

### Fictional Case for Study: Plagiarism

A student passes in an essay with a unified, coherent and substantial argument, and with respectable and relevant scholarly sources that are frequently identified in correct APA style. Although students have a process-writing option to receive feedback on an in-progress draft before submission, not all do so, and you are now seeing this text for the first time. Students have already passed a quite rigorous EAP course, but you note many unacceptable source-to-essay matches in this essay. Some are as long as 6- or 8-word strings; others (quite numerous) involve just a few words, or even single words, but in close proximity. Taken together, there are *many* such matches, with some parts of the essay approaching 40% of borrowed language. Often, there are accurate page references, but much of what is represented as paraphrase in fact appears to be (nearly) verbatim copying.

Here is a (fictitious but realistic) instance of the type of problem described above:

***Imaginary source text: 61 words***

*Linguistics is the study of language; this much is beyond dispute. But the problem is, what language? and whose language? Traditionally, it may have been adequate to assume that Linguistics would examine mainly the written discourse of influential social groups whose members use the standard (i.e. socio-politically established) variety. More recently, however, these rather elitist assumptions have been called into question...etc.*

***Imaginary essay text: 24 of 56 words are [almost] the same (42%)***

*Definitions of the adequate focus of Linguistics have been [disputed] over time. Traditionally, it was [assumed] that Linguistics would examine mainly the written discourse of members of influential social groups, in other words, users of the socio-politically established standard variety of the language. It is not surprising that these elitist assumptions have [recently] come into question.*

Asked about these troubling similarities, and reassured that (of course) some register-specific technical terms – such as *written discourse*, *social group*, and *standard variety* in the text above – cannot and need not be paraphrased, the student accepts the invitation to re-write the essay *sans* plagiarism and also without any penalty (except for the nuisance and embarrassment), but **still turns in a strikingly similar second version**, claiming at that point that **it is simply impossible** to avoid such echoes and, therefore, **it is unreasonable for you to reproach them**.

**Thinking about the need for academic standards, but also about the student's – and your own – need to experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness, what would you do?**