

Avoiding Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is fundamental to the values promoted by the University. It is important that all students are judged on their ability, and that no student is allowed unfairly to take an advantage over others, to affect the security and integrity of the assessment process, or to diminish the reliability and quality of a St Andrews degree.

Academic misconduct includes *inter alia* the presentation of material as one's own when it is not one's own; multiple submission of the same material (aka self-plagiarism), the presentation of material whose provenance is academically inappropriate; academically inappropriate behaviour in an examination or class test, and in general any attempt at bending or breaking rules or misrepresenting work to gain an unfair advantage. Any work that is submitted for feedback and evaluation (whether formative or summative, at any point in the programme of study) is liable to consideration under the University's [Good Academic Practice](#) policy. All work submitted by students is expected to represent good academic practice. (Accessed 15/08/2014: [click here](#) for current policies).

Given that all St Andrews students have completed the Good Academic Policy training course at least once, it is very disappointing when students still show signs of academic misconduct.

1. How do I present referenced material in my assignment?

You have to present material that has been written by yourself in a way that shows that you have understood it. This means that you have to express concepts and ideas in a clear and concise fashion using your own words and your own presentation structure. The exercise of thinking of different and better ways to express something ensures you really understand it or realise that you don't. If you think of an assignment as you giving a lecture, then write to explain a concept to an imaginary audience. You might find it seems incomprehensible: this means it is not clear. Going through the text in your mind many times will ensure it is salient and coherent. Even on the 10th or the 100th time of explaining concepts you can improve.

Core to writing is the presentation of information (ideas, concepts, theories, methods, results...) that you have gleaned from your reading. You need to present and explain these in your own words. This first section presents some general guidance on how (and how not) to present that information.

1.1. Do not change a few words

When you need to present the ideas or results of other authors, you still need to use your own words to do so, unless you are making a direct quote. The following is copied from [Swansea University](#) [*additions are shown in italics and are for clarification*]

“There are two ways to refer to the works of other authors:

Paraphrasing allows you to summarise another author's ideas in your own words, whilst still acknowledging the original source. Quotation marks are not

needed. A concise well-paraphrased account demonstrates your understanding of what you have read.

When paraphrasing or referring to an idea contained in another work, you are encouraged to provide a page or paragraph number, especially when it would help an interested reader locate the relevant passage in a long or complex text. If you refer to a table or diagram, you must include a page number as the reader may wish to check it.

Direct quotes can be used. However, an assignment cannot be a 'cut and paste' exercise. Quotations should be used sparingly, [*and only when necessary to make a specific point for which you need to analyse or refer to what was exactly written by the authors*] as the person reading the assignment wants to see your views and analysis of what you have read. When you use a direct quote always give the page number(s) or paragraph number for non-paginated material and place double quotation marks around the quotation. [*Typically you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of what is said in the direct quote by discussing it in your own words as part of your argument*].

Example of Paraphrasing

Text from the original article: Little is known about whether and how early childhood living arrangements affect adult children's propensity to take aging parents into their homes. Past research on caregiving has focused on the characteristics of current family structure such as sibling composition, the marital status of parent or child, or competing roles. (Szinovacz, 1997)

Bad/close paraphrasing: Not much is known about how living arrangements in childhood affect adult children's willingness to take elderly parents into their homes. Past research on looking after elderly parents has focused on the characteristics of current family structure such as brothers and sisters, the marital status of parent or child, or competing roles (Szinovacz, 1997) = only a few words have been changed, not reflecting any understanding or interpretation of the original.

Good paraphrasing: Research has tended to focus on the effect of current family structure on adult children's willingness to look after their elderly parents – in consequence, little is known about the effects of childhood living arrangements (Szinovacz, 1997). = the content has been rephrased" (from [Swansea University's guide](#)).

The most common form of plagiarism is from misunderstanding the idea of putting things into your own words, thinking it equivalent to changing some words of text written by others. Putting in your own words means writing your text yourself from the beginning, without recourse to copying and editing others' text. To help make this more concrete, below are a few examples of plagiarism. TurnItIn highlights the phrases that it has detected as coming from another source.

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Social cognition has been defined as the ability to interpret and predict others' behaviour in terms of their intentions and beliefs and to interact in complex social environments and close relationships (Baron-Cohen et al. 2000). The ability to recognize and respond to emotional content and cues present in the environment

In this snippet, American spelling has been changed to UK spelling (behaviour) and simple word substitutions made. This almost certainly arose because of using "cut & paste" followed by editing. Regardless of how it came about, it is plagiarism.

