Avoiding Academic Misconduct – Student Guidance

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Introduction

The aim of this guide is to help you understand what academic misconduct is and what you should do to avoid it. The main types of academic misconduct are explained. If a tutor suspects that a student has committed academic misconduct, it will be investigated and a penalty will be imposed if it is found to have occurred. The University procedure for establishing that academic misconduct has occurred, and what action will be taken, is briefly described. The guide is for all students but there are specific procedures relating to postgraduate research students

What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct relates to academic work that does not meet normal standards of academic practice. Types of academic misconduct are defined in the Academic misconduct procedure applying to cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct available [here](#).

This includes:

1. Copying text or images without acknowledging the source

2. passing off someone else's work or ideas as your own

3. submitting work which has been produced by someone else, e.g. another student, an essay bank, ghost writing service including on-line essay writing services.

4. submitting assessed work meant to be your own on which others have collaborated

5. cheating in exams

6. making up research data

7. falsifying signatures of others, e.g. on consent forms.

Why does it happen?

It may happen unintentionally, e.g. a misunderstanding of the rules of referencing, but penalties can be applied even if academic misconduct was not intended so students must have an understanding of what is and is not acceptable academic practice when completing assignments and examinations.

Students simply might want a better mark and think that cheating is the way to get it, or run out of time and take short cuts. Students should also be aware that any use of proof reading services are solely to identify grammatical, spelling or punctuation mistakes. The use of proof reading services may constitute academic misconduct if the service includes any editorial activity which entails re-writing or re-wording the student's original work. More serious penalties are applied where deliberate intention to gain unfair advantage by cheating can be demonstrated.

How does the University deal with academic misconduct?

There are a number of reasons why academic misconduct may be suspected. A tutor may notice that a student's work is similar to that of another student or be inconsistent in style or vocabulary. Use of Turnitin can show how similar it is to other work or sources. Students can also use this tool to check their own work for errors in referencing. Please refer to the Student Guide to Turnitin available [here](#).

If academic misconduct is suspected, the tutor will ask the student to attend a Stage 1 meeting (which may be conducted by telephone if impractical to convene onsite). The student can bring a friend along. At the meeting it will be explained why there is a problem. It gives the student an opportunity to respond and explain how they prepared the work. If academic misconduct is still suspected, the student will be asked to admit or deny the allegation.

If denied, and the tutor still believes there is a case to answer, the student will be asked to attend a Stage 2 academic misconduct panel which will make a final decision on the allegation. The student can bring a friend along. It may be possible for a student to take part in the meeting by telephone if they cannot attend in person.

Please refer to the Academic misconduct appeals procedure available [here](#).

What are the penalties for academic misconduct?

If it is decided that academic misconduct has taken place, the Programme Assessment Board will determine what penalty to apply. There are a range of penalties which reflect the study level of the student and the extent to which learning outcomes are met. There are more serious penalties for 'subsequent offences' and for students in later stages of the course. Penalties range from a reduced or zero mark for the assignment or whole module through to the student being required to withdraw from the programme. Guidance on this is given in the Academic misconduct procedure.

Common types of academic misconduct

1. Plagiarism

This is defined as the unacknowledged incorporation in a student's work of material derived from the work (published or unpublished) of another. Examples are:

- the inclusion in a student's work of more than a single phrase from another person's work without the use of quotation marks and acknowledgement of the sources

- the summarising of another person's work by simply changing a few words or altering the order of presentation, without acknowledgement

- the use of the ideas of another person without acknowledgement of the source

- the unacknowledged use of images (digital or otherwise) music, patents or other creative material either in the entirety or in the creation of a derivative work

- copying the work of another student

- unacknowledged resubmission of work that you have previously submitted to gain

academic credit at this University or elsewhere

<u>Common errors that students make</u>

- Taking sentences from one source and mixing them up with sentences from another source to produce what the student considers to be a novel piece of text (patch-writing)

