

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ACADEMIC GOOD PRACTICE: GUIDANCE
FOR STUDENTS FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS

1. How should I use these FAQs?

These FAQs contain advice concerning the [Policy on Good Academic Practice](#) which has been approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee. All students are expected to be aware of this policy and to abide by it at all times. The Policy on Good Academic Practice must be taken as the definitive source of information.

2. Why do I need to read these FAQs?

You should note that a claim of ignorance of the University's expectations on good academic practice is not an acceptable defence to an allegation of academic misconduct.

In academic misconduct cases, serious penalties may be imposed if you are found guilty.

3. What is good academic practice and why is it important?

Good academic practice is the responsible use of data, sources, evidence and other information, however derived, in your own academic work. It therefore includes proper citation and referencing in written work, responsible use of experimental data, acknowledgement of sources, etc. Good academic practice is important in the wider academic community. We have a duty to others to acknowledge their input to works that we produce; we should not be seeking to claim credit for the ideas or analysis of others.

Therefore at this level of education we expect students to take ideas and information from various sources and work them up along with their own ideas and interpretations into an original piece of writing, documenting the sources they have used and distinguishing their own ideas from those of other people.

4. How can I learn about good academic practice?

All students matriculated at the University of St Andrews must complete the on-line training in good academic practice and any School specific training or materials available.

If you are in any doubt about good academic practice or about the training you are required to complete, your Adviser of Studies should be able to help you either themselves or by referring you to the appropriate person within the School.

5. Do different Schools at the University differ in their practices?

The nature of good academic practice may vary between disciplines. For instance, different disciplines have different expectations in the use of quotations. An essay in Biology would probably only use a quotation from Darwin at the beginning of an essay on Evolution as a 'scene setter' and then use no other quotations thereafter. However an essay in English Literature on Macbeth would have many quotations followed by the writer's interpretation of the quote.

Different disciplines also have different conventions on how referencing should take place. Common referencing systems include Harvard, Turabian and Chicago. These illustrations show how good academic practice in one discipline might be interpreted as poor academic practice in another. However, using the "wrong" referencing system for your discipline may reduce the grade you receive for your work, but it would never give rise to an allegation of academic misconduct.

We urge you to take care to understand how the staff in your Schools interpret good academic practice in their subject areas.

6. What is academic misconduct?

There are some activities by students in higher education that most people would find easy to identify as "cheating".

Some major areas of academic misconduct are: plagiarism; false citation; aiding and abetting; falsification of data; multiple submissions; cheating in exams and contract cheating.

7. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the submission of someone else's work as though it were one's own. Plagiarism may occur unintentionally through poor work practices, as students may for example submit work that contains the words or ideas of others without realising that they need proper acknowledgement. A piece of work that contains plagiarised material may be subject to a penalty even if there were no intention to plagiarise. It is consequently very important for you to understand how to avoid producing work that contains plagiarised material.

8. How do I avoid plagiarism?

Copying and pasting material from a web site or book into a piece of written work is likely to be regarded as plagiarism (but see next question), even if it is just one sentence that is copied. While students are certainly expected to read the work of others, their written work should be in their own words, and the sources of information they are using should be acknowledged in a footnote, specific reference list, or bibliography depending on the subject's requirements. Merely changing a word here and there through a copied paragraph is not enough either, and nor is taking the structure of another person's article and rephrasing the argument (known as paraphrasing).

9. But what if I do want to directly quote or use directly copied material?

If you wish to include material from one of your sources word-for-word, then it should be included within quotation marks and have its source clearly stated. This gives credit where it is due, and allows the reader to follow up the material presented. (This is quite normal practice in some disciplines, but is much less widely used in others). If you wish to use a picture or diagram from one of your sources, and if this is allowed by copyright law, then this is acceptable within the University's Good Academic Practice policy as long as you specifically acknowledge the source. For some disciplines, at least, this acknowledgement should be in the figure caption.

10. Are expectations at the University of St Andrews different from previous experiences with respect to plagiarism?

Earlier in your education it may have been entirely acceptable to find information from one or more sources and to copy these out with a few linking sentences into a report of some form. At University this approach is not acceptable. Most pieces of written work that you may be asked to tackle will involve some analysis or explanation from you, helping you to develop the higher-level skills of synthesis of an argument and explaining concepts to others. If at any stage you are not sure about what is allowable, please ask those teaching staff associated with the assignment for advice.

11. What is false citation?

Sources should be cited accurately, fully and in accordance with discipline-specific conventions. False citation is the use of incorrect citation or acknowledgment of a source. This may include citing correct information from the wrong source or incorrectly citing information from a valid source. It may also include the citation of sources that were not used to prepare the academic work in a bibliography or other list of references.

12. What is aiding and abetting?

Allowing someone to copy your work is also an offence under this

University's policy, so both the copier and the original author may face proceedings. This misconduct could take the form of copying results of a laboratory experiment, part of an essay, or part of a computer programme, for example.

