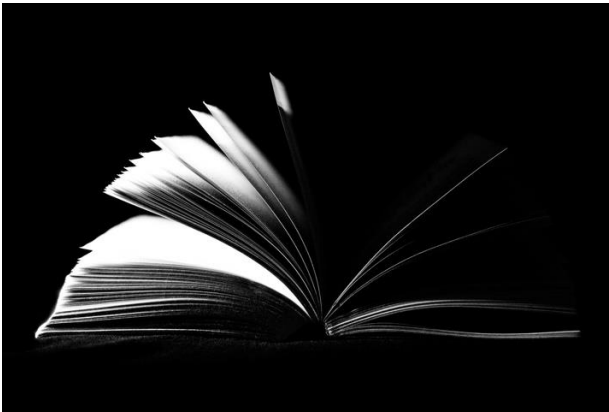


Creating a Higher Understanding and Awareness of Plagiarism

By Patrick T. Randolph



I. Introduction—The 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon

I call it *The 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon*. The situation is a familiar one on many university or college campuses. A student cannot quite understand the topic well enough to write an effective essay on it, and his limited vocabulary prevents him from paraphrasing the needed sources to support his points. The end result is that he panics and searches online for help. He cuts and pastes what he believes to be harmless passages. He feels his professor would never notice or question their origin. The student breathes a sigh of relief. His essay is done. He has plagiarized. But, the assignment is complete. He can sleep now, and, of course, he hopes no one other than his laptop and his own psyche are aware of this 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon of panic and plagiarism.

Plagiarism happens all too often—from students and professors to journalists and politicians. Plagiarism is unfortunately a common daily reality. Although English language teachers cannot do much about the plagiarism that extends beyond our own classrooms, we can educate our English language learners (ELLs) about what it is and how to avoid it, and most important, we can teach them about respecting and appreciating others' intellectual and creative property.

Moreover, I feel that these anti-plagiarism ideas may be especially significant in our current worldwide state of mandated online practices of teaching and learning due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. That is, because students may be doing all of their graded writing at home versus a mix of in-class and at-home writing, the potential of plagiarism-related issues has increased.

In this article, I offer useful ideas and activities that will help students steer clear of plagiarism. First, I will describe each of the activities I cover in the anti-plagiarism seminar that I hold at the beginning of each semester for my classes. I will, then, conclude by sharing some results from my seminar that illustrate how the activities have helped create a higher understanding and awareness of plagiarism and how to avoid it.

II. The Anti-Plagiarism Seminar

DAY 1: Rapport & The Basic Quiz



On the first day of our seminar (that usually takes place in the first or second week of the semester), I am very explicit about my role in the course. I explain that I am there for my students. My sole purpose is to inspire and guide their thinking, writing, and language development. I tell them that if it is 2:00 a.m., and they are facing a conundrum regarding their paper or presentation, to email me and request an extension versus panicking and succumbing to The 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon. The trust factor is of central importance, and this initial explanation of cooperation helps to build respect and rapport. Students are less likely to commit plagiarism if they find the instructor is firm but supportive, strict but caring.

Next, I ask the students to take a short, ungraded quiz where they define the following concepts: paraphrasing, patchwriting, plagiarism, and summarizing. Then, I have them paraphrase one to two sentences about a specific topic. After the students complete the quiz, we go over the definitions, making any needed corrections, and I select two or three students to write their paraphrased work on the whiteboard (Randolph, 2012). This group work gives us a chance to address both paraphrasing and the need to cite the source; the latter step is one which most students forget to do during the quiz. This, of course, is a red flag that shows the students are not used to doing it and thus need extra practice in using and working with sources and citations.

What I find most interesting, and what my readers might find intriguing as well, is that many students can define “paraphrasing,” but fail to actually paraphrase the passage correctly. In many cases, they either do a great deal of patchwriting (i.e., changing the order of words or phrases, replacing words with synonyms but leaving them in the same order as the original phrase or sentence, or changing verb tenses), or they plagiarize it by directly copying the text and using

multiple-word chunks. For instance, in one high advanced credit-level ESL writing course, 10 out of 12 students correctly defined the term, “paraphrasing,” but only one student correctly paraphrased the short passage. What is equally disconcerting is that all 12 correctly defined “plagiarism,” but four of the 12 actually plagiarized in their attempt at paraphrasing (Randolph, 2019).

