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WHAT IS PLAGIARISM AND HOW TO AVOID IT

By Craig Lock

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PLAGIARISM:

Wow . What a big word, like "marmalade". Hope I spelt it correctly!

PLAGIARISM is deliberately copying someone else's work and putting your name to it. A couple of years ago, there was a celebrated case in my former homeland, South Africa. A university lecturer had copied extracts from American author, Joseph Leyleveld's excellent book, MOVE YOUR SHADOW. (An excellent book, by the way!). A big extract was taken word for word and he was discovered (and was forced to resign his prestigious position). Naughty naughty!

Plagiarism seems to be quite prevalent amongst songwriters, like George Michael, but bet there are many writers too. "Prima donnas"!

A final few words in summary on the subject of plagiarism...
When deciding whether you are perhaps infringing copyright and/or plagiarism, ask yourself this question:

1. "If I was the author, how would I feel about someone 'copying my hard-worked for writing' "?
Sometimes "word-for-word".

2. "Has the writer made a genuine effort to put the material into his/her own words?"
and

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3. "Has he/she just copied or borrowed my ideas and other points from my writing?"

I think "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"! Still don't plagiarise my work, please!

DEFAMATION:

DEFAMATION (not a bodily function – OOPS, ER !).. but if you do, you will soon be really deep in the "rich brown stuff".

Always keep a good name. Avoid libel suits (must replace mine

someday the lot/financial fortunes of the writer!).

Never defame anyone in your writing, especially after they've "fallen off their perch" (ie. after they are deceased – thanks Monty Python).

As writers we are very privileged people, who can directly influence public opinion. Most other people don't have the opportunity to defend themselves through the avenue of publicly written words.

So it's a heavy responsibility we writers have to convey the truth (is that subjective or absolute? – that's an entire essay in itself).

Well our opinion of it, anyway .

If you haven't a kind word to say against someone, don't say it at all. "Mr Goody Goody two-shoes" (but in my crazy travel book about my European adventures HERE, THERE and EVERYWHERE, you'll find out why I only had one!). Hard sometimes, when you are reporting the facts, as you saw them and want to market your work sometimes; because controversy always sells... like bad news headlines sell newspapers.

Most of the above information is based on pure common-sense (what's that?) and using your discernment. However, many writers don't have an abundance of the aforementioned qualities in making judgements.

A word (or two or three) of my advice...

In writing follow the following (sounds "funny" that!) creeds:

When in doubt about what course to take (not English III), just ask yourself this:

If you were the author, would you like someone else copying your work, or saying 'those things' about you.

Use judicious judgement (note alliteration) and when in doubt, rather err on the side of caution.

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Even if you have been badly hurt by someone in the past, don't be tempted to retaliate and take vengeance for "the sordid past" through your words. Everyone has made mistakes they may regret in life, so think the best of people. At least try!

Enough moralising and back to my original topic. A final few words to conclude on the subjects of plagiarism and defamation. Always write with ABSOLUTE HONESTY (from your particular perspective), in utmost GOOD FAITH and INTEGRITY... and as the proverb wisely advises:

Do unto others , as you would have them do unto you."

Then you CAN'T GO WRONG in your writing.

Phew! Finished this lesson in a hurry this morning, sitting out in the hot NZ sun. My business partner wanted it by 1 pm, because it's a long weekend. Another glorious day in Godzone. What paradise.

What a life as a writer!

Craig Lock is an author of numerous books and the creator of the ORIGINAL online creative writing course. <http://www.nzenterprise.com/writer/creative.html>

Is Someone Plagiarizing Your Work?

By Michael Southon

About two weeks ago I received an article submission that immediately attracted my attention. The title was identical to the title of an article I wrote and which was published in 'WebProNews' in May 1999.

"Probably just a coincidence", I thought to myself, and kept reading. But the first paragraph stopped me in my tracks. It was quite clearly plagiarized from my article. As I kept reading I recognized sentence after sentence that had been lifted from my article and then modified slightly.

The whole article was plagiarized. I could hardly believe it. As the English say, I was 'gob-smacked'.

What Is Plagiarism?

'Plagiarism' comes from the Latin word 'plagiarius', a kidnapper. Here are two dictionary definitions of

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plagiarism:

'[to] take (the work or idea of someone else) and pass it off as one's own' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, Third Edition, 1999).