In many instances students are encouraged to discuss their work with other students, and such discussions may lead to modification in their own work, to their legitimate benefit. There may also be occasions where students are asked to work in a group and to submit the results of collaborative work. However, allowing someone to copy your work for submission and submit it as though it were their own is likely to give rise to an offence by both parties.

If at any stage you are not sure about what is allowable, please ask those teaching staff associated with the assignment for advice.

13. What is falsification of data?

Falsification of data is the inclusion of falsified, invented, or fictitious data or information in a submission, or the deliberate and knowing concealment or distortion of the true nature, origin, or function of such data or information. In any academic study the integrity of the researcher is vital. Any data used in a lab report, population study, or economic report should be real and representative. It is entirely unacceptable to fabricate or alter data to fill in a gap in a graph, or to invent results of an experiment and then report them as genuine measurements.

It is also unacceptable to conceal data in order to improve the outcome of research.

14. What is multiple submission?

Work prepared for assessment should be submitted once and once only. Submitting the same material for more than one assessment task is academic misconduct. This applies to substantial portions of previously submitted work as well as to whole assignments.

On occasion assignments within a module may intentionally build on each other, such as submitting an outline before submitting a report. If at any stage you are not sure about what is allowable, please ask those teaching staff associated with the assignment for advice.

15. What is contract cheating?

All work submitted for assessment should have been produced by you (or with your group if a group assignment). The use of services or attempting to use services supplied by third parties, such as essay purchasing web sites is academic misconduct.

16. What is cheating in exams?

Any attempt to gain improper advantage in the course of a University examination is academic misconduct. This includes, but is not limited to, bringing notes or other written materials to your desk in the examination venue, the use of electronic devices other than those specifically permitted for the particular examination, communication with other candidates during the examination, attempting to gain sight of another candidate's work or deliberately allowing another candidate to see your work.

An extensive list of materials permitted in examinations is maintained by the Examinations Office and information can be found on the web:

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/ExamRules.pdf>

If in any doubt, please speak to the Chief Invigilator of the examination venue.

17. How is plagiarism, multiple submission and contract cheating detected?

You should be aware that the University may use a variety of means to detect cases of plagiarism, multiple submission and contract cheating, including plagiarism detection software. Students may be asked to submit their work directly through plagiarism detection software or via Moodle or MMS, and staff may submit student work directly to plagiarism detection software for checking. Plagiarism detection software may keep a record of submitted work for checking against future submissions.

18. What if I am short of time to submit an assignment?

On occasion students may find it difficult to manage their time. This may lead to a temptation to take "short cuts" in the preparation of work rather than risk a penalty for late submission of work. Such short cuts might include not keeping notes of the sources of their material, or even submitting a piece of work copied from a book, internet source, or another student. However, it should be borne in mind that the possible outcomes for cases of academic misconduct are much more serious than for late submission of work. Please do remember that if work has to be submitted late for a good reason you can always approach a member of staff.

19. What will happen if I am suspected of academic misconduct?

If it is a first case and the offence is relatively minor you may receive a written warning from the Academic Misconduct Officer in your School. Do not ignore the written warning; take steps to ensure that you NEVER repeat this offence and be sure to complete any remedial academic integrity training required. Your name will be held on a central Academic Misconduct Register and more serious or second offences will be taken very seriously. If the case is more serious, you will receive a letter inviting you to attend a board of adjudication.

20. Can I bring someone with me to the Board?

At these adjudication boards (School and University) a student has the right to be accompanied by a representative who may be a person who is either presently matriculated as a student, or is an employee of the University of St Andrews or who is elected as a sabbatical officer or is an employee of the Students' Association of the University of St Andrews.

21. What are the penalties for Academic Misconduct?

First cases of academic misconduct will often be handled by an adjudication board at School level, and penalties for students found guilty can range from a written warning to a mark of zero for that piece of work.

Major or repeated cases of misconduct will be taken to a University board, and there the penalties for those found guilty can be up to and including expulsion from the University.

22. Can I appeal the decision?

You have a right of appeal against all decisions, within the terms of the published University procedures, full details of which can be found at:

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/rules/appeals/policy/>

23. Where can I go for help?

The Academic Skills Consultant in the University's central Learning and Teaching Service (CAPOD) has produced guidance on how to avoid committing academic misconduct. This material is available online as a Moodle course called *Training in Good Academic Practice*. There are also links to various academic writing web sites from the Study Support area of the CAPOD web pages. You may also approach CAPOD for help with Good Academic Practice.

The Education Advocate for students at the Students' Association can give advice to students and may be able to accompany you to academic misconduct hearings. Their contact details may be found at

<https://www.yourunion.net/support/education/educationadvocate/>

There are various useful sources of online guidance on plagiarism and other academic misconduct issues, collated and provided by CAPOD:

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/capod/students/studyskillsandadvice/>

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