

Methods of Avoiding Plagiarism

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In many parts of the world plagiarism and the issues surrounding plagiarism have long been addressed or at least attempted to be addressed at the university level. However, in Japan only in recent years has an awareness of the importance of avoiding plagiarism been raised. In this article I will explain while referring to current research on who possibly could be blamed for plagiarizing, why they plagiarize and what can be done to help students avoid plagiarizing.

Stereotypes are often formed about students in general, however, when it comes to plagiarism it is commonly assumed that Asian students in particular are more prone to plagiarize. Even at Ferris University discussions about having to keep in mind that our students, Japanese students, are more prone to plagiarize can quite often be overheard. As a result of these discussions, teachers are often encouraged by others, including teachers and non-Japanese teachers as well, to be more tolerant of plagiarism while teaching in Japan. Nevertheless, research has shown that all students plagiarize regardless of ethnicity and other possible variables (Martin and Rao, in press). This does not mean, however, that students do not have tendencies. Some students might be more prone to plagiarize due to differences in educational practices and models (Ha, 2006; Sowden, 2005; Liu, 2005) and altering perceptions due to these differences (Hayes and Introna, 2005). In other words, it may be more likely for students from Japan, for example, to plagiarize because of what they have learned at school in Japan and even though they may have the opportunity to study abroad, even then they may not completely grasp that they should avoid plagiarizing. (Yet it could be argued that regardless of possible tendencies, becoming more tolerant in and of itself of plagiarism is not going to solve any problem.) On the other hand, according to Martin and Rao (in press), a possible reason why foreign

exchange students may avoid plagiarizing more after studying abroad is that they may have acculturated more to the host culture. It has been found that students who are more immersed in the culture of the country where the concept of avoiding plagiarism has long been understood, become more aware of the necessity of avoiding plagiarism.

The question on most teachers mind is why do students plagiarize even when they have been explicitly told not to? According to Sutherland (2004) and Whitley (1998) students might plagiarize because they may: 1) not be confident of their writing skills, 2) lack sufficient time to execute assignments, 3) have a positive attitude towards cheating, 4) anticipate rewards from success and 5) be ignorant of how to properly cite others' work. International students specifically were found to plagiarize because they: 1) were alienated by the testing system, 2) lacked training and skills to form their own opinions and relied on or respected the authorities on the topic, 3) had mismatched skills from different educational systems (textbook-based approaches and recall-type exams), and 4) had issues with language, as well as family and financial pressures to do well in school (Hayes and Introna, 2005). One conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that teachers can do something for students to help them avoid plagiarizing. Even though it does seem like a loss cause at times. Martin and Rao (in press) have drawn attention to the following examples of methods that can be used to help students avoid plagiarizing: 1) defining plagiarism and clarifying the rules related to plagiarism, 2) providing feedback, 3) training for teachers and 4) training for students. In the next few sections these methods will be discussed in more detail in relation, where possible, to Ferris University.

At Ferris University, according to the Ferris English Program Guidelines for Using Other People's Work (accessible to all students and staff at Ferris through their e-mail accounts), plagiarism has been defined as "...using another person's work as your own. This includes using someone's words, ideas, research, photos, etc., without saying where you got the information." As for the rules at Ferris University

in regards to plagiarism, the guidelines below have been provided.

- I. If part of a student's work is plagiarized:
 - i. First time: A warning is issued and the student is required to re-do the assignment.
 - ii. Second time: The student fails the assignment.
- II. If the entire work, or a majority of it, is copied: The student fails the assignment
- III. If the plagiarized work is on the Final Report submitted through Kyoumuka: The university-wide policy is in effect. (The student will not pass the class. See the Student Handbook, 学生要覧, for the current policy.)

Although plagiarism has been defined and the rules regarding plagiarism have been clarified for all at Ferris University, plagiarism still occurs. The second possible method involves providing feedback to students on their plagiarized works. There have been two suggestions found to be made about how this can be done. First, teachers could provide originality reports from Turnitin, an online program used to detect plagiarism, which has been found to help students avoid plagiarism (Martin, 2005). Also, returning students' assignments with the areas that have been plagiarized highlighted has been found to help students as well (Moss & Sanchez, 2004).

Suggestions made for training teachers have been to: 1) raise awareness of stereotypes, 2) use tools to track plagiarism, such as, Turnitin, and 3) develop uniformed norms (Martin and Rao, in press). At Ferris University uniformed norms have been developed as mentioned above and these norms are known by teachers who attended the Methods for Avoiding Plagiarism workshop at the 2010 Ferris English Teachers' Faculty Development Workshop. Also, teachers who read this paper have been given an opportunity to raise their awareness of stereotypes. It is unknown whether teachers are familiar and/or if they use tools to track plagiarism. This is a possible avenue for teachers to pursue in the future.

The final method mentioned, training for students, is the main method that I would like to focus on in this article. One way to train students which has been found to help students avoid plagiarism is to train students to be able to distinguish differences between educational systems and cultural norms (Baron & Strout Drapaz, 2001). Another way that I would like to present within this paper is to train students on how to research and reference. This article will conclude with an example of how this can be done.

