

Ghostwriting

Background

This fact sheet examines how best to tackle the form of academic misconduct called ghostwriting, from the perspective of a lecturer or tutor.

Our definition of ghost writing is:

“Ghostwriting is the presenting of another individual’s work or assignment, as the student’s own. Ghostwriting exists when someone has made substantial contributions to writing and this role is not mentioned”.

There is ample opportunity for students to have their work written by another due to increasing numbers of sites like <http://www.advancedwriters.com> and www.freelancer.com

A student turning to ghostwriting can do so for many reasons but often does so when a nearing a deadline after weeks of having done other work, both academically and professionally, and it seems to them as though an assignment is going to slip through the cracks. Whatever the reason, we know that:

- Assessment and course design can influence the attractiveness or possibility of this form of plagiarism.
- A student who represents ghostwritten work as his or her own has committed academic misconduct. It is plagiarism.

Identifying ghost writing

Ghostwriting may be occurring if:

- the submitted work does not align with your knowledge of the student’s personal development, weaknesses and strengths, thought processes, writing processes, work organization and English language proficiency.
- the submitted work does not align with a previously collected sample work
- examination of the file’s properties (see below) raises concerns.

Approach if ghost writing is suspected

1. Show the evidence privately to the student and ask the student to explain and talk through the submitted work. Have a discussion of where and how the student acquired information for his/her work and how he/she wrote it.
2. If you have previous samples of a student’s writing, compare samples, with the student’s assistance. Seek their explanation for differences.
3. Maintain a record of all observations, activities, and actions for transparency purposes in case university authorities at a later stage become involved.

Actions

- If there is a reasonable certainty of ghostwriting having occurred then the “Academic Misconduct” policy describes the process to be followed.

Some strategies to minimise ghost writing

Good teaching, assessing and unit design can reduce the chance of a student deciding to take the step of submitting someone else’s work as his or her own.

Assessment in general

- Avoid assignments that just ask students to collect, describe and present information. Require synthesis of information and preferably synthesis of information based on information that is mostly obtained in lectures and tutorials.
- Gather writing examples early in the semester during tutorial or lecture time as part of an assessment and keep them.
- Get students to do assignments in class.
- Structure assessments across units so that pressure points do not occur.
- Get students to submit drafts and use peer review to give each other feedback on drafts. Value this process by allocating marks to the feedback students give each other.

Processes that generate evidence of developmental work

- Require students to keep copies of drafts, handwritten notes and other relevant material and require submission of these as part of the assignment. Ask students to produce these items.
- Ask for a personal reflection on the task – ask students questions like “What did you learn” and “What problems did you encounter”.
- Practice writing and paraphrasing in class time. Get students to include these practice items as part of final assignments.
- Require oral presentations as part of written assignments.
- Give opportunity for students to practice the required skills and to gain feedback from yourself and other students

Accessing a word file’s properties

Windows

Right click on the file and select properties

Mac

Use “Get Info” or open the file and then select “Properties” from under the “File” menu. Either method will reveal the author of the document.

Students may know how to change these properties so this is not definitive proof of a work NOT being ghost written. The reverse may be true!

- Integrate the improvements into your subsequent operational plan.