Morals for your story


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Dilemma
My question is about plagiarism, I think. I suppose what I'm trying to establish is what the boundaries of plagiarism are. I have to write a paper for a class and I could potentially choose a topic that I have written about already for a previous class. It won't be possible to use the entirety of my already existing paper for this one since the assignment is slightly different, but would it be unethical to use portions of it? And what about the research? Would it be wrong to reuse it? I suppose if I choose a new topic, I won't even have to worry about if I'm plagiarizing myself. But I would prefer to continue my thinking about this topic more deeply than to choose some other topic I'm not as interested in. What do you think I should do? What are the main dangers I should be sure to avoid?

--Writing Papers Can Feel Like Walking Across a Mine Field

Responses
If you did your original work honestly there is no reason not to reuse it. Plagiarism is defined as taking someone else's work and calling it your own. Though I would encourage you to do a little more research if you can to freshen it up a bit. The only risk is if you turned your previous paper in to turnitin.

--Abe

It sounds like what you are planning on doing would probably not be plagiarism, as you plan on modifying your original paper in order to meet the needs of the new one. Since this is a topic that you are interested in, and would like to expand on, I think you should stick with it. Also, you asked about new research. If you want to think more deeply on this topic then you should definitely do some more research and include it in your paper as this will expand your understanding of the topic and give you more insight. While you use your old paper as a base it would probably be best not to copy and paste large sections. Lastly, the best way to avoid any anxiety, guilt, or accusations of plagiarism would be to talk to your professor about it and find out how much of your original work they would be willing to accept in this new paper.

--JZ

The most important thing in this case is to be honest and clear about what you are doing. If you include your previous paper as a reference and openly acknowledge in the paper that you are building on your previous work, then I can't imagine how you could get in trouble for plagiarism. However, the point of writing these school papers is to practice researching and to develop and organize your ideas. If you recycle too much of your research and conclusions from your previous paper, you won't have accomplished much.

Consider what would happen if everyone reused the same topic and research on all of their school papers (applying Kant's categorical imperative). No one would learn or accomplish anything, making writing assignments worthless. On the other hand, if you are taking the same general topic and writing about a new aspect of it, or going into much greater depth, then briefly including some of your previous research as background information seems appropriate, as long as you cite your previous paper. In either case, the safest course of action would be to ask your professor before committing to it.

--Honesty is Imperative

By definition plagiarism is the use of someone else's words and thoughts as your own. It requires two people. As far as rewriting parts of a paper in order to satisfy the requirements in another class, you could do this your entire academic life, and might have a good senior thesis. The real question you should be asking is why are you taking that class? If you want to explore a subject that you are already interested in and know quite a bit about, you probably don't need that class. All you need is a library, and spring break. If you are in the class to truly expand your knowledge and skills you should step out of your comfort zone.

According to Aristotle, the best way towards the good life is through practice. From playing the harp, to building great structures no one starts off proficient at what they do. The more skills you acquire, along with the diversity of your knowledge will shape your future, and allow you access to the good life. If you want to become an expert in one subject, by all means don't put out the extra effort to study a new subject. But if you want to be more than just a harpist, broaden your horizons and take the virtuous path.

--Jack O'fallitrades

Let's look at this problem in two ways. First, if you are really are doing this paper to delve deeper and learn more about the topic then I will say that your morals are true and even Kant would agree that you are in the clear. However, if you are doing this partially because you already do know things about your topic and it would be easy to redo with a little bit more information added, then you are doing it for unethical reasons and therefore the action would be considered unethical.

Second, I would recommend you go through the old sources and see what you can do about rephrasing and pulling as little as you can from your original paper and focus on the new information that you can find about your topic. If you are still worried, you could list your own paper as a resource and talk with your teacher about it.

--Go Find The Diamonds That Are Deeper

Keep the topic, ditch the paper. According to Aristotle, it might be perfectly ethical to continue with the topic that you're interested—it is a human being's telos to be just as human as they can be, and who can conduct such research but humans? Especially in their own areas of interest. From the view point of virtue
ethics, it would be quite human and virtuous of you to pursue the topic that most interests you. You would also not be obstructing anyone else's rights by
reusing portions of your own paper—however, I would personally advise against doing so. Take this opportunity to improve on your original paper, not copy it;
research further this topic you’re so attached to, and develop your arguments and rhetoric for the new assignment. If you are really so interested in the topic,
should be easy to write a paper which is even better than the first.
-- Improve Thyself

