



Assessing Intent in Verbatim Plagiarism Investigations¹

One approach for assessing intent in verbatim plagiarism cases examines the acts of copying, pasting, and integrating (CPI) text into a document. CPI draws on the copy-and-paste description of plagiarism and relates the physical actions of copying and pasting to the levels of intent to start the analysis. The intent level derived from CPI may then rise or fall according to other evidence.

Copy: Selecting and copying text and figures from electronic sources has become the digital equivalent of manual note-taking—but maintaining bibliographic information for citation purposes is still necessary. Copying without preserving information for proper attribution can be a reckless act, because a reasonable person would recognize the increased risk of later using the copied material without attribution.

Paste: The act of pasting copied material into a document is inherently a knowing, conscious act, because it generally requires manual highlighting followed by executing a copy command, changing documents, and executing a paste command. Thus, a knowing level of intent is inherent in the act of pasting the material into the new document, and the act becomes knowing plagiarism in the conscious absence of subsequent steps to provide quotation marks, citation, and reference. The recurrence of matching typographical errors, spelling conventions, and embedded citations or objects into the new document are common evidence of the copy-and-paste method of plagiarism demonstrating knowing intent.

Integrate: Additional specific steps to integrate the copied material into the body of a new document can help mislead the reader into concluding that the new document is the subject's original work. Those steps can elevate the intent level to intentional. Examples include: updating "in press" references cited in the source to reflect subsequent publication in journals; renumbering embedded citations to be consistent with the bibliography; or changing verb tenses to suggest work completed by another is to be performed in the future by the subject. Each of these specific steps on its face shows intent to achieve the specific purpose of making the copied material appear to be original. Evidence of integration of the copied material often supports findings of intentional plagiarism.

¹ We introduced the Quotation-Citation-Reference (QCR) method for assessing the act of plagiarism in our March 2009 Semiannual Report, p.43.