
WHITE PAPER The Plagiarism Spectrum

Instructor Insights into the 10 Types of Plagiarism



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1.0 Introduction

An act of plagiarism would seem to be easy to recognize based on simple criteria: Is the work the author's own creation and written in the author's own words? If not, does the writing provide appropriate credit to previous work? Increasingly though, the lines of what constitute plagiarism are blurring as the Internet reshapes culture and education.

The Web's more interactive "Web 2.0" evolution has created an environment that encourages information sharing and values the remixing and remaking of original content. In this environment, plagiarism is easier to commit and originality more difficult to define.

This white paper distills a study of thousands of plagiarized papers, providing examples of 10 distinct types of plagiarism that comprise the vast majority of unoriginal work in student papers. These types are defined across a spectrum of intent and have been given titles to reflect both the influence of the Web on plagiarism and to help make the definitions more meaningful to the generation of students who are "digital natives."

Following the definition of types and examples, this paper will share tips for educators and administrators on how to best address the types through academic integrity policies, honor codes, and interventions in the classroom.

2.0 Defining Plagiarism: The Plagiarism Spectrum

The Plagiarism Spectrum is a guide to help educators, students, academics, and writers recognize the various forms of plagiarism. This spectrum moves plagiarism beyond the black-and-white definition of “literary theft” to one that captures the nuances of how plagiarism can take form.

As part of this study, Turnitin surveyed both higher and secondary education instructors to take a measure of how prevalent and problematic these instances of plagiarism are among their students. The Plagiarism Spectrum ranks the types of plagiarism by intent and then provides data on the prevalence and problematic nature of type based on the feedback from 879 survey respondents.

10 TYPES OF PLAGIARISM ORDERED FROM MOST TO LEAST SEVERE



1. CLONE:

An act of submitting another’s work, word-for-word, as one’s own.



2. CTRL-C:

A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.



3. FIND-REPLACE:

The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.



4. REMIX:

An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.



5. RECYCLE:

The act of borrowing generously from one’s own previous work without citation; To self plagiarize.



6. HYBRID:

The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.



7. MASHUP:

A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.



8. 404 ERROR:

A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources



9. AGGREGATOR:

The “Aggregator” includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.



10. RE-TWEET:

This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text’s original wording and/or structure.

3.0 Survey Findings and Implications

FREQUENCY SCORES

The survey data indicate that of the plagiarism types, the “Clone” appears to be the most prevalent as well as problematic (Fig. 1). The alignment between the severity of type (where it ranks in terms of intentionality) and the problematic nature of the type highlights how frequent instances of intentional plagiarism are occurring on academic campuses. Not far behind is “CTRL C,” which shares with the Clone the same unacknowledged appropriation of content or copy from another, single source.

The “Mashup” ranks behind the Clone in prevalence, but falls lower in the scale of severity. The high prevalence score reflects how often student papers manifest the mixing of unattributed source content, with the lower severity score leaving the door open with regards to intent. With the Mashup, an instance of plagiarism may very well be unintentional—the result of a lack of information on using sources appropriately or maybe because of cultural differences (educational systems in other countries are more accepting of students copying work).

“Remix” and “Recycle” also rank high in prevalence, though educators found these instances to be less problematic. Particularly, with Remix, the low problematic score seems to suggest that educators take a kinder view to this type. Although the student’s intent may have been to purposefully paraphrase content from multiple sources, that intent may potentially be a reflection of their inexperience with doing research papers or with writing academic papers in general (hence the lower problematic score).

Near the bottom of the prevalence standings are the “Hybrid” and the “404 Error,” a proxy for how difficult it may be for students to engage in these types of plagiarism.

PROBLEMATIC SCORES

With regards to both the Clone and CTRL C, their high problematic rankings reinforce the seriousness of the intent behind the plagiarism, but also underscore the challenge that educators encounter in identifying this type (Fig. 2). In keeping with this difficulty, the “Mashup” also appears relatively high on the problematic scale.

“Re-tweet” and “Remix” garnered especially low problematic scores, serving as an implicit acknowledgement of how common poor paraphrasing is as a practice for student writers. At the same time, the low scores seem to support the view that educators accept paraphrasing as a step in the process of students learning how to acquire and incorporate new knowledge when writing papers.

The “Aggregator” and “Recycle” also register lower on the problematic scale. Given that both types involve more original effort (as opposed to original writing) is likely the reason for the lower scores.

