



# Redefining Plagiarism

18 November 2024

Sarah Elaine Eaton, PhD

[publicationethics.org](https://publicationethics.org)

## Plagiarism Definition

“

**When somebody presents the work of others  
(data, words, or theories)  
as if they were his/her own  
and without proper acknowledgement.**

”

<https://publicationethics.org/category/keywords/plagiarism>

## When and where do our definitions of plagiarism come from?

- Western, Eurocentric historical and etymological roots: Latin root – “To kidnap, to steal”
- Major technologies that shifted how plagiarism happens:
  - The printing press (~1450);
  - The Internet (~1990s);
  - GenAI/Large Language Models (~2020s).
- Plagiarism and copyright are entangled in commercial publishing

## Challenges Brought on from GenAI

- We do not necessarily know what data sets were used to train Large Language Models (e.g., ChatGPT).
- We can no longer have confidence that writing (as both a process or a product) is an entirely human endeavour.
- It is reasonable to assume that GenAI is being used in many forms of writing. It can be difficult to know if GenAI is being used as a supplement to or substitute for human effort (i.e., analyzing, thinking, creating).

## GenAI Text Detections Tools

- Are controversial
- Can produce false negatives and false positives
- Have variations in efficacy, sensitivity, and specificity
- Can be “tricked” by the use of machine translation tools, human editing, use of ‘humanizing apps’
- Cannot reliably be used to identify possible plagiarism

Elkhatat et al. (2023); Foltýnek et al. (2023); Gegg-Harrison & Quarterman (2024); Sadasivan et al. (2023); Weber-Wulff et al. (2023).

## Are we moving towards a Postplagiarism era?

Postplagiarism refers to an era in human society in which advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence are a normal part of life, including how we teach, learn, and interact daily.



Eaton, 2023

## Towards A Revised Definition of Plagiarism

- Human-AI hybrid writing may soon become the norm
- Move over spell check, GenAI is here (e.g., Microsoft CoPilot)
- *Technology may evolve, but responsibility remains a constant (at least for now) – As humans we can outsource some or all of our writing to an AI app. What we do not outsource is our responsibility for outputs that have our name attached to them.*

## Towards A Revised Definition of Plagiarism

- *Our understandings of plagiarism – and originality – are shifting, but as yet there is neither clarity nor consensus about what a new definition of plagiarism could be.*
- *Shifting our focus to what counts as quality may ultimately be more productive than trying to detect plagiarism as it is currently defined.*



## References

- Eaton, S. E. (2023). Postplagiarism: Transdisciplinary ethics and integrity in the age of artificial intelligence and neurotechnology. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 19(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-023-00144-1>
- Elkhatat, A. M., Elsaid, K., & Almeer, S. (2023). Evaluating the efficacy of AI content detection tools in differentiating between human and AI-generated text. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 19(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-023-00140-5>
- Foltýnek, T., Bjelobaba, S., Glendinning, I., Khan, Z. R., Santos, R., Pavletic, P., & Kravjar, J. (2023). ENAI Recommendations on the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in Education. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 19(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-023-00133-4>
- Sadasivan, V. S., Kumar, A., Balasubramanian, S., Wang, W., & Feizi, S. (2023). Can AI-Generated Text be Reliably Detected? *ArXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2303.11156>
- Gegg-Harrison, W., & Quartermann, C. (2024). AI detection's high false positive rates and the psychological and material impacts on students. In S. Mahmud (Ed.), *Academic Integrity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (pp. 199-219). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-0240-8.ch011>
- Weber-Wulff, D., Anohina-Naumeca, A., Bjelobaba, S., Foltýnek, T., Guerrero-Dib, J., Popoola, O., Šigut, P., & Waddington, L. (2023). Testing of detection tools for AI-generated text. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 19(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-023-00146-z>



## THANK YOU

Sarah Elaine Eaton, COPE Council Member  
[seaton@ucalgary.ca](mailto:seaton@ucalgary.ca)



[publicationethics.org](http://publicationethics.org)



publicationethics.org

Registered charity No 1123023

Registered in England and Wales, Company No 6389120

Registered office: **COPE** New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford,  
Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO53 3LG, United Kingdom

©2021 Committee on Publication Ethics (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



facebook.com/publicationethics



@COPE



LinkedIn

PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN SCHOLARLY  
RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION