

# Learning the Hard Way

## My Experience with Plagiarism

KOFFI KOUAME

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Writing has always been a passion of mine. Being able to express my thoughts and ideas through written words is a unique and powerful form of communication. However, my understanding and attitude towards writing have changed over time because of the impact of plagiarism. Since I first plagiarized, it has negatively affected how I feel about writing, made me feel discouraged to write, and made me unable to think outside the box. I was scared about my teachers knowing that I was using plagiarism as a method of writing, but I still did it knowing that there were consequences if I failed to properly cite sources. I never wanted to get caught, but throughout the years, it has made me question my ability to write and express my ideas freely. As a result, I have become more cautious in my writing which has affected my creativity and originality.

The reason I feel this way is because plagiarism is considered an act of stealing or cheating, and this goes against the values and principles of academic and professional integrity. While there are reasons why people choose to plagiarize, my reason was fear that my writing wouldn't be good enough to earn good grades. Even though I knew that I could have serious consequences that could negatively affect my future career opportunities, I still did it!

As previously discussed, the real reason why I chose to plagiarize was due to my struggles with English as it is not my first language. I was born in Ivory Coast, Africa, and spent my entire life there until I was 12. I grew up speaking French, Afrikaans, and Attie, my ethnic language. These were the languages I spoke my entire life. In 2019, I moved to America during my freshman year of high school, and everything was different: the language, surroundings, and more. School was challenging, and writing was no exception. During my sophomore year, I came across the concept of plagiarism and how it could save me time on assignments.

When I came to the United States, I first encountered plagiarism. Prior to that, I had never experienced any issues with writing in my native

language, so the idea of plagiarism was new to me. However, in Ivory Coast, where I am from, the approach to teaching academic writing is different. There, the emphasis on plagiarism and citation rules was less strict, which may have contributed to my lack of experience with it. Looking back, I realize that the educational system in Ivory Coast did not place as much emphasis on originality and proper citation as it does in the U.S. This is not to say that plagiarism was encouraged, but rather that it was not as heavily monitored and enforced as it is in the U.S. As a result, I did not face the same challenges related to plagiarism before coming to the U.S.

One day, I was assigned an English essay and found myself at a loss for words, so I turned to the internet and searched for “Essay about soccer.” To my surprise, I found several essays that popped up. I chose one that resonated with me and that I enjoyed reading. With a few tweaks to the title and select words, I copied and pasted it into Google Docs and submitted it as my own. I was apprehensive about getting caught, but to my surprise, I received an A. From that moment, I began to rely on plagiarism whenever I found myself struggling to come up with ideas or needed to save time for soccer and football practice. I was a two-sport student-athlete, and I spent most of my free time practicing and training for games.

The idea of saving time by plagiarizing seemed too good to pass up. I remember the time when I was in high school and all my friends thought that plagiarizing was the smartest thing ever. They would always talk about how easy it was to copy and paste someone else's work and get an A without putting in any effort. At that time I thought it was the smartest thing ever, too.

For a while, I felt like I was getting away with everything. I was saving time, getting good grades, and still had plenty of time to focus on my sports. But deep down, I knew that what I was doing was wrong and that I could potentially get caught. Everything went well and smoothly until my junior year. I did exactly what I usually did. I searched ideas on Google, found something interesting, and presented somebody else's work as my own. However, this time I got caught by my teacher! She said something that grabbed my attention and made me realize what I was doing could jeopardize my education. She said something along the lines of, "I know this isn't your work, and I don't want you to do this again. Rather than giving you a zero, I want you to go back and rewrite your essay. You have a unique voice and come from a beautiful background. Use the resources I

gave you, please, and write your own paper. You could really get in trouble if you do this again.” Her words left me feeling embarrassed.

As I listened to her talk, I felt my face grow hot with embarrassment and shame. It was a feeling I had never experienced before. I couldn't even look into her eyes and deny that I stole someone else's work. I was paralyzed by my own shame. It was as though all my confidence had been stripped away in an instant, leaving me feeling exposed. After that, I went home and sat down to write my own essay. Since then, I have stopped using plagiarism as a reliable tool for my education. I now understand the importance of writing original content and the consequences of plagiarism. I have also learned to value my unique voice and background and to use them to create meaningful writing.

My experiences with plagiarism have made me realize the negative impact it can have on one's writing and personal integrity. While it may seem like an easy way out, plagiarism is a form of stealing that undermines the hard work and effort of the original author. The fear of not being good enough should never lead someone to resort to plagiarizing. Rather, it's important to seek help and resources to improve one's language and

writing skills. My struggle with English as a fourth language led me to plagiarize in the past, but I have come to understand that it's important to take responsibility for my work and develop my own unique voice. Even if I don't receive a good grade on a writing assignment, I know that it's not the end of the world. Instead, I view it as an opportunity to learn from my mistakes and ask for help to grow as a writer. By putting forth my best effort, I can take pride in knowing that I've done my best and have created something that is truly my own.

As I mentioned, the emphasis on plagiarism and citation rules was less strict in my country, compared to the U.S. educational system. This has contributed to my lack of experience with plagiarism before coming to the U.S. I believe it's important to consider the cultural and educational backgrounds of students when teaching plagiarism. Rather than simply enforcing strict rules, it may be more helpful to provide resources and guidance to improve student's writing skills and understanding of originality and proper citation. By emphasizing the value of one's unique voice and background, students can learn to appreciate their own ideas and develop writing skills without resorting to unethical practices like plagiarism. I believe plagiarism should be taught and monitored the way it is now.

However, It's crucial to approach the topic in a way that is culturally sensitive and constructive for students' development as writers.

It's important to understand that plagiarism is not just wrong; it's also a serious offense that can have long-term consequences for a student's academic and professional career. Through my personal experiences, I have come to realize the value of academic integrity and the importance of developing one's writing skills. I believe that this is something that everyone should prioritize in their academic journey. Plagiarism not only violates the trust of teachers and professors, but it also hinders the student's growth and development. By taking shortcuts and not putting in the necessary effort, students deprive themselves of the opportunity to learn and improve. This is why I strongly advocate for upholding ethical standards in academia and beyond.

My personal experiences have shown me that hard work, dedication, and honesty are the keys to success. By prioritizing our learning and development, we can set a positive example for others and inspire them to do the same. I hope that my experiences can serve as a lesson to others

and encourage them to prioritize their growth and development rather than resorting to unethical methods like plagiarism.