



University of Brighton

“All My Own Work?” Plagiarism and how to avoid it

Student notes



University of Brighton

Welcome to the University of Brighton. We hope that your experience of higher education will be enjoyable and inspiring.

All members of the academic community around the world, whatever our subject disciplines, are committed to the creation and discovery of knowledge and the free exchange of ideas. This ideal relies on a common understanding of the notion of academic honesty which, at its simplest, means never falsifying the results of research and always giving full credit for any other people's contributions to our own achievements.

Because it is so important to safeguard academic integrity, conventions have evolved which you will need to observe in all your academic work from now on. Some of these may already be familiar to you and in most cases the reasons are obvious, but some rules and procedures may seem pointless or confusing. Nevertheless, you will need to understand and respect them, to avoid unintentionally committing a serious academic offence for which the penalty may be failure of your course and a requirement to leave the University.

Necessarily some of the issues relating to plagiarism are complex; if you have any concerns or questions about any of the points discussed in this document then do raise them with your personal tutor, course tutor or year tutor. If you read the student notes, ensure that you understand it and follow its guidance, then I am confident you will be able to complete your course at the University of Brighton successfully.

All My Own Work?

Plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Activity 1 - Why does it matter?

Take some time to think about the implications of each of these situations. Make brief notes of your responses and then discuss them with other students:

1. A medical researcher falsifies the results of a new anti-cancer drug to make his discovery seem more important.
2. A writer submits an idea for a series to a television company, who turn it down. A few months later, they broadcast an almost identical programme. She never receives any acknowledgment or payment.
3. A historian publishes a book claiming that the Holocaust never took place. He makes lots of detailed assertions backed up by anonymous quotations but does not give any sources for this information.
4. A minority of students at a particular university are acquiring essays via the Internet, and the university authorities have failed to stop the practice. This has led to a decline in the University's reputation and all their graduates (even genuinely first-class students) are now finding it hard to get a job.
5. A design student loses the portfolio containing all her sketches for her final project, and has to start again from scratch. At the final degree show, she finds that many of her original ideas have been used in another student's work.

Clearly some of these situations have more immediately serious consequences than others, but they all threaten people's lives or livelihoods and distort perceptions of the truth.

In the long term, this affects us all.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the word given to a particular kind of academic dishonesty - passing off someone else's work, ideas or words as your own. It can sometimes be unintentional, especially where students' previous educational experiences have actively encouraged the compiling of material from outside sources as an approach to writing essays.

The growth of the internet means that borrowing is not confined to printed works, and cutting and pasting material from web-pages may have been acceptable for some school projects. However, in higher education this would be regarded as plagiarism, unless the web-pages were properly acknowledged and the content was accompanied by a critical commentary.

Here is one definition:

Plagiarism may take the form of repeating another's [words] as your own.... or even presenting someone else's line of thinking ... as though it were your own. In short, to plagiarise is to give the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from another. Although a writer may use other people's words and thoughts, they must be acknowledged as such. (MLA 1977, p.5)

In that case, is it acceptable to copy lengthy passages of text so long as you use quotation marks, give accurate references and join them up with a few sentences of your own? This is not technically plagiarism, but it would be considered poor academic practice. At University, you are expected to develop your own voice and to use relevant quotations and references to help construct your own argument - building on other people's research rather than sheltering behind it.

An American college professor wrote the following advice for his students:

Only use someone else's writing when you want to quote precisely what they wrote. If this is not your goal, USE YOUR OWN WORDS. [...] Understanding and learning is more than just replaying something you have heard. Writing is a valuable exercise that tests your ability to explain a topic. I often think I understand something, until I try to write it out. This is an important part of learning. (Van Bramer, 1995)

Activity 2

The examples below are based on an exercise in Swales and Feale (1993), cited by Jude Carroll (2001).

Here are six ways to use sources. Example number one is plagiarism; example six is not. Where do you cross the line?

1. Copying a paragraph word for word from a source without acknowledgement.
2. Copying a paragraph and making small changes - e.g. replacing a few verbs, replacing an adjective with a synonym; acknowledgement in the bibliography.
3. Cutting and pasting a paragraph by using sentences of the original but omitting one or two and putting one or two in a different order, no quotation marks; with an in-text acknowledgement plus bibliography.
4. Composing a paragraph by taking short phrases from a number of sources and putting them together using words of your own to make a coherent whole with an in-text acknowledgement plus bibliography.
5. Paraphrasing a paragraph by rewriting with substantial changes in language and organisation; the new version will also have changes in the amount of detail used and the examples cited; citing in bibliography.
6. Quoting a paragraph by placing it in block format with the source cited in text and bibliography.

