon Townsend

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