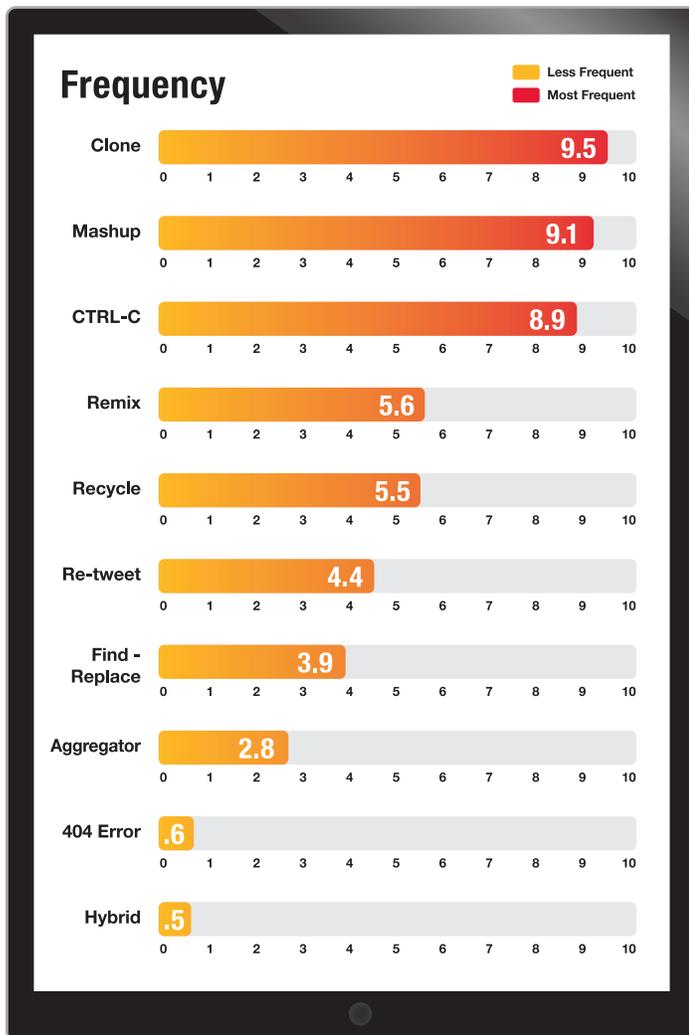


FIGURE 1 | Frequency Scores

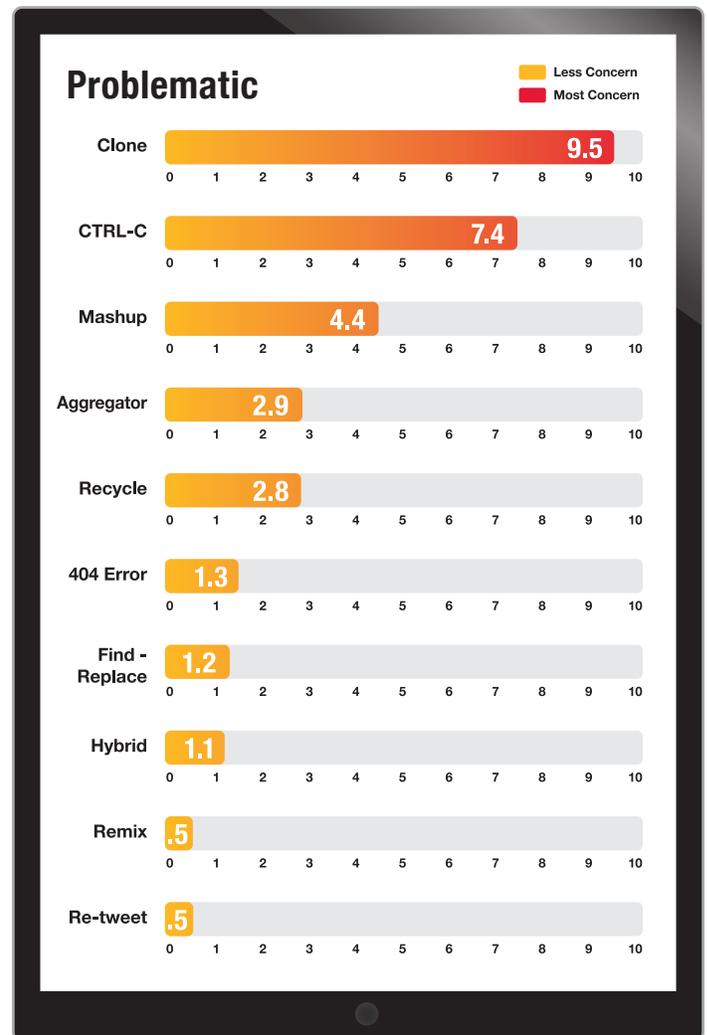


FIGURE 2 | Problematic Scores

4.0 Recommendations to Educators

Here are a few suggestions for how educators and administrators can consider the different types of plagiarism in designing their academic policies:

