

Acceptable use of the Internet for Intellectual Sources

Everyone uses the internet for information. According to the April 3rd, 1998 issue of Science, there are now as many as 350,000,000 pages on Internet, and with plans in existence for putting everything in libraries in digital form, the accessibility of virtually any text will become a reality in the not-too-distant future. This means that the temptation to start with someone else's words in a word processor and massage them into a paper will become greater and greater. It's the same kind of problem that has occurred in the past, only it's much easier now.

The practical consequence of all this information in electronic form is that you will be tempted. You'll find out there are sites where you can download whole papers, and you'll be able to find articles about many topics within a moment's notice. **Of course your teachers have access to these same tools with the same lightening quick speeds.** But that's not the point. **You're not in school to play a cat and mouse game with your teacher to see if you can fool him or her by using someone else's work.** You are in school to hone your mind into a reliable thinking machine that will serve you well throughout the rest of your life. This is the number one skill you are here to obtain: thinking. Why do you think the system of education has changed so little over the past few thousand years? Just as great teachers such as Jesus, Confucius or Mohammed sat with their disciples, so you sit with your teachers. You present your thoughts to one who has had greater experience thinking than you have, and this one coaches you little by little to become a better thinker yourself. Presenting someone else's work, as your own, turns this relationship into a **fraud, and cheats you** out of the very thing you are in school to get, an education. What you would be getting away with, if you are not caught, is **wasting your time and energy and that of your teacher.**

So how can you use stuff that's already in electronic form? Various teachers have widely divergent opinions about this subject. Here are rules: It may be more useful to print it out before you start writing and use it like you would a book. At least then cutting and pasting is not so convenient. **Always write your papers from scratch,** starting with a blank screen. **Don't cut and paste from various documents.** If you do cut and paste a little, make sure each passage is properly cited. Do the citation work at the time of writing instead of leaving it for the end. Be realistic about what you are doing. **If you are doing a lot of cutting and pasting, chances are you are not writing your own paper.**