Once we complete the quiz, I give the students a sentence from an article; for example: “Exercise, the latest neuroscience suggests, does more to bolster thinking than thinking does” (Reynolds, 2012, para. 1). I also offer, if applicable, where the research was conducted according to the article. On the same sheet of paper are three choices (a) good paraphrasing with an appropriate APA in-text citation; (b) patchwriting; and (c) plagiarism. I ask the students to match these up with three written examples of a, b, and c. Below is an example of the activity.

Please find an example of (a) good paraphrasing with an appropriate APA in-text citation; (b) patchwriting; and (c) plagiarism.

1. In a recent study on physical exercise, scientists found that exercise does more to bolster thinking than thinking does. The finding was well documented. _____
2. According to Reynolds (2012), a study at the University of Illinois found that physical activity does more to improve mental activity than thinking does. _____
3. Reynolds (2012), in her recent article, “How Exercise Could Lead to a Better Brain,” investigates a study done at the University of Illinois. The upshot was that physical activity is far more effective in enhancing our cognitive skills than any known form of mental training or testing. _____ (Randolph, 2019, slide 13)

I have the students pair up and identify the examples, and we confirm the answers as a class. The correct answers for this activity are: (c), (b), and (a). We also discuss why paraphrased versions are often longer than the original passages. In some cases, the paraphrased work may have to supply more background information for the reader. In addition, some paraphrased passages require a deeper and even better explanation than was given in the original text.

For homework, I give the students short quotes to paraphrase. We discuss these as a class in the following lesson. Below are four quotes that I have used for the seminar. My students seem to enjoy these as the quotes are related to their lives on a personal level.

Four Quotes for Paraphrasing

“We must make learning fun.” —Plato

“Always be yourself.” —James Stewart

“I think one day you’ll find that you’re the hero you’ve been looking for.” —James Stewart

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.” —Albert Schweitzer

DAY 2: Playing with Paraphrasing

I start **DAY 2** by reviewing the definitions of our key terms (i.e., paraphrasing, patchwriting, plagiarism, and summarizing) and by reviewing the identification activity. I, then, ask a few volunteers to write their paraphrased quotes from the homework on the whiteboard. I try to offer quotes that are relatively simple but are open to being paraphrased in a number of ways. For instance, the above quote by Albert Schweitzer is open to multiple versions: “Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.”

After the selected students write their paraphrased work on the board, we go over the following questions:

- (1) Has the student understood the quote?
- (2) Is he/she sufficiently comfortable with the idea/s to paraphrase it/them effectively?
- (3) Has the student kept the essence of the original quote? and
- (4) Has the student cited it correctly?

This activity and the follow-up discussion focus on the craft of accurate paraphrasing. We also compare different paraphrased interpretations to see how each individual’s perspective or background brings a slightly different point of view to the topic while simultaneously guarding the original essence of the passage. This is a discussion that my students say is very beneficial and rarely touched on in their other English language courses.

The homework for the following day is the all-important True or False Quiz that I ask the students to do on their own. This is an ungraded, 20-statement quiz they do as homework. The statements on the quiz are particularly significant as most of them are based off of questions that my ELLs have asked in the past about plagiarism, or they are the results of what some former students have done in my classes related to failed attempts at plagiarism. We, then, check this quiz together in the following session.

DAY 3: The True or False Quiz

I begin **DAY 3** by reviewing our key terms again. The purpose of this is to raise the students' awareness of the importance of these concepts and to add to the comfort and confidence level of actually knowing what they mean. I, then, have the students pair up and compare the answers of the True or False Quiz. Next, we check each statement and also discuss why it is true or false. This discussion is vital as it helps answer the students' questions, and it also generates more ideas to think about, which will ultimately help the students avoid The 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon. Some example statements are below:

- Patchwriting is a form of plagiarism. _____
- If you paraphrase something, you don't need to cite the source. _____
- All work (with the exception of universal facts) that is not yours or your own previously published work must be cited. _____

(For a look at the full quiz, please see the **YouTube** video of my presentation, "A Guaranteed, Humanistic, 4-Step Process to Prevent Plagiarism," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfvm9t5mwrU> from 24:35 to 32:27.)