1. INTENT MATTERS

It has been said that the punishment should fit the crime. Academic policies too often take the approach of adopting a one size fits all response to plagiarism. This has led to policies that tend to be too extreme and bureaucratic (the latter reflecting the pressure of needing to justify extreme responses). The Plagiarism Spectrum emphasizes the range of intent, which when coupled with prevalence and problematic scores, provides educators with guidance in terms of developing appropriate academic responses. The Clone, with its high problematic and severity scores, warrants a more extreme response, whereas an instance of the Mashup, while fairly prevalent, does not demonstrate the same severity of intent and thus should not be handled in the same way.

2. GUIDE STUDENTS

There is a range of intent behind student plagiarism, highlighting the range of awareness that students may have about the ways in which plagiarism can take form. Educators would do well to provide students with information and guidance around the types, not only to help curb instances of unintentional plagiarism, but to also let students know that their instructors are wise to the ways in which they might inappropriately include information in their written work.

3. USE OriginalityCheck®

As instructors work with students on their drafts, they should give them access to view their Originality Reports in Turnitin. This will give students the opportunity to see where they may have improperly paraphrased or inadvertently misused a source. Also, consider asking students to address the Originality Report findings in a “reflection” assignment. What did the students learn about their papers through the Originality Report, and what steps will they take to address those concerns?

5.0 Conclusion

Today's digital culture has blurred the lines of originality and authorship. It is imperative that within this culture, writers, academics, and students have a clear sense of what constitutes plagiarism. Dictionary definitions and even campus academic honesty policies are often vague and do not necessarily address the types of plagiarism that occur.

The Plagiarism Spectrum works well as an educational tool to help students and writers of all levels to better understand what plagiarism is and how it takes form. In addition, academic institutions can use this spectrum to account for the differences between serious issues of academic dishonesty and that of the inadvertent misuse of sources. This understanding can better guide policy development in the appropriate responses to plagiarism in the classroom.

About This Survey

Turnitin surveyed 879 higher and secondary educators from around the world. Of the respondents, 28% were secondary instructors; 51% taught at 2-year or 4-year undergraduate schools and 20% taught at the graduate level. 33% of respondents taught English or writing Composition.

Level:

28% Secondary (7% Middle School + 93% High School)
12% 2-year college
39% 4-year college
20% Graduate +
1% Other

Subject:

33% English/Writing/Comp
38% Non-English
2% Librarian
27% Other

6.0 Appendix: Samples of Plagiarism by Type

http://pages.turnitin.com/plagiarism_spectrum.html

Clone

Submitting another's work, word-for-word, as one's own

Frequency 9.5

Problematic 9.5

Original

A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

Unoriginal

A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.



CTRL-C

Contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

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Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

The Beautiful Yosemite Valley

From the time of its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, possession on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. And Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, while perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.



Find - Replace

Changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

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Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

A Beautiful Setting in Yosemite

Since its first discovery by non-native people in the mid-19th century Yosemite Valley has held a special, even sacred, hold on the American psyche because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mindset, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing political movements, migration patterns and environmental issues as man has become more attuned to their relationship and impact on nature.



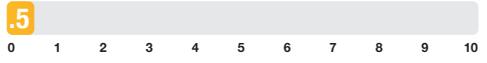
Remix

Paraphrases from multiple sources, made to fit together

Frequency



Problematic



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

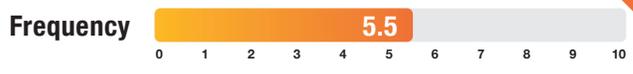
An Untouched View

A History of Settlement and Change in Yosemite Valley

The first non-natives to see Yosemite Valley were probably members of the mid-nineteenth century Joseph Walker Party, who crossed the Sierra Nevada from East to West. The first descriptions of Yosemite came almost 20 years later. From the start, the valley has been renowned for its natural beauty, and highly regarded as the centerpiece of Yosemite National Park, attracting visitors from around the world. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to their relationship and impact on nature.

