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How to check your scientific paper for plagiarism

GEORGE LUNDBERG, MD / [EDUCATION](#) | FEBRUARY 8, 2011

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We were taught in grammar school that plagiarism is wrong. It is stealing someone else's property.

Imagine in high school asking your mother to buy you "Cliff Notes" so you can copy it word for word. Mother would not have liked that, and it wouldn't have been right.

To write an essay today, you'll probably start with a search engine. Instantly, Mr. Google delivers many intelligent commentaries on anything, probably better than you would write. You can copy them piece by piece, paste them into your paper, and, voila!, you're done!

Except, you stole.

It may not feel like cheating to copy and paste, but it's little different than copying a book by candlelight with pen and paper.

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There is one difference. You can be caught. Guaranteed!

Many high school students now are taught to use a program from www.turnitin.com to test whether their work is plagiarized by checking it against everything that has been published online.

If there is plagiarism, TurnItIn will identify it.

Editors of some scientific journals now use a program called Cross Check powered by www.iThenticate.com.

Steven Shafer is the editor of the research journal *Anesthesia & Analgesia*. He uses Cross Check to examine every one of the 2,000 annual submissions he receives!

And he finds that around one out of every 10 submissions is at least partly plagiarized.

Oh my! What to do?

Programs like TurnItIn and Cross Check are expensive, but there are free programs as well like www.doccop.com.

Doc Cop — D-O-C C-O-P — chops the text into pieces, and uses Google to search the Internet for matching text.

Since many papers have multiple authors, the only way for the guarantor author to know that the final paper does not contain plagiarized text is to run it through a program like Doc Cop prior to submission.

Authors and potential authors of papers submitted to medical and science journals should follow the lead of students to protect themselves against allegations of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a form of scientific misconduct, even fraud, and such a finding can be hazardous to your career.

Don't plagiarize. If you do, you will be caught.

George Lundberg is a MedPage Today Editor-at-Large and former editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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