Recycling Essays

In high-stress times, the idea to recycle an old paper for a new assignment is tempting. However, it’s important to remember that education is a process, much like sports or music. You can’t expect to learn without doing the work. Anyone who looks at an old essay after a year or two is sure to be put off by the quality of what they thought was good writing. The process of writing is never static. So the next time you think about recycling one of your older essays for a new assignment, ask yourself some honest questions:

- Have I improved as a writer since I wrote this paper?
- Does this essay really fit the guidelines for a new assignment?
- Would writing a new essay take more time than revising an old one?
- Will I learn what I am supposed to if I recycle a paper?
- What if I get caught self-plagiarizing? That’s serious business!
- What do I have to gain in the end from being lazy?
- Is recycling an old paper worth the risk?

Recycling a paper is rarely the best idea. It’s okay to look through your past writing to get an idea, but be sure to get creative and build on it for a new assignment. Believe it or not, there’s a reason for the seemingly tedious essay requirements for each class. Just remember that learning comes with a struggle, and while it may take a few sleepless nights to actually do your assignments, you’ll feel better in the end and learn something in the process.