Writing papers can be very tough and time consuming. I can see the attraction to reusing parts of an old paper to help speed the writing of a new one. And
from a purely ethical/legal standpoint, because you wrote that old paper, it is already your intellectual property and it would not be stealing or plagiarism to
reuse parts of it in a future publication. However, from a scholarly standpoint, it would be in your best interest to choose a different topic that you have not
already explored in order to expand the range of your knowledge, even if that topic may not be the most interesting to you. If people only ever learned about
things we thought we’d enjoy to learn about then no one would know nearly as much as they should. If you want to learn more about the topic that you have
already written about and enjoy, you most definitely should, but don’t limit yourself. So, there is no ethical problem to reusing parts of an old paper, but as a
scholar, you may want to consider choosing a different topic.
--Broaden Your Horizons

To determine whether or not you should use segments of your old paper, you must first determine what your is motive for using your old topic. If the reason
you are using your old topic is because it is of interest to you and you would like to research more about the subject while writing your paper you spend
quality time on it, then that may be morally acceptable. If the reason you want to use your old topic is to be lazy and spend less time on your paper, get an
easy grade, then it is not morally acceptable. If you look at deontological, which says the end result is not important but the means by which you get there is,
whatever consequences result from using your old research does not matter. What does matter is how you go about using your old research, and the
honorable way of doing that is only using it as a starting point to learn more, delve deeper, and improve your writing.
--Ryan

I don’t believe plagiarism is what you are really worried about. Based on your entry, it seems as if you feel it is morally wrong to use a paper you have
submitted for another class; this way, you will not have to spend time writing yet another paper on the same topic. Regarding this, my suggestion is to do
whatever makes you the most happy. If it would make you happier to spend this time doing something of greater value to you, then do that. If you think it
would hang over your head to use an old paper, write a new one. It’s your grade, and if you think a high school paper will suffice for a college class, go for it.
--Writing CAN Bring Happiness

If you talk to your professor and show him or her the paper, and they it is OK to use it as a skeleton to write a deeper more thoughtful paper off of it, then
morally you are not in the wrong. However if you just turn in a paper you have already written and call it an original piece, then it is morally incorrect. From a
logos standpoint these are your ideas and your work so you are not plagiarizing. The research should be ok to reuse because if you had started a new paper
you could still find those sources. It really depends on what your professor has to say, though.
--Looking at Logos

I don’t feel that it is plagiarism if you use parts of your old paper for a new one. Using the knowledge and opinions that you already have obtained should not
be considered wrong. In school we are using equations and formulas that were not invented by us. When you use the knowledge you learned in class on the
test it's not plagiarizing or copying. However, if you use something that you haven't learned or created without crediting the original author then it would be
considered plagiarism. I think plagiarism starts when people use others work and claim it as their own; and it almost always ends with an F on that paper.
--Continue to Use What You Create and Know—Employing Caution, Though

Immanuel Kant would probably disagree with reusing your old paper, whether it is the whole thing or just sections of it. Kantian ethics deals with the motives
behind each action. By reusing your paper, it seems as if you do not want to put in the effort to researching a new topic and writing about it. The motive in
this situation seems to be that you are trying to find the easy solution to this problem by reusing your paper; thus you would be acting out of the wrong
motives. Also, Kanitan ethics does not condone lying. By using something that you have already written, you are not being totally truthful in saying that you
wrote the paper just for this assignment and this class. However, I do not believe that reusing your research would be considered bad ethics because you
will have to check that the data is still updated and accurate. The best option, according to Kantian ethics, would be to just pick a new topic to write the
paper about, or to use the existing research and focus on another view of the topic. Either way, this should ensure that you do not get in trouble for
plagiarizing.
--Start Anew

New Dilemmas
I recently got a test back, and I was very happy with my score. While going through the test, though, I noticed some mistakes that the grader had missed. I
really do not want grade to be diminished, but at the same time I do not want to be walking away with a score I didn’t earn. Should I bring the test to the
teacher’s attention, and throw myself on his mercy with the possibility of him lowering the test grade. I could, also, just keep my grade and be happy with it?
What is the moral thing to do?
--Test Results Aren’t Always Clearly Positive or Negative

I am a freshman here at Mines, and like most of you other freshman, I am looking for a place to live off campus next year. I had been approached by a
couple of upperclassman friends (let’s call them roommates group one, or RG1) that were looking for a roommate starting this summer. Everything had been
set in stone for me to live with them, or so I thought. A couple of weeks ago, they told me that another one of my friends’ living plans for next year might not
work out and that if they didn’t, he wanted to move in with them. I was taken aback. They told me to start looking for another place to live just in case the
friend wanted to move in there.

So I did, and I found people to live with (RG2) and we started looking for a place. After we found a couple options, RG1 told me that it all worked out and that I could move in with them. Now here comes the problem. Originally I was obligated to RG1 and they were just as obligated to me. They broke that trust when they put my position back up for grabs. Then I became obligated to RG2. So now I am wondering what I should do. Which obligation should I honor? The original one with RG1? Or the new one with RG2 because RG1 nearly broke their obligation to me?

--Homeless Engineer