As I mentioned above, what makes this quiz so effective is the number of follow-up questions it prompts from the students. The actual quiz contains 20 statements; however, the average class I have taught since using this quiz generates an additional 10 to 15 more insightful questions about plagiarism, citations, and intellectual property. For instance, the statement: "If you paraphrase something, you do not need to cite the source" elicits many questions. Often students feel that because it is now paraphrased, it is no longer necessary to cite the original author. Some feel the paraphrased version acts as a kind of citation, or some feel that because it is paraphrased, it is no longer the original author's idea but rather the student's because he or she has paraphrased it. So, a clarification on this point is necessary and leads to a discussion on the importance of respecting and protecting intellectual property; that is, they look closely at who "the owner" is of a specific idea, insight, or method, and they reflect on why it is important to acknowledge that.

Students are also curious about self-citing. Statement 13 on the quiz highlights the need to self-cite previously written work (i.e., "Copying something that you wrote and not citing it is

not plagiarism”). This statement raises the awareness and need to cite something that one has published or even perhaps written for another course.

The homework for **DAY 3** is paramount. I give each student a contract (see Appendix) and ask that they read it over carefully. I explain that we will discuss it in the next class, and this will consummate our semester-long binding contract of honesty and academic integrity.

DAY 4: The Academic Honesty & Anti-Plagiarism Contract

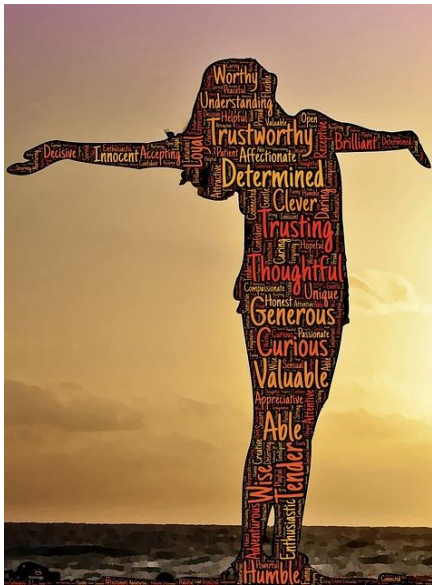


The pinnacle of this seminar is the discussion and signing of our *Academic Honesty & Anti-Plagiarism Contract*. First, I ask volunteers to read aloud each clause and ask if they are clear on the content and consequences of the contract. Essentially, the contract shows that they understand what cheating and plagiarism are, and they acknowledge that if they commit these academic crimes, they might suffer the consequences of failing the course. I, then, ask the students to sign the contracts and date them.

After class, I sign each contract and, if possible, have the department chair or program director sign them as well. Then, I make copies for the students and keep the originals. When I hand the contracts back to the students, I remind them what is at stake and ask that they look at these from time to time. I also ask that they review the True or False Quiz.

One valuable point I would like to touch on is the need to frequently revisit the concepts of paraphrasing, patchwriting, and plagiarism during the term. This can be done by implementing short lessons and activities on paraphrasing. One mistake I see or hear teachers make is the practice of “one and done.” That is, they introduce or explain the concept of plagiarism on the first day of the term or during the first day of working on an essay, but then they never touch on it again until a student has committed the act of plagiarism. In short, offering frequent reminders not to succumb to The 2:00 A.M. Phenomenon is a wise and beneficial practice to follow.

III. The Results of the Method



When I first developed and started using the activities during my anti-plagiarism seminar, I noticed how sincere the students were in trying to figure out and understand the US higher education codes of academic conduct. This explicit and detailed seminar seemed to show them that I cared and wanted them to be successful. It helped to build that feeling of rapport I discussed earlier.

The results of using the activities clearly illustrate that the seminar works for the students and helps them understand what is right and what is not regarding the use of working with sources in academic writing. Before implementing the activities and designating time for the seminar, I would have an average of three to four plagiarism cases per class. And, during some semesters, this would increase to five to six per class. However, after I implemented the seminar, the plagiarism cases dropped considerably. In fact, some classes now go the entire semester without one case of plagiarism.

To highlight the effectiveness of these seminars, let me focus on their results since the 2016 academic year. In the past four years, I have taught over 20 courses; they are both writing intensive classes and speech and debate courses. The ESL for credit classes require a heavy use of sources to support the students' arguments in their papers and their presentations. Since the spring of 2016, I have recorded only eight plagiarism cases. However, of these eight rather egregious cases, four of them happened before we were able to do the anti-plagiarism seminar. That is, due to the university's English department or the Intensive English Program's scheduling of a particular term, or due to the department or program's own curriculum guidelines, I had to give the anti-plagiarism seminar later than the first or second week of the semester. Those instances proved to be problematic for the students, as they did not get the needed information right away about sources, citations, paraphrasing, and plagiarism. So, in essence, I have had only

four genuine cases of plagiarism in four years. In short, the seminar does not completely rid the ELL classroom of plagiarism, but it has significantly helped.

