

# Common Issues University Students Face: Problems and Solutions

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## **Abstract**

*This paper will explore three problems and present practical solutions for them, based on teaching experience and students' feedback. Using critical thinking for problem-solving we will tackle the issues of student tardiness, procrastination and plagiarism.*

**Key terms:** critical thinking, tardiness, procrastination, plagiarism

## **Introduction**

University professors agree that students face several common issues to be dealt with; tardiness, procrastination and plagiarism. We have chosen those three areas because they constitute some of the most important reasons students do not get high grades, lower their GPAs, and sometimes fail their courses. Having determined the three areas of interest, we must also mention that in order to solve a problem, students must realize that a problem does indeed exist. For a student to solve a problem he or she must accept and acknowledge it, and be committed to solving it. Students need motivation, and they need to realize the benefits they may get from dealing with the problem.

## **Definition, causes, and practical solutions:**

### **a. Tardiness**

Tardiness, or coming late to class has a negative impact on the teacher and students. When students waltz in late, they interrupt class session, and miss what the instructor has already announced or explained. The first few minutes of class are usually for wrapping-up the last session and announcing the current lesson's objectives. Should teachers allow students to come in late? Although it is the students' right to attend class, it is not fair to disrupt others. At Notre Dame University-Louaize, NDU, a private university in Lebanon, there is a penalty for arriving late unless the student has a valid excuse; and every three late arrivals count as an absence. Why are students late? Traffic is often a problem, in addition to having a car accident, not finding a parking spot, and other reasons for late arrival. On the other hand, allowing students to hand in work late is unfair to others who have worked hard to submit their work on time. Students should accept responsibility for their academic life. It is their responsibility to arrive on time and to hand in their work as scheduled. They should be ready to bear the consequences of their behaviors and actions. As a result of tardiness, students may get a lower GPA, which is linked to failure.

Why are students tardy?

Tardiness shows a lack of time management skills, lack of discipline, lack of responsibility, lack of interest, insufficient motivation, and lack of ambition. In the future, students may have to pay a high price for the lack of organization in their career life.

Some solutions for tardiness

To avoid tardiness, professors advise the students to leave early enough to get to university on time and to find a parking space. Students should drive carefully to avoid accidents, and allow plenty of time for traffic and unexpected situations.

### **b. procrastination**

Procrastination is defined as delaying doing something for later. Whenever students have something important or intricate to do, such as writing a report or research paper, they tend to procrastinate. Procrastinators wait until the last minute to get things done. It is worth mentioning that some people enjoy working under pressure while others find it too stressful and do not enjoy it. Since work is left until the last minute, students are not producing their best work by being late. In addition, they may feel behind, or under pressure, and this may undermine their confidence (Chaffee, 2006). Procrastinating from time to time is normal, however, excessive procrastination may become problematic. Some causes for procrastination are a low interest in the assignment, unclear instructions, or the student may not understand the assignment or not know how to do it. Procrastination is also defined as, "putting off important tasks to a later time." (Wikipedia, [Wikipedia.org/wiki/procrastination](http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/procrastination)). Some psychologists associate this behavior with deriving pleasure from excitement or working under pressure. Some people may be waiting for inspiration. Procrastination may lead to stress, anxiety, and guilt feelings. It may be associated with laziness, lack of ambition or motivation, low will power and fear of failure. (Pychyl 2012)

Some psychologists link procrastination to low self-confidence, disliking the task, boredom and apathy, even perfectionism and sometimes it is associated with psychological disorders such as depression or ADHD.

Why do students procrastinate?

Academic procrastination is a "syndrome" of students who start work just before a deadline. Students who procrastinate often put off starting a task they find difficult. Sometimes they find it difficult to get started or they try to start many tasks at once, thus setting themselves up for failure. They may also start and then stop before finishing the job. There are several causes for procrastination;

1. Perfectionism; not being able to meet the required standard
2. Fear of failure; lack of confidence, inability to accomplish a task
3. Confusion; no clear instructions on what is required
4. Task difficulty; it may be too difficult or students may lack the ability or skills to perform the task
5. Lack of motivation; little or no interest in performing the job, finding it boring or irrelevant to their life
6. Lack of concentration; distractions, disliking the task

(Pychyl, 2012)

How to overcome procrastination

Professors encourage the following suggestions:

1. Understand that you have to do the task sooner or later, and that "there is no time like the present."  
The sooner you start the sooner you are done.
2. Set your priorities and number the tasks you have to do by order of importance
3. Use your will power to complete a task once started and before moving to another task.

4. Get help when you find a task difficult; your teacher, another student or the Writing Center can be of assistance in a writing assignment
5. Set a time for work and a time for play and stick to them
6. Eliminate distractions so you can concentrate on your work
7. Think positively and believe you can do the work. You will feel satisfied once you have completed your task
8. Reward yourself when you complete a task

([www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/en/procrastination.asp](http://www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/en/procrastination.asp))

On the other hand, what can instructors do to help their students do the work on time without procrastinating?

1. Give interesting assignments; allow the students to choose the kind of projects they like to work on or the topics of their papers
2. Give clear instructions for what they are expected to do
3. Allow the students to use a variety of skills for more interesting and more effective assignments
4. Give a bonus to early birds, better grades to those who submit the work on time
5. Work organization: break down a large assignment into smaller related parts. For example, for a research paper, ask for a separate outline, introduction, body, conclusion, and references.

### c. Plagiarism

In the NDU Syllabus (See Appendix) plagiarism is defined as, “the presentation of someone else’s ideas, words or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one’s own creation. Also, paraphrasing, summarizing, as well as direct quotations are considered plagiarism, if the original source is not properly cited.”

