

Don't Be a Cheater

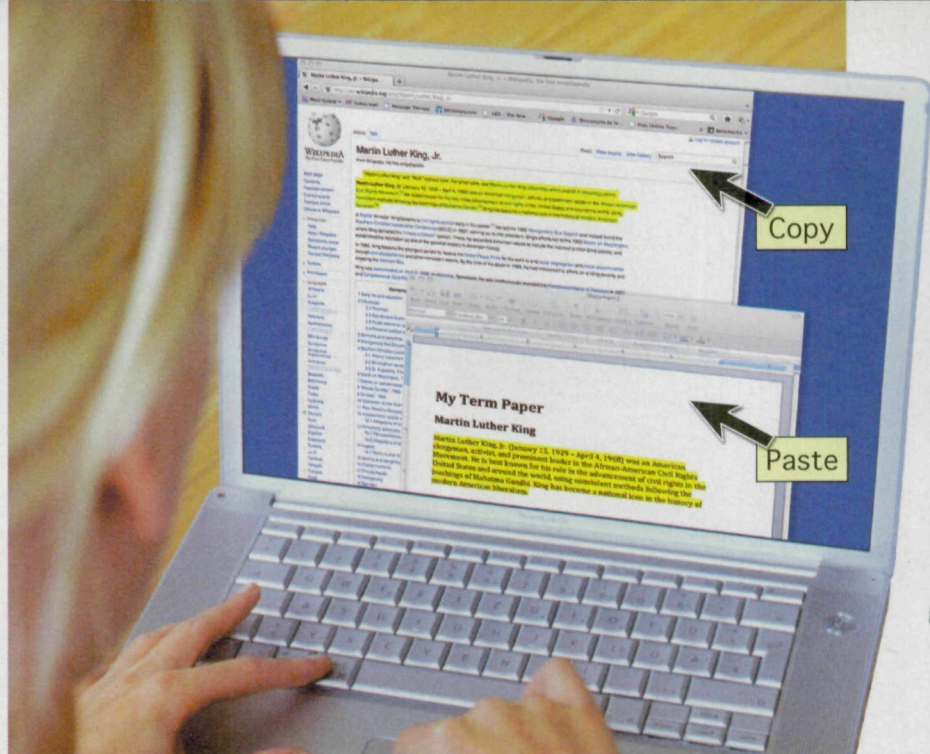
Copying from the Web is so easy that many kids don't realize it's cheating

Have you ever waited until the last minute to start a research paper for school? One middle school student from Pennsylvania came up with what she thought was an easy way to solve that problem.

"I went [online] and just copied the paper in my handwriting, and [the teacher] never knew," she told the authors of a study on cheating.

You might recognize—like that student did—that her "solution" was cheating. But a lot of kids might not, and that's a problem. Copying someone else's words without giving the author credit is called plagiarism. It doesn't matter whether you found those words in a book or on a Web site.

Most kids are used to getting almost any information they want for free online. But many don't realize that copying from the Web is **unethical**—and can lead to a failing grade or even a suspension from school. In a study by Common Sense Media, 21 percent of teens admitted that they've



turned in a paper downloaded from the Internet. What's even more alarming is that 36 percent of teens said they didn't consider this to be a serious offense.

Whose Words?

Many kids see nothing wrong with cutting and pasting from Web articles—especially ones with no clear author. Students are accustomed to using sites like Wikipedia. The online encyclopedia lets anyone add and update entries. That leads many kids to believe that no one really owns the information.

"We have a whole generation of students who've grown up with information that just seems to be hanging out there in cyberspace and doesn't seem to have an author," Teresa Fishman told *The*

New York Times. She's a professor at Clemson University in South Carolina. "It's possible to believe this information is just out there for anyone to take," she says.

Be Original

Services like Turnitin.com are helping teachers catch copycats. The site lets teachers check students' work for plagiarism against a database of millions of research papers. But the best way to avoid getting into trouble is to first understand the do's and don'ts of using information you find online. The list of tips below is a good place to start.

Word to Know

unethical (uhn-eth-ih-kuhl)
adjective. not within the usual standards of proper conduct

Avoid Plagiarism

1 Whenever you use words, ideas, or graphics that are not your own, **always cite** (give credit to) the **original sources**.

2 Use quotation marks around any quotes or sections of text that are taken word-for-word from your source, and cite the source.

3 Don't just rearrange or replace a few words from the original text and call it your own. **Double check your work against the original sources** to be sure.

4 Check all facts against at least two reliable resources. These include respected organizations, such as government (.gov) or educational (.edu) sites.

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