



5.3

Copycat

In this activity students learn what plagiarism is and why it is wrong.

Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- explain why plagiarism is wrong
- describe ways to combat ‘accidental’ plagiarism
- recognise signs of plagiarism
- explain how to remember without memorising (by visualising).

Time required

Allow one hour.

Outline of the activity

Plagiarism is passing off somebody else’s work as your own. It can range from getting someone else to write your work or cutting and pasting from the Internet to incorrectly referencing information in your work. There are useful tutorials on plagiarism available on the Internet. An example is listed below:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/slc/resources/writing/plagiarism/plagiarism-tutorial>

Give students a copy of the briefing sheet and explain what plagiarism is. Ask them to work out which extract in each example on their briefing sheet is the non-plagiarised one, and why.

Have a short discussion with the class about how and why people plagiarise. Reasons could include:

- laziness - not making an effort to come up with another way of writing a phrase
- accidental - taking notes from an article without referencing it in your notebook so you believe it is your own work
- memorising - learning words by rote can lead to ‘regurgitating’ words without meaning to

- ‘no one will notice’ - it is blatant copyright infringement if you decide to take credit for the hard work of someone else.

Then give students copies of the abstract. Ask them to read it thoroughly and then turn the page over. Without referring to the abstract students should write down everything they remember from it in their own words.

Tips and strategies



This activity can be run with 5.7 Writing a scientific review article. Once students have understood the concept of plagiarism, they should be better able to summarise without copying.

A good idea is to ask students to use highlighter pens to find out how much of a text resembles the original. The more highlighter used, the more likely the text has been plagiarised.

A tip for teaching students to learn without memorising is to promote the skill of visualising what is happening in the text whilst they are reading it. This allows them to remember the gist without the actual specific words. It is detailed reading and note-taking that usually results in plagiarism.

The topics of copyright, ownership and patent law could be discussed in this activity, especially with regards to discoveries in science such as Alec Jeffreys’ work in DNA fingerprinting.

Students may need help with some of the terms in the abstracts mentioned such as polymorphism, microsatellites and PCR.