Whether or not you are quoting directly, or summarising or questioning ideas and information that have contributed to the development of your ideas, it is still important for you to give full details of your sources.

This has two purposes:

- to acknowledge other writers' contributions to your ideas
- to enable your course tutors to help you. If weaknesses in your work come from using poor quality texts, they need to know what these are so they can advise you on more interesting, reliable or up to date materials.

Some instances of academic 'borrowing' may involve other kinds of source material, and are potentially more serious.

Activity 3

Look at the following examples. Do they amount to plagiarism? Which do you think is the most serious? Why?

1. Mary pays £100 for an outline for an essay from a commercial supplier and uses it as the basis of her own coursework.
2. Nazeem and Daniel work together on a piece of coursework and submit very similar answers, claiming in each case that it is their own work.
3. Su, a first year student, finds a discarded copy in the print room of an answer done by a student who appears to be studying a similar course. The ideas are so good that she uses them for her work – they clearly cannot be improved upon. She does not know whose they are.

Plagiarism, whatever the source of the material or the intended outcome, is unacceptable. It is important to understand that *intention* does not have a role to play in the definition of plagiarism.

What are the penalties?

The main reason to avoid plagiarism is for your own sake - you will be wasting your time at University unless you learn to develop your own ideas. But there are additional University sanctions which may include outright failure of your degree.

Activity 4

1. How do you think each of the examples in Activities 2 and 3 would be dealt with by the University?
2. Now look at the attached section on academic misconduct from the University's *General Examination and Assessment Regulations for taught courses* (GEAR) - students are responsible for familiarising themselves with these regulations in full.

Which of the examples above do you think would be considered 'poor academic practice' or 'academic misconduct' offences?

- 3 What would happen a) for a first offence and b) for a subsequent offence?
- 4 What other kinds of behaviour are included in 'academic misconduct'?

It is also important to realise that a record of the investigation will go on file and may have to be referred to if a request for a reference is made by a prospective employer. Similarly, if an allegation of collusion or plagiarism is upheld where a student is enrolled for an award which would have carried eligibility for recognition by a professional association, the professional association may, at the discretion of the Examination Board, be informed of the facts and of the University's actions.

This doesn't go away. In July 2002 the Vice-Chancellor of one of the world's top Universities was forced to hand in his resignation after it was discovered that he had plagiarised by copying from other authors without attribution in books published in 1979 and 1983. You may be able to think of some more recent examples which have been reported in the news.

Finally, some reassurance....

All the talk of sanctions and rules can be alarming, but if you remember what was said in the introduction about how Universities and academics work - creating new knowledge by exchanging and building on each other's ideas, while acknowledging their sources - then the rest just requires common sense and some time to get used to the referencing conventions used in your subject – which will be explained in your course handbooks.

As Hugh Pyper (2000) wrote:

.. if you are clear, careful and honest there should be no problem. Don't let the fear of plagiarism keep you from using to the full the amazing resources in other people's writings.

*Learning how to make proper and responsible use of other people's work in developing your own understanding of a subject is the heart of academic life. Reading good scholarly work should also give you useful examples and models of good practice and you should actively look out for ways in which these may help you improve your own writing. **If in doubt, ASK!***

Further guidance and help

This booklet is intended just to give basic general information about the nature of plagiarism and why it is taken seriously. Further advice is also available in your course handbooks, library and on the internet.

Take some time to read through the guidance in your course handbook and in the online **ASK Academic Study Kit**, available at <https://student.brighton.ac.uk/ask/> which you will find on your homepage in Studentcentral. This contains advice on all aspects of studying, including [avoiding plagiarism](#).

However, the most important guidance comes from your course handbook and course lecturers, who will advise you on what is expected and the referencing conventions used in your discipline.

If you are unsure about anything, do ask them.

Using Turnitin at the University

The University uses Turnitin to help with [eSubmission](#), marking and feedback of students' assessment. The University reserves the right to use the Turnitin originality checker, and students' work submitted for assessment purposes may be submitted for checking. This use complies with UK Data Protection Law and Copyright Law.

References

In this article, a fairly standard form of Harvard referencing has been used, with in-text citations in brackets showing the author, date and (where appropriate) page number. Fuller publication details are then given in a list of references at the end, arranged alphabetically by author.