Of course, in some cases, ELLs actually know about the US codes of academic conduct but pretend not to. Thus, an additional strength of the seminar is that it stops students from using ignorance of the law as a possible excuse for committing academic crimes. The contract encourages the ELLs to be fully aware of the consequences of cheating and plagiarism. That is why the frequent reminders to review the contract and the anti-plagiarism material are so essential.



IV. Concluding Remarks

Establishing a healthy teacher-student rapport, working through the anti-plagiarism activities, and reminding the students about the contract and its consequences will not necessarily guarantee that plagiarism will entirely disappear from the English language classroom. However, as the results have clearly shown, the seminar activities and contract have helped to significantly reduce the number of plagiarism cases in my classes. These relatively simple but highly effective ideas heighten our ELLs' awareness of the US codes of academic conduct, and they help to develop a strong sense of respect and appreciation for all writers and the actual writing process.

References

- Randolph, P. T. (2012). Boldly and gently ridding the class of plagiarism. *IEPIS Newsletter*.
- Randolph, P. T. (2019, September 14). *A guaranteed, humanistic, 4-step process to prevent plagiarism*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfvm9t5mwrU>
- Reynolds, G. (2012, April 18). How exercise could lead to a better brain. *The New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/magazine/how-exercise-could-lead-to-a-better-brain.html?_r=0

Appendix: The Contract

Academic Honesty & Anti-Plagiarism Contract

I, _____, hereby understand that both plagiarism and cheating are acts of academic dishonesty; moreover, they are considered “academic crimes” in the colleges and universities in the United States of America. I also understand that it is a crime at this school.

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that if I plagiarize or cheat on an assignment, I will receive a “0” for that particular assignment.

I, _____, understand that if I plagiarize while writing one of the essays in this class, I will receive a “0” for that work. This act, in and of itself, might also cause me to fail this class due to losing those specific points.

I, _____, also understand that if I plagiarize twice in this class, then I will automatically fail this course.

I, _____, acknowledge the above as understood and accept the consequences.

Signatures

| | |
|----------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| Student | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Lecturer | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Director | Date |

Patrick T. Randolph © 2018

Art sources: All images are from www.pixabay.com.

Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to patricktrandolph@gmail.com.

PATRICK T. RANDOLPH has received two “Best of TESOL Affiliates” awards for his presentations on his own contributions to vocabulary pedagogy (2015) and his seminar on preventing plagiarism (2018). He has also received two “Best of CoTESOL Awards” for his 2017 presentation on Observation Journals and his 2018 talk on Creative Writing. Recently, Randolph received the “Best Session Award” from MinneTESOL (2019-2020). He specializes in vocabulary acquisition, creative and academic writing, speech, and debate. Randolph has created a number of brain-based learning activities for the language skills that he teaches, and he continues to research current topics in neuroscience, especially studies related to exercise and learning, memory, and mirror neurons. Randolph has also been involved as a volunteer with brain-imaging experiments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He lives with his wife, Gamze; daughter, Aylene; and cat, Gable, in Lincoln, NE.

Check out Patrick’s new book with TESOL Press!

New Ways in Teaching with Creative Writing

New Ways in Teaching with Creative Writing, by editors Patrick T. Randolph and Joseph I. Ruppert, is the first book of its kind for the English Language Education Community. The focus of the book is to show how the techniques and genres used in creative writing can help ELLs enhance their academic and technical writing skills with control, comfort, and confidence.

New Ways in Teaching with Creative Writing is available on the TESOL Press website at

<https://sites.tesol.org/ItemDetail?iProductCode=14410&Category=NEWWAYS&WebsiteKey=62ea1393-07ea-402b-b723-0e66240ee86b>

and on Amazon at

https://www.amazon.com/New-Ways-Teaching-Creative-Writing/dp/1942799861/ref=sr_1_12?keywords=Patrick+T.+Randolph&qid=1585341759&s=books&sr=1-12



Copyright © 2020 Language Arts Press
www.LanguageArtsPress.com