

## **COURSEWORK WHICH DISCOURAGES COPYING, COLLUSION OR CUT-AND-PASTE**

These suggestions focus on ways to encourage students to make their own answers or do their own work. It also suggests way to discourage them from seeking ways to find, fake or simulate doing their own work.

**SUGGESTION ONE: Do not set coursework that requires skills which the students have not been taught to use.**

**An example:** asking students at the start of their course to *'Write a critical review of two research papers'*.

**A modification:** ask students to complete a template which structures the evaluation of research articles under specific instructions (*'What is the key finding? ... List two facts or points that support the main point'* etc). However, be careful not to just create another problem – that of students copying each other. This might happen because you have created a task with only one answer. See suggestions below for addressing this point.

**SUGGESTION TWO: Do not make the questions too hard.**

This is not the same as saying 'Make the questions easy'! For example, if the course is about urban design and the task is :

*'Redesign the ways to enter and leave [major junction in capital city] to allow twice the number of cars and people per day to move into and out of the area at four times the current speed'*

.... would students see this question as a challenge or a threat to getting a good grade? Would they start looking for someone else's answer? Instead, you could:

- 2.1 make the examination task smaller (*'List the four most important aspects to consider if you were intending to increase travel etc.....Justify your choice with reference to ...'*)
- 2.2 provide more guidance to students on how to do it, (*'Using the 1998 report on traffic flow in xxx junction, identify three ways in which the present traffic etc'*)
- 2.3 set the examination as a group task rather than an individual one so students can pool ideas and resources
- 2.4 ask students to provide an interim step as their answer instead of the finished report, product or item. (*'State three factors that any tender to redesign the traffic flow in xxx would have to include and justify your selection with reference to...etc....'*)

Note: see suggestions below about ensuring students do not copy from each other.

**SUGGESTION THREE: Find ways to deter students from procrastination**

Students who leave things to the last minute often feel they have no choice but to plagiarise. One teacher who uses this strategy says, *'It works because I make them work'*. To achieve this, you could: .

- 3.1 *Break the task down to several sub-tasks, each with a deadline. Then check the deadline has been met.*
- 3.2 *Ask students to present 'findings so far' orally in class*
- 3.3 *Ask for an outline to be brought to a specific class then sign and date the outline. Later, when the students hand in the final work, require the signed outline, too.*
- 3.4 *Observe some of the 'work in progress' during class time, perhaps by asking students to discuss it together*
- 3.5 *Set up an on-line discussion where students review and comment on each other's work. The software will show the dates when this happens. Note: students are not likely to do this unless it is designed into the course as a required learning activity.*

Teachers and students need to remember that 'ensuring activity is occurring' is not the same as assessing it. Formative assessment can be time-consuming and unrealistic, given teachers' workloads. However, verifying that work has started can help students develop their own time management skills – perhaps.

**SUGGESTION FOUR: Find ways to make the students' work public or shared.**

- 4.1 Include in the task brief the requirement for others with knowledge of the content to read and comment on the text. For example, ask a student on a placement to have the report read by the placement supervisor who then adds his or her own comments.
- 4.2 Ask all the students to post or 'publish' their results on a shared location such as a Virtual Learning Environment.
- 4.3 If the work was done jointly with other students, ask them to comment on the process of making the work.

**SUGGESTION FIVE: Do not set questions or problems that have an existing answer.**

Students say that as soon as they sense there is a pre-existing answer to the question, it can seem almost pointless to create one themselves. You increase the chances that your question starts them working if you:

- 5.1 Choose an 'action' verb for your assignment.

By asking students to *rank, plan, alter, or invent something*, you signal there is work to be done. The same is true for verbs such as *'categorise', produce, compare, select, rate and justify* - they are signals that the answer is unlikely to be something 'ready made'.

- 5.2** Avoid verbs designed to show the student's knowledge **in coursework**.

Words like *'describe', 'identify', 'list', 'recount', and 'draw upon'* just send students to Wikipedia or Google where they will find plenty of resources which almost do the work for them.

- 5.3 In observed, timed examinations, words like those in 5.2 encourage students to pre-memorise answers.

For example, in one course six students went through past examination papers and identified a pattern of questions and topics. They decided they needed answers to ten topics to have a chance of answering the required three from a choice of six. They jointly wrote ten answers and then memorised all ten. Their luck was in, the three predicted topics came up, and all passed.

The alternative is to set questions where students must think about the answers during the examination time, drawing upon their knowledge and learning in the course.

#### 5.4 Avoid common or 'popular' problems which are well-known in the discipline.

Questions about managing a diverse workforce, about information security, or even about seemingly specific topics such as the impact of smoking on public health are easy to 'Google'. Even if your question is less generic, students can easily find something close to the topic and quickly shape their answer to fit.

#### 5.4 Set new questions each time the course runs.

Students report no difficulty in finding answers if they suspect (or know) that the questions have not changed. This is true even if the previous work was not returned to students since most can describe easy ways to access others' assignments or to locate informal collections of past student work (and some collections are now located outside of particular universities and can be accessed worldwide).

### **SUGGESTION SIX: Avoid questions that make it very easy for students to copy from each other**

Copying between students is common if the assessment task/problem has one answer or a small number of ways in which the problem can be solved. Instead:

#### 6.1 Give students individualised data

The example in Suggestion 2 about recommending a template could encourage copying. Asking students to select their own research papers from a list of possible choices lessens the opportunities and asking them to choose their own, even more so. However, you have added another dimension to the task – selecting a possible article. This is the strategy suggested in 8.3 below.

#### 6.2 Ask students to use their personal experiences, experiments or activities to answer

#### 6.3

### **SUGGESTION SEVEN: Avoid questions that are generic or dated.**

The longer a question has 'been around' and/or the more general the question is, the more likely it is that students can find a great deal of material about it, perhaps using even the most rudimentary internet search. Generic questions such as 'what is Boyle's law?' are obviously just asking for a Wikipedia hit - but so are less obvious Google-targets such as 'What is the future for OPEC as a decision-influencing body?' or 'How would an Anthropologist analyse the European Song Contest?'

Suggestion:

- 8.1 Ask about local topics. For example, instead of a question about 'waste recycling', ask about waste recycling in Stockholm, in a Melbourne suburb. Or locally.
- 8.2 Ask about specific topics. For example, instead of 'Discuss Einstein's theory of relativity' ask 'Discuss Einstein's theory of relativity using as an example a child jumping on a pogo stick inside a speeding train' [Note: I heard this example from Papendopoulos, 2008]
- 8.3 Ask the student to refer to recent topics such as new legislation, current events or recently published material in the media or academic literature

**Example:**

Students at the beginning of their programme were asked to select a recent media story relevant to waste reduction or recycling. After a brief description of the article (i.e. saying what it was about), students were asked to discuss the article in the light of topics they had covered in class, supporting their own views with facts and references to the text book.

- 8.4 Ask students to apply generic theories to specific cases or data. These could include experiments the student carried out, projects they have done, or clients/patients they have worked with.
- 8.5 Ask students to include reference to specific texts, notes or class activities in their answers.