- Carroll, J. (2001) *What kinds of solutions can we find for plagiarism?* [online]
- MLA (2009) *Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* New York: Modern Languages Association 7th ed.
- Pyper, H. (2000), *Avoiding Plagiarism, Advice for students*
- Swales, J. and Feak, C. (1993) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan
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Academic Misconduct

(from the [*General Examination and Assessment Regulations for Taught Courses*](#))¹

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The University seeks to promote better understanding by students of academic integrity and practice. It expects all students to inform themselves of the academic conventions for correctly citing and acknowledging the work of others. In particular students are expected to familiarise themselves with the University's plagiarism pack "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It" and with these regulations.
- 1.2 Whilst an emphasis is put on enabling students to learn correct academic practice and to achieve high academic standards, the University will normally consider whether first occurrences of poor academic practice can be used as a learning opportunity, taking into account the stage of study concerned. Nevertheless attempts to gain unfair advantage or to cheat are taken very seriously and all allegations of academic misconduct will be investigated according to these regulations. There can be a range of penalties from the educational, including advice on good academic practice up to, at the most severe, being required to withdraw without a degree or exit award for cases of serious cheating.
- 1.3 "Poor Academic Practice" normally arises through lack of following academic conventions by a student not yet familiar with the assessment practices of the University. Hence their work may include un-attributed or incorrectly referenced material that is very similar to the original source.
- 1.4 "Academic Misconduct" is normally an attempt to gain unfair advantage by e.g. fabricating data, passing off work as the student's own or repeated poor academic practice.
- 1.5 These procedures cover students on all modules and taught courses (including MRes).
- 1.6 The University [*Guidance on proofreading*](#) sets out for students what is and is not considered acceptable proofreading practice for all summative work in order to ensure that at all times the student's responsibility as author of their own work is clear.
- 1.7 An Examination Board will not normally overturn a decision by a Head of School (or nominee) or an Academic Misconduct Panel.
- 1.8 The University reserves the right to institute disciplinary proceedings arising from a case of academic misconduct with the Student Disciplinary Procedure and/or to refer a student to the "Fitness to Practise Panel".

2 Definition of academic misconduct

- 2.1 Academic misconduct includes, **but is not limited to:**
 - Plagiarism. Where a student submits work originated in sum or in part by

¹ For collaborative provision (excluding consortium courses where the University is a delivering partner and specialist providers), the Principal of each College will nominate a senior member of staff at the College who will be responsible for investigating cases of alleged academic misconduct. This will include reviewing the evidence, determining whether the alleged misconduct is poor academic practice or academic misconduct, interviewing the student if the case is poor academic practice and appointing the investigating panel members where the case is considered to be academic misconduct. Refer addendum to GEAR for more information.

- someone else, with or without their consent but without acknowledgement;
- Collusion. A type of plagiarism defined as collaborating with another student(s) in the completion of assessed work and submitting this as being entirely the student's own work.
- Falsification or fabrication of results, data or references;
- Duplication. Where a student submits work for assessment that is the same as, or broadly similar to, work submitted earlier for academic credit, without acknowledgement of the previous submission;
- Cheating in an invigilated examination. Where a student copies from unauthorised material or from another student's script within an examination room, communicates with another person during an examination, consults information or individuals while absent from the examination room, or attempts to gain a higher grade by fraudulent means;
- Impersonation. Where one person assumes the identity of another with the intention of gaining unfair advantage for that person;
- Ghosting. Where a student submits as their own, work that has been done as a whole or in part by another person on their behalf, or deliberately makes available or seeks to make available material to another student with the intention that the material is to be used by the other student to commit academic misconduct.
- Unethical behaviour. Conduct which deviates from accepted ethical behaviour, including failure to gain ethical approval, coercion or bribery of project participants, breach of confidentiality or improper handling of privileged or private information on individuals gathered during data collection.

3 Procedure for dealing with academic misconduct

- 3.1 The initial procedures for dealing with poor academic practice or academic misconduct in work submitted for assessment and for dealing with academic misconduct in an invigilated examination are set out at paragraphs 4 and 5 below.

4 Initial procedures for dealing with academic misconduct in work submitted for assessment

- 4.1 Where a member of staff suspects poor academic practice or academic misconduct in work submitted for assessment, he/she will report the suspicion to the Course Leader (or equivalent) and will forward the available evidence for consideration by the Head of School responsible for the delivery of the module or nominee.
- 4.2 Where an external examiner suspects academic misconduct, he/she should notify the Course Leader (or equivalent), who will investigate the suspicion.
- 4.3 The Head of School, or nominee, will consider the work against the criteria at 6.1.1 below and will determine whether the student should be required to attend an Academic Practice Review or whether the matter is to be referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel.
- 4.4 The Head of School or nominee will write to the student in accordance with 6.1.1 below, as soon as possible upon receipt of the member of staff's report, informing them that a case of alleged academic misconduct has been reported and making them aware of the support available to them through Student Services or the University of Brighton Students' Union.
- 4.5 An allegation of academic misconduct may be made after the work has been

marked and returned to the student.