'to appropriate ideas, passages etc. from another work or author' (Collins Dictionary of the English Language, ed. P. Hanks 1979).

Plagiarism can be done in many ways, but the most common technique is to paraphrase someone else's words.

Here's an example:

Original:

"And if you've matched the ezine to the product you're selling, you've reached your target audience."

Plagiarized version:

"If you have correctly matched the ezine or newsletter to the product you're selling, then you will have reached your target audience."

As you can see, the plagiarist has simply taken the original and then replaced the phrase 'you've matched' with the phrase 'you have correctly matched', inserted the words 'or newsletter', and replaced the word 'you've' with the words 'then you will have'.

Part of the reason that plagiarism is so rampant on the Internet is that many people genuinely believe that it's okay to take someone else's writing, make a few changes, and then present it as their own.

Is Plagiarism a Crime?

As far as I know plagiarism is not a crime in most countries, and this is probably because plagiarism is so difficult to define. How many words does a plagiarist have to substitute and rearrange before the copied version ceases to be a copy of the original?

This is why plagiarism is much more difficult to deal with than copyright theft. A copyright thief simply steals your work, lock-stock-and-barrel. A plagiarist steals your work and disguises it as their own.

But while plagiarism may not be a crime, it is heavily sanctioned in professions that are based on the written word. I know of one professor of sociology who lost his job almost overnight because he plagiarized someone else's work. And in journalism the consequences of being exposed as a plagiarist would be the same.

Unfortunately, internet plagiarism is flourishing. There's now a whole industry that supplies college students with 'model' term papers for the purpose of plagiarism. Here are just some of the websites

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that are part of this industry:

School Sucks

Other People's Papers

Evil House of Cheat

But the plagiarism industry has spawned another industry: websites and software designed to detect plagiarism. One such software was developed by turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com) and plagiarism.org (www.plagiarism.org).

This is how it works: the software makes a 'digital fingerprint' of a submitted document using an elaborate set of algorithms. That fingerprint is then checked against a database that contains over 1 billion publicly-available web pages. Plagiarism.org then produces an 'originality report' that gives the user an index of how original the submitted paper was, and whether it falls above or below the 'plagiarism threshold'.

This software, however – while an excellent tool for college professors – probably wouldn't help writers find out if their work has been plagiarized.

What Can You Do About It?

The Internet is so vast, chances are you wouldn't know if someone had plagiarized your work. I only discovered that my work had been plagiarized because the 'author' sent his plagiarized article to me for publication in my own newsletter.

But if you do discover that someone has plagiarized one of your articles, you could do what I did.

I immediately contacted the author of the 'article' and requested that he email everyone to whom he had sent the article, explaining that it was plagiarized, and that they should on no account publish it. I added that if he did not withdraw the article from circulation I would contact his web host and the moderators of any lists that distributed the article.

The author replied within a few hours and admitted that the similarity between the 2 articles was "VERY uncanny". He said he had no idea "how they could be so similar". But after a few emails, he did withdraw the article.

In a way, it's a compliment when someone plagiarizes your work: it means you're writing good stuff. But that's little consolation. If you make your living from writing on the Internet, plagiarism could be the greatest threat to your livelihood.

(c) 2001 by Michael Southon

Michael Southon has been writing for the Internet for over 3 years. He has shown hundreds of

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webmasters how to use this simple technique to get massive free publicity and dramatically increase traffic and sales. Click here to find out more:

Is Someone Plagiarizing Your Work?

The Kidnapping of Content

Web Search Rankings And Plagiarism

Word Frequency Analysis as a means to improve writing quality

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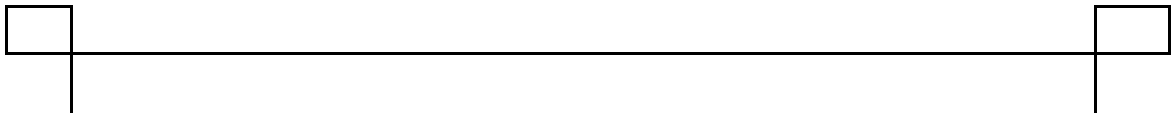
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