Plagiarism is an illegal form of copying another person’s work or ideas without asking, and passing it as one’s own. ([www.englishclub.com/writing/plagiarism.htm](http://www.englishclub.com/writing/plagiarism.htm)) Copying and pasting from the Internet without proper citation is considered plagiarism. Presenting a research paper without providing references is plagiarism.

Why are students tempted to plagiarize?

Students may think that it is the easy way out; they may not be sure of themselves, they may think that it is acceptable if they can get away with it. Sometimes it is accidental, and sometimes intentional. Some excuses students have presented include not knowing how to put it in their own words, impressing the teacher and getting a higher grade, not knowing it is illegal, thinking that if something is already published it is acceptable to copy it, (this is verbatim from a student of mine) saying that the Internet is “public domain”.

Other reasons students plagiarize, and what instructors can do to help them avoid it:

1. Laziness. I have once received a paper with another student’s name on it. Clearly, the student was looking for an easy way out. When I asked him for the reason for handing in someone else’s paper, his response was “everybody does it. It’s just that I got caught”.
2. Deadlines. One other reason students are tempted to plagiarize is deadlines they cannot meet due to other responsibilities, such as work, or distractions. They realize too late that the paper is due tomorrow, and they have not started it yet. Panic may occur, and the student will be tempted to

“buy” or find a “ready-made” paper. This is where asking for parts of the paper, is smart. For instance, ask for the outline, then for the first draft, etc...This will make it more difficult for the student to copy.

3. Low-self confidence in their ability

When it is the first time students are required to do research, they are not familiar with the APA style for instance, and may feel overwhelmed. Teachers should go over the details of writing a paper or have the students attend a session at the Writing Center.

Sometimes, when a student feels that another writer “says it better”, instructors should tell them that they would consider mainly their ideas and that grammar points will not be deducted, except when incoherently expressed

4. Students may not know how to integrate sources in their papers. Explain or review paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting. Make sure they understand that paraphrasing and summarizing, although written in their own words, must also be cited. Professors should teach their students to write their summary without looking at the source material, so as not to be tempted to copy the words. (Ashworth and Bannister in Writing News, Feb 2006). Ask them to paraphrase as little as possible but summarize instead. Teach them how to introduce quotes, and when to quote.
5. Students do not always understand why sources are so important and “what all the fuss is about” (Ibid). Students sometimes ask, why should I cite when I have the same ideas as the author? Explain to the students that they are part of a community and that information is borrowed and contributed among scholars (Ibid).
6. Note-taking skills: Students may be sloppy in taking notes and may get confused about their own words and those from a source. This is how accidental plagiarism occurs. Professors should teach the proper note-taking techniques, using index cards, and have the students include their citations on the draft as well, so as not to forget to include them.
7. Sometimes, students are not sure when to cite, at the end of each sentence or paragraph, etc... they must realize that every source on the Reference page corresponds to an in-text citation in the text. Sometimes students have more references that is apparent in the paper.
8. Despite all the hype about plagiarism, some students do not grasp the full meaning of this offense. It is not clear to them what constitutes plagiarism. Instructors should explain in details what constitutes cheating and what does not; -like when a friend helps you with your writing- and what is common knowledge or a well-known fact that does not require citation. (Ashworth and Bannister, 2006)

Why is plagiarism considered a serious academic offense?

Writers and researchers work very hard to produce original work. They deserve to get credit for their work. On the other hand, instructors need to know if the students understand their work and are capable of creating it on their own.

Sometimes the idea that plagiarism is acceptable is cultural. In some countries, the idea of academic integrity is not fully understood. Plagiarism should be explained in schools and universities (as it is at NDU, printed in the syllabus). To minimize plagiarism NDU instructors require their students to submit their research paper on Safe Assign, a program that detects the percentage of plagiarism. This deters the students and shows them that plagiarism can be detected easily. In addition, teachers know the level of their students and recognize their writing style. Professors usually make it clear to the students that copying from the Internet is not allowed; and that it is the same as copying from a book

or journal. Copyright rules apply to Internet sources as well, and the penalty for plagiarism is severe. Some teachers will allow their students to resubmit their papers, while others will give them a failing grade. Some universities may suspend students for plagiarizing or even kick them out completely.

#### How to avoid plagiarism

Students have to understand the risks they are taking when they plagiarize. So, whatever their motive, they should consider the consequences and act accordingly. Instructors must explain the penalties for plagiarism:

A lower or failing grade on the paper

A lower or failing grade in the course

Being placed on probation for academic dishonesty

Being suspended from university

Being totally expelled from university

Academic dishonesty will be noted in the student's transcript, which will affect all subsequent university or job applications

On the other hand, professors should explain to students that it is better to submit a late paper than to hand-in a plagiarized one. An Incomplete is better than an F grade if unable to complete the work during the semester. Doing your best is better than handing-in an excellent but plagiarized paper.

([www.ololcollege.edu/archive\\_material/plagiarism\\_project/avoiding\\_plagiarism1.html](http://www.ololcollege.edu/archive_material/plagiarism_project/avoiding_plagiarism1.html))

### Conclusion

The above issues are three areas of concern worth considering and coming to terms with, as they represent some important common problems students have to face. In this paper, we have identified and defined the problem areas, namely tardiness, procrastination, and plagiarism. We started with the least to most serious. These issues are some of the reasons students are not getting high grades or even failing. However, having suggested possible solutions, professors have to realize that students will always present issues that will have to be resolved.

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