5 Initial procedures for dealing with academic misconduct in an invigilated examination

- 5.1 Where an invigilator in an examination suspects that academic misconduct may have taken place, the following procedure must be used.
- 5.2 If possible, the attention of another invigilator should be drawn to the student's behaviour.
- 5.3 The student will be allowed to continue with the examination having been informed that a full report will be submitted following the examination. Where the student is in possession or uses unauthorised material², such material will be confiscated by the invigilator and submitted with the invigilator's report. At the end of the examination, the student will have his/her attention drawn by the invigilator to the procedures for investigating academic misconduct which will be followed (as detailed in section 6.3).
- 5.4 The invigilator initiating the action must enter a full and detailed account of the evidence on the Invigilator Report Form, including the student's examination number and submit this to the Head of School or nominee, within two working days of the examination, who will assess whether there is a potential case of academic misconduct to be answered and decide whether to refer the matter to the Academic Misconduct Panel (refer section 6.3).

6 Procedures for investigating academic misconduct

6.1 Categorisation of Poor Academic Practice/Academic Misconduct

- 6.1.1 The Head of School or nominee will consider the initial evidence and determine whether the case should be dealt with by an Academic Practice Review meeting or by an Academic Misconduct Panel. Although a first occurrence will normally be dealt with by an Academic Practice Review, a number of factors will be taken into account including:
- i. Whether there is a reasonable expectation that the student should have learned appropriate academic practice (e.g. reference skills) and received sufficient guidance (e.g. tutorial or "plagiarism pack").
 - ii. Any previous recorded instance of poor academic practice or academic misconduct by the student;
 - iii. The magnitude and proportion of the assignment affected; and
 - iv. Whether the student is subject to a professional code of practice or requirement.

The student will be notified in writing of the outcome of the Head of School or nominee's assessment of the alleged poor academic practice or academic misconduct, details of its nature and whether it will be dealt with by way of an Academic Practice Review meeting with the Head of School or nominee or by requiring the student to attend an Academic Misconduct Panel.

- 6.1.2 If the Head of School or nominee considers that there is no reasonable evidence of poor practice or academic misconduct, then he/she will notify the member of staff

² Students should only be allowed to have in their possession such material as is specified in the general regulations or in the rubric of the examination.

reporting the case and the Course Leader and the process is terminated at this stage. No record will be placed on the student's file.

6.2 Academic Practice Review

6.2.1 The student will be invited to attend an interview with the Head of School or nominee, normally within five working days following notification of the decision to the student. The student will be notified in writing of their right to seek advice and representation from the Students' Union or to be accompanied to the meeting by another student or member of staff and will be given a copy of any work or evidence to be considered at the meeting.

6.2.2 The academic work in question will be discussed and the student will be given the opportunity to discuss other academic work they have submitted for assessment. The Head of School, or nominee, will ensure that appropriate instruction is given on how to avoid the problem in future and the work in question will be returned to the marker and marked in accordance with the extent and merits of the valid parts of the work. The marker will provide extensive feedback on how the deficiencies in the work could be addressed. Advice will be given on the potential consequences of any further instances of poor academic practice.

A report of the meeting will be placed on the student's file and the Course leader will be advised of the outcome only.

6.2.3 If at the end of the interview the Head of School or nominee considers that the case should now be categorised as Academic Misconduct, the student will be informed that the case will be referred to an Academic Misconduct Panel.

If the Head of School or nominee considers that there is now no reasonable evidence of poor academic practice or academic misconduct, the process is terminated at this stage and no record will be placed on the student's file.

If the student fails to attend an Academic Practice Review without reasonable explanation, they may be referred to the Academic Misconduct Panel.

6.3 Academic Misconduct Panel

6.3.1 The student will be invited to attend an interview with an Academic Misconduct Panel, which will meet to investigate the case as soon as reasonably practicable following the allegation of academic misconduct. The student will be notified in writing of their right to be accompanied to the meeting by another student, a member of staff or a member of the student's union advice service. They will be provided with details of the alleged academic misconduct, given a copy of any work or evidence to be considered by the panel and advised of their right to submit a statement in mitigation.