Even if you have re-ordered sentences and changed a number of words and even phrasing, you may still have plagiarised:

an integral part of social cognition in functioning (Fitzgibbon et al. 2000; Fiske et al., 2003). Dysfunction in this domain is considered a critical factor in poor interpersonal functioning and communication, and is associated with the development and maintenance of psychopathology (Surcinelli et al. 2006). Furthermore, there has been considerable empirical and theoretical evidence indicating that difficulties with emotion recognition can lead to specific types of social function impairment, including reduced social interest and competence, inappropriate social behaviour and lower life

Here, the editing has been more extensive, but it is clear that the sentences have been taken from source 3. The chances of phrasing the ideas presented using these words is, to all intents and purposes, 0. That is, try to take the concepts in the 2 sentences and write them out without looking at the text again. You will not reproduce the same wording.

The above examples would both merit an official misconduct warning. The consequences of the misconduct warning are that your name will be held on a central register. No-one can access except via the Deans Office and it will not appear on any transcript or publically available record. However, if you your work raises similar concerns in the future then things will get more serious. If you do not incur in further misconduct, the warning will have no adverse effect on your marks or academic record.

If there are repeated instances within a single piece of work or you continue to commit plagiarism of the type shown above or other forms of misconduct, then a School Board of Adjudication will be called. This board has the power to restrict the grade you are awarded to 7 (minimum pass) or a 0 (a fail, possibly with no right to re-assessment).

influences emotion recognition ability. In one of these studies, Malatesta et al (1987) assessed the recognition of facial emotion expressions of sadness, fear and anger in three different age groups of female participants – young (25-40 years), middle aged (45- 60 years) and older (65- 80 years). The results indicated that the ability to interpret all three facial expressions decreased with increasing age. Two further studies also found evidence for age-related declines in emotion recognition: Calder et al (2003) showed that increasing age produced a progressive reduction of fear, and to a lesser extent, anger but an improvement in the recognition of disgust. In addition, Williams et al (2006) discerned a shift in responses to positive versus negative emotions over age in both recognition and brain function. Recognition of the negative emotion fear showed a significant decline as a result of increasing age, whereas recognition of the positive emotion happiness increased. Apart from very few exceptions, the pattern that emerges from the majority of these studies is that recognition of certain facial expressions decreases with age, while others remain relatively stable or even improve. This has been summarised by two separate meta-

Seeing a paragraph like the above is clear indication that the student has tried to gain an advantage: they are implicitly acknowledging that they cannot express ideas themselves. Note that citing the source (source 29 in green – is Williams et al 2006) does not mitigate the plagiarism. Although correct citing indicates poor practice – possibly capping at 7 – omission of the reference altogether (source 2 in purple is not cited) indicates deliberate attempts to present the work of others as your own – probably capping at 0.

There are, of course, instances where the use of phrases will overlap. This is particularly true of phrases used in results sections:

A Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference in the depression levels of young and old people, $U = 386$, $z = -.95$, $p = .34$, $r = -.12$, and no significant difference in the anxiety levels either, $U = 333$, $z = -1.75$, $p = .08$, $r = -.23$. However, there was a significant difference in the irritability levels between young and old people, $U = 303$, $z = -2.2$, $p = .028$, $r = -.28$.

The highlighted text would not be seen a plagiarism as the phrases are almost inevitable. Note, however that each case is examined and evaluated in its own right. Furthermore, having non-plagiarised text in no way mitigates or cancels the presence of plagiarised text.

If you do receive a warning or are summoned to a board, do not try to argue that every case is like the above: the warning will not be for these sections. Think of speeding: just because you drove most of the way within the speed limit, doing 60 in a 30 mph zone is speeding.

2. Tips on avoiding misconduct

Having completed the online Good Academic Practice training course, students know about the issues. As such academic misconduct is likely to be unintentional. This is not an excuse and in no way lets students “off the hook”. However, there are some simple techniques that will reduce the likelihood of misconduct. This article focuses first on plagiarism, the most common form of academic misconduct.

DO NOT USE ONLINE SERVICES to check your work. The very fact that you are considering doing so indicates you have plagiarised work and are aware of doing so. The following advice aims to provide you with tips and advice that, if followed and thought about, will result in the work being your own (and demonstrably so from TurnItIn).

2.1. Never edit after cut & paste (because you should never use cut & paste).

The most common form of plagiarism is bad paraphrasing. Talking to students, it is clear that many use what they think is an efficient and effective way of getting information into a paper: cut and paste. This is a recipe for disaster.

The copied entry can be edited and words changed. However the sentence structure will remain and this will be evidence of plagiarism (see the bad paraphrasing example above). It is remarkably difficult to change sentence structure without starting from scratch. And if you have to start from scratch, then the cut and paste hasn't really got you anywhere. So make notes by writing them yourself.