Recycle

Borrows generously from the writer's previous work without citation



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

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Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

Ecology 201:

An Unnatural Expectation

The Impact of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

From its first discovery by the Ahwahnechee in the mid-nineteenth century Yosemite Valley has held a unique, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time reflecting changing politics, human migration patterns and the rise of environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.



http://pages.turnitin.com/plagiarism_spectrum.html



Hybrid

Combines perfectly cited sources with copied passages without citation



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. "Native Americans have lived in the Yosemite region for as long as 8,000 years. The first people that we have record of was a band of Native Americans that called the Valley "Ah-wah-nee" and themselves the Ahwahnechee."¹ While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

¹ "Yosemite Valley." Wikipedia. Wikipedia. 20 Apr. 2012.
 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yosemite_Valley>

MASH UP Mashup

Mixes copied material from multiple sources



Original

A Natural Setting

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Unoriginal

A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience. The work of Ayres gave easterners an appreciation for Yosemite Valley and started a movement to preserve it. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to their relationship and impact on nature. The 1849 California Gold Rush led to conflicts between miners and natives, and the volunteer Mariposa Battalion was formed by the state of California as a punitive expedition against natives in the Yosemite area.



404 Error

Includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources



Original

A Natural Setting

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Unoriginal

Perceived Beauty: Man's Nature

Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

“Since its first discovery by the Joseph Walker Party in the mid-nineteenth century”¹ “Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all “special temples of Nature.”² “While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to their relationship and impact on nature.”³

¹ For an insightful discussion of Walker's expedition, including an extended description of their first sight of Yosemite Valley, see Walker's original piece in *The Golden Times*. May 5, 1833 : p. 4. Print.

² Bloom, H. "Aesthetics of the Found: The 'Nature' of the Natural." *Aesthetics and the Found*. November 2000 : 18-22. Print.

³ Huang et al. "Politics, Policy, and the Environment." *Nature and Society*. 25.3 (1997) : 127-53. Print.



Aggregator

Includes proper citation to sources but the paper contains almost no original work



Original	Unoriginal
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A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

A Natural Setting

*A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley*¹

Yosemite Valley was first sighted by non-Indians in 1833 by Joseph Rutherford Walker and his group of explorers.² Yosemite has a long and diverse cultural history that helped to shape the region, country, and even the world.³ While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to their relationship and impact on nature.⁴

¹ Harrick, C. "A Natural Setting." *Nature and its Discontents* 23.1 (1996) : 41-50. Print.
² "History of Yosemite," *Yosemitegold.com* Ace & Friends, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.yosemitegold.com/yosemite/history.html>>
³ "Yosemite National Park Cultural History," *Yosemitepark.com* DNC Parks and Resorts at Yosemite, Inc., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.yosemitepark.com/cultural-history.aspx>>
⁴ Harrick, C. "A Natural Setting," p. 41.



http://pages.turnitin.com/plagiarism_spectrum.html

#10



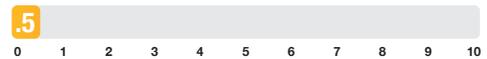
Re-tweet

Includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text's original wording and/or structure

Frequency



Problematic



Original

Unoriginal

A Natural Setting

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

Since its first discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, Yosemite Valley has held a special, even religious, hold on the American conscience because its beauty makes it an incomparable valley and one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite holds a special grip on the western mind, perceptions about the Valley have evolved over time due to changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as man has become more attuned to his relationship and impact on nature.

A History of Exploration and Settlement in Yosemite Valley

From its earliest discovery by non-indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century Yosemite Valley has held a spiritual hold on the American conscience; its beauty is incomparable and has been held up as one of the grandest of all special temples of Nature. While Yosemite has a special grip on the western mind, impressions about the Valley have evolved over time, shaped by changing politics, migration patterns and environmental concerns as mankind has become more attuned to its relationship and impact on nature.¹

¹ Harrick, C. "A Natural Setting." *Nature and its Discontents* 23.1 (1996) : 41-50. Print.

About Turnitin

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Oakland CA, 94607 USA

USA/Canada: 866-816-5046
International: +1 510-764-7600
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