6.3.2 The Panel will be constituted as follows:

- Head of School or their nominee (as Chair)³
 - Two members of staff not involved in the teaching of the student (this may include the Course Leader)
- i. the member of staff who reported the suspicion of academic misconduct is not a member of the Panel but may be invited to the panel hearing to present

³ Note that the Academic Misconduct Panel Chair should not be the Chair of the student's Course Examination Board

the facts of the case and to answer any questions from the panel;

- ii. all decisions of the panel will be made by majority vote. The panel has the right to defer its decision if further investigations are required, but a decision must be made, in writing to the student, as soon as reasonable practicable.

6.3.3 The panel will be serviced by an Administrator from the School or nominee, who will notify the members of the Panel and the student(s) concerned of the date, time and place of the meeting of the Panel, at least five working days before the meeting is due to take place. This person will be responsible for taking a full note of the evidence and the decision of the panel.

6.3.4 If the academic misconduct in question involves more than one student, the same Panel may consider each case depending on categorisation in accordance with 6.1.1 above.

6.3.5 The Panel may proceed in the absence of the student where it is satisfied that due notice was given, and there is no satisfactory explanation for the student's absence.

6.3.6 The Chair of the Panel will hold only information on the student's level, stage of study, current profile of results, and the report from the member of staff who undertook the initial investigation. The Chair will not be in possession of details of any previous cases of academic misconduct on the student's record, and no reference to any such cases will be made at this point.

6.3.7 The student will be presented with the allegation and the evidence. The Panel will interview the student (and witnesses where appropriate) and consider the student's written statement. The student will be given the opportunity to reply to all evidence and to address the Panel before it considers its decision.

6.3.8 If the Panel finds there is no reasonable evidence of academic misconduct, the process is terminated at this stage and the student absolved of the allegation. The work will be returned to the marker and the mark/grade given by the marker for the piece of work will stand and no record will be kept on the student's file.

6.3.9 Where the Panel finds reasonable evidence of academic misconduct, or if the student admits that academic misconduct has taken place, the case is upheld. At this stage the Chair will call for the student's record for any previous cases of academic misconduct before the panel makes its recommendations of the penalty. A written report of the Panel's deliberations will be sent to the Chair of the Course Examination Board and a copy sent to the Secretary of the Academic Board. The report will include:

- i. a statement of the evidence considered by the Panel and the Panel's conclusions;
- ii. details of any other cases of proven or admitted academic misconduct in the student's record;
- iii. the outcome.

A record of the Panel's report will be retained on the student's file and logged in the Examination Board file.

6.3.10 The Chair of the Panel will report the outcome in writing to the student(s), as soon as reasonably practicable after the meeting giving full reasons.

7 Penalties and professional practice

- 7.1 The Panel will be appraised of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements, and has the authority to forward the outcome of the case to 'Fitness to Practise' panels, or to recommend notification where this is a requirement of the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body. The student will be informed of any such action.

8 Student's right of appeal

- 8.1 A student who wishes to appeal against the outcome of an Academic Misconduct Panel should write to the Registrar and Secretary within 10 working days of notification of the decision. An Appeal shall only be made on one or more of the following grounds:
- i. That there is material evidence now available which was not previously available to the Academic Misconduct Panel and of such a nature to cause doubt as to whether the result might have been different had the material been available to the Panel;
 - ii. That the facts as set out in the findings of the Panel do not warrant the finding that there was academic misconduct.
 - iii. That the penalty imposed was unreasonable having regard to all the circumstances of the case.
- 8.2 A simple rehearsal of the arguments from the original Panel hearing will not be deemed adequate grounds for appeal. In cases where new evidence is to be submitted, or where a new witness is to give evidence, the nature of this evidence must also be stated together with an explanation of why it was not available to the original Panel.
- 8.3 The Registrar and Secretary will then decide whether the appeal meets any of the grounds listed above. If the decision is taken that there are no grounds for appeal, the student will be informed in writing as soon as possible after receipt of the appeal by University.
- 8.4 If it is identified that there are valid grounds for appeal, an Academic Misconduct Appeals Panel, whose members were not members of the original Academic Misconduct Panel, will be constituted. Normally the Appeals Panel will consist of:
- a Dean, Head of School or their nominee as Chair,
 - a member of staff familiar with assessment on the student's course or module and
 - a member of staff from outside the student's school

The meeting of the Appeals Panel will take the form of a re-hearing and will follow a similar process to the original panel. The decision of the Appeals Panel will be notified as soon as possible following the procedures described. There is no further right of appeal and the decision of the Appeals Panel shall be final.

9 Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

A student may complain about the Appeal Panel's decision (or any decision short of the Appeals Panel that effectively brings the internal process to an end) to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Details of how to complain can be found at: <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>