- Students are not expected to write to the standard of professional authors. Using the words of others because you think they are better than you can write is not acceptable - you must use your own words to show what you have learned

- Rearranging order of words/sentences, changing verbs/adjectives

- Copying large pieces of text and referencing - this is poor academic practice because it does not demonstrate understanding or analysis of the material

- Incorporating images or sound (perhaps music) found on the internet into an assignment without acknowledging the source (even if correctly referenced, copyright may be infringed)

<u>To avoid plagiarism</u>

In assessed work, you need to show that you have considered relevant sources and can explain what you have learned using your own words.

- First gather together the sources that you wish to refer to in your assignment

- Read them and jot down notes on what you think the author of each book chapter, article or web-page is saying

- At this stage, put the original sources away and begin to write your essay or report using your own words, referring back to the original sources only if you are looking for quotes to include (which you should reference)

- Reference all sources appropriately both in-text and in your references section

- Never 'copy and paste' any text from an original source into your own work

2. Collusion

This is where assessment work is submitted as your own, but has not been completed independently. Copying the work of another student, with or without their knowledge or agreement, counts as plagiarism. If the work has been copied with the permission of the other student, this becomes collusion and both students are committing academic misconduct. Examples are where a student:

- submits work, that has been done in collaboration with another person, as being entirely their own work

- collaborates with another student in the completion of work which is submitted as that

student's own work

- enables another student to copy all or part of his/her own work and to submit it as their own work; both students will be penalised

Common errors that students make

- Thinking that if they have completed a project as part of a group, they can work together to write it up – you may discuss an assessment task, but it must be written independently unless stated otherwise

- Misunderstanding group work assessment requirements – you should be clear on the requirements for independent and group submission

- Unintentionally enabling others to access your work by not taking reasonable precautions, e.g. leaving a logged-on computer unattended

To avoid collusion

- It is acceptable for you to share resources with your fellow students, such as interesting or relevant papers and /or articles that you come across

- You should not give another student your preparation notes, as that student may then use your work and pass it off as their own

- You should not give another student a copy of work that you submit for assessment - if they use it for their assessment you will be implicated for academic misconduct

3. Other forms of academic misconduct

Ghosting including Contract Cheating is where a student uses other people to write part or all of their assessed work, e.g. using a 'ghost writing' service. Any student providing such a service will also commit academic misconduct. This is also often referred to as 'contract cheating' and covers the purchase of services from on-line essay writing sites.

Falsification is falsifying or 'making up' data or information. This includes presentation of data in laboratory reports, projects or other forms of assessment based on experimental or other work falsely purported to have been carried out by the student, or obtained by unfair means. Another example is the falsification of references, including the invention of references and/or false claims. Falsification of evidence to support a claim that extenuating circumstances have affected your assessed work, or any other falsification of information to gain unfair advantage, will also be treated as academic misconduct.

Personation is the legal term for impersonation. If, for example, you have someone sit an exam for you, both parties commit academic misconduct.

Cheating in an examination.

These types of academic misconduct are treated very seriously as they involve intention to deceive, and to gain unfair advantage from the outset.

4. Need help?

- For advice on your assessment task, contact your tutor

- If your assessed work has been affected by extenuating circumstances, speak to your tutor or contact Ask4Help at Student Central or via the Student Portal; for details of related procedures go to the Student Guide to PEC evidence available here.

- Northumbria Skills Plus (select 'referencing and plagiarism' from specific topics) here

- Student Guide to Turnitin - Library staff and the ASK4HELP Service can advise students on use of Turnitin and interpreting Originality Reports

- For advice on an academic misconduct allegation, contact the relevant Caseworker at the Students' Union (email su.advice@northumbria.ac.uk or telephone 0191 227 4757) or click here

- For students on taught programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate) please refer to the Academic misconduct procedure

- For postgraduate research students, please see the Academic Support web pages here