First, it should be pointed out that researching and referencing can be supplemented in any class. However, the example that I will present is a lesson that was given in two 英語 IV A & B writing classes which are second year writing classes and the lowest level in the Intensive English program at Ferris. This would be their last class which would mean that they have no hopes of moving up to a higher level. In other words, most of the students in these two classes are not particularly motivated to learn English. The textbook that was required to be used in this class was *Great Essays* by Folse, et.al. (2002). As done quite often, supplementary material was introduced to the students in relation to what was written in the book. In the book students were required to write a comparative essay on foreign and domestic cars. The following introductory paragraph and topic sentence for the first body paragraph were provided (see below). As can be seen, it would be apparent to most teachers who are familiar with Ferris students that the students lacked the knowledge required to write such an essay and therefore, I decided that this would be a perfect opportunity to introduce training on researching and referencing.

Transportation today is much different from the way it was fifty years ago. At that time, people who wanted to buy an automobile had a small variety to choose from. Nowadays, there are so many choices that it could take months to look at all the cars on the market. Often a buyer must first choose between a foreign car and a domestic car. To reach a decision, a buyer should compare foreign and domestic cars in terms of quality and dependability, maintenance, and style.

Foreign and domestic cars vary in quality and dependability.

Since this was an introduction to researching and referencing, I took it upon myself to do the research. That is, I searched for an article on the website that could be used as a source to write the rest of the essay. Before searching for the article I did give the students the benefit of the doubt and asked them to try to write the essay based on their current knowledge. They failed miserably and so I mentioned to them that I would bring information to class the following week that they can use to write the rest of the essay. This consciously raised their awareness of the importance of doing research when writing certain essays.

The article brought to class the following week was “Foreign car or domestic? Reputation isn’t the only factor” by Aviya Kushner (bankrate.com). This article was chosen because it provided the necessary information to write the essay and it covered a topic which students are familiar with, i.e. Japanese cars. It also painted a good picture of Japanese cars which was believed to peak the students interest. The first line of the article is: “mechanics, consumers and car analysts all tick off the same names when asked for the most reliable cars: Honda and Toyota”. A final reason for choosing this article was because it was specific. The essay in the book was found to be too general. However, a specific topic, such as, comparing Japanese and American cars was predicted to be a much more manageable topic for the students to write about.

Students were asked to read through the article and highlight in different colors the instances in which Japanese and American cars were praised. Most students were able to find at least a few examples. The following praises were discussed about Japanese and American cars as a class after the students had been given time to search for them:

Japanese cars

- Japanese cars were considered to be the most reliable.
- Experts considered Japanese cars to be the most dependable.
- Consumers also considered Japanese cars to be the best cars.
- Some mechanics believed that Japanese cars are of the highest overall quality.
- Some Japanese companies were known to provide excellent customer service.

American cars

- Some American cars were considered to get better service.
- Some American cars were considered to last longer.
- American cars were considered to have stronger bodies.
- Some American cars were considered to cost less to insure.

As can be seen from the information above, it was possible to find praises for both Japanese and American cars but that Japanese cars were seen to be better overall. The students were then requested to, during the remainder of the class, complete the essay in the book using this information that we had just discussed. All of the students' writings were collected at the end of the class. Below are examples of students' writings.

Student written example one

Foreign and domestic cars vary in quality and dependability. Some American cars do better in the long run. But Japanese cars are the most reliable and dependable. Consumers as well think that Japanese cars are the best (Kushner, 2003).

Another thing to consider is maintenance. Some Japanese car companies have excellent car service. But some American cars can get better service (Kushner, 2003).

Kushner, A. 2003. *Foreign car or domestic? Reputation isn't the only factor*. Retrieved from <http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/auto/carguide-2004/domestic-import1.asp>.

Student written example two

Foreign and domestic cars vary in quality and dependability. First, I will explain the quality and dependability of American cars. Some American cars do in the long run. Compared with the past, some American cars have improved. Moreover, American cars have a stronger body than other foreign cars. On the other hand, Japanese cars are the most reliable (Kushner, 2003).

Kushner, A. 2003. *Foreign car or domestic? Reputation isn't the only factor*. Retrieved from <http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/auto/carguide-2004/domestic-import1.asp>.

The above written examples were chosen to be given to students as good examples in the following class after the researching and referencing lesson. Although the writing is the students, the referencing included was provided as an example for how to reference. Students could clearly see from these examples how to reference.

To provide further evidence of the students' growth, I will conclude by referring to the results of the evaluation at the end of the year. One hundred percent of the students in both classes either agreed or completely agreed with the following statement: "I acquired new skills in this course". As for specific comments given by the students, there was numerous positive feedback given. The most important given was: "I understood very well how to write an essay. My awareness of writing in general increased". (For both quotes above, the translations are mine). As can

be seen by these results, the students felt as if they had learned during the course as well.

In summary, plagiarism at Ferris is not a new phenomena, however, it has recently been addressed. Although it has fairly recently been addressed and though there may be tendencies for our Japanese students to plagiarize, we should not just tolerate plagiarism but take action to help students avoid plagiarizing. The one way of doing this presented in this article, referencing and researching, can be seen as not only a practical skill to be learned but a conscious raising task which can awaken the students' understanding of the importance of referring to sources.

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