2.2. Close your sources

It is tempting to write your paper with your sources close at hand or open in another window. This is only marginally less stupid than using cut & paste. The trouble is that you will glance at the original source because this will help you phrase the issues. It will inevitably lead to using sentence structures that are close to those of the original. In other words, it is very likely to lead to plagiarism.

One appropriate technique is to close down all sources, move the papers off your desk (or at least turn them upside down). Only once the sources are hidden should you write about the concepts/ideas/results relevant to your essay. Do not try to replicate the ideas, write about them. It often helps to say the words out loud (or at least in your mind) as you go. This will ensure that the style reflects you and will therefore be consistent throughout the work. Once you've written, insert the necessary in-text citations.

2.3. Avoid not referencing sources

Quite often, you will find that a key paper gives you a lot of factual and theoretical information. Indeed, this is almost what defines a paper as being key. From this one paper you will, quite rightly, make lots of notes. When you come to use those notes it is all too easy to take a sentence and move it without noting the reference. This moved sentence, although not initially plagiarised, now represents academic misconduct because you are not attributing an idea to its source. So remember to keep source information (citation) with every sentence as you move and edit things.

2.4. Avoid “as cited in” overload

You will often find that, like you, authors of a paper reference many of the findings and ideas that they use to develop their arguments. That is, they appropriately attribute ideas or results they use to others. Of course, you should read the key

papers that these authors cite yourself to check the claims. But continuing to do so leads to infinite regress (you can't read all the papers in the papers in the papers...). This means that you will want to attribute an idea "as cited in XXX". If you are trying to attribute ideas, you can use "see XXX for details" or "for review see XXX" and not reference the original paper. Similarly "XXX argued..." can help. In other words, avoid repeated instances of "as cited in".

2.5. Avoiding pitfalls of group work

Discussing how to approach the different aspects and issues of academic work in small groups will often lead to greater understanding (and therefore better standard of work) than going it alone. It is therefore strongly recommended that you discuss work (lectures, assignments, examinations) with each other as often as you can.

However, if working in a group you must be careful about taking notes. It is all too easy for collective notes to become incorporated into different write-ups and fall foul of academic misconduct. That is, if the notes are the result of a collective, you can't submit them as being your own, which is a requirement for submission. Therefore, discuss things as a group but only make notes on the results of those discussions when you are alone.

2.6. Self-plagiarism¹ is still plagiarism

Imagine you are taking our 60 credit project in your final year (either module PN4299 or PS4299). The relationship between a 2500 word review and the introduction to your final report is of particular relevance. The review will cover a broad range of material, some of which will undoubtedly be relevant to your final report. It is also possible that your JH review (PS4040) covers some relevant material. However, self-plagiarism is still misconduct: you must treat all work, whether your own or from others, in the same manner. This does not mean you can't use the ideas from your review essay, but you mustn't copy the text. Rather you need to carefully re-write the material as necessary so it fits with the introduction to the report.

2.7. There is no such thing as accidental misconduct

When you read a paper, make sure that you distinguish between any exact quotes, and notes written in your own words. It is essential that you avoid plagiarism when you write your reports (see above). One way that plagiarism might happen "by accident" is by forgetting which statements in your notebook are actually quotes, which are lazy (bad) paraphrasing and which are your own summaries of a research article. It will therefore be still your responsibility if such an "accident" occurs: "I didn't realize" or "I didn't mean to" will not be an excuse for an academic misconduct adjudication board.

2.8. There are no extenuating circumstance for misconduct

Good academic conduct is core to psychology. There are never extenuating circumstances. Being under time pressure is not an excuse: why did you not plan your time? If circumstances change such that you are – through no fault of your own – under time pressure, request an extension. Other circumstances that are not relevant but have been tried as a justification of misconduct include illness, breakdown of personal relationships or peer pressure (if someone asks you for your

¹ The University categorises self-plagiarism as multiple submission: trying to obtain credit multiple times from a single piece of work

work, report them: they are trying to gain advantage over you and everyone else in the module).

2.9. Plagiarism is not the only form of misconduct

Other forms of misconduct include mis-representing word-count. You should include the word count on every piece of submitted work. Details of how to calculate the word count are given in the relevant module, year or Honours handbooks. Mis-reporting of the word count may result in misconduct.

The University's [Good Academic Practice](#) policy sets out the principles of appropriate academic standards. Any attempt at bending or breaking rules or misrepresenting work to gain an unfair advantage will be penalised, regardless of whether or not it is explicitly mentioned or named in this or other documents.

3. Falsification of data

Data forms the bedrock of psychology and neuroscience. As such it is appropriate that any infringement will be dealt with severely. The School of Psychology & Neuroscience will therefore penalise any substantiated evidence of falsification of data. The minimum penalty will be awarding the piece of work a 0. More severe penalties will automatically be considered.