

Synonym Spinners and Paper Mills: It's a New World Out There"

Susan Brudvig, Indiana University East

Abstract

The explosion of online paraphrasing tools and contract cheating websites has created significant threats to academic integrity. This position paper is largely tutorial: Its aims are to create awareness of these tools and to demonstrate forms of detecting their use. However, prevention also is key. The author provides specific recommendations to faculty for creating student assignments and structuring written work.

Position Paper

The explosion of online paraphrasing tools (i.e., "synonym spinners" and "article spinners") and contract cheating websites (e.g., online "paper mills" and for-hire "ghost writers") has created significant threats to academic integrity. Although neither form of academic misconduct is new, both forms tend to skirt identification by faculty for two reasons:

- A submission using a synonym spinner or ghost writer may bypass originality detection by a plagiarism checker such as TurnItIn.
- Faculty often are unaware of these online tools and technologies, much less equipped to identify their use in student work.

This position paper is tutorial and has these objectives:

- To introduce faculty to online paraphrasing tools and contract cheating websites, demonstrating how students use these tools and highlighting how detection is avoided.
- To delineate different ways in which faculty may identify use of these tools in students' submissions.
- To suggest that authentic assessment, in-class writing, and self-reflection are among the best assignment types to encourage original written work.

While faculty awareness, detection and prevention are key, it is not enough given the pace of technological change. The author describes one institution's creation of an originality support team, whose sole purpose is identification and detection of unoriginal student work.

Bibliography available upon request.