



University of
St Andrews

Good academic practice: Guidance for students and frequently asked questions

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ACADEMIC GOOD PRACTICE: GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS AND
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.

The University expects 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 (TGAP) 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.

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; coercion; academic misconduct in exams/class tests and contract cheating.

7. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the submission of someone else's work as though it were one's own. Plagiarism can occur in any form of communication of ideas. This includes written coursework, presentations, whether verbal or written, and also in any student-created digital production (e.g. video, film production). 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.

Avoiding plagiarism

A number of factors can contribute to your academic success and your ability to maintain academic integrity by avoiding plagiarism. These factors include:

- Good time management
- Starting your research early
- Having good note-taking methods
- Properly citing and referencing sources

Having good note-taking methods

When taking notes for a piece of assessment, avoid copying and pasting material from a website or book, even if it is just one sentence. While students are certainly expected to read the work of others, it is best practice to put your written work into your own words and write the details of the source next to your written notes. 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).

Properly citing and referencing sources

- **Citing** refers to the use of 'in text' indications of the information source.
- **Referencing** is the acknowledgement of information you are using in a footnote, a reference list or bibliography, depending on the subject's requirements. These should include all the citations made in the text.
- See also section below (Avoiding False Citation).

You must cite and reference others' work, ideas and concepts (in print, online and verbal). There are five major forms of information that must **always** be cited and referenced.

- **Direct Quotes**

If you wish to include material from one of your sources word-for-word, then it should be clearly indicated 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).

A direct quote can be very short or very long, but must always have an indication that it is taken verbatim from an original source.

- Direct quotes of three full lines or shorter must always have 'quotation marks surrounding the text'.
- Direct quotes longer than three full lines must always be made into a block quote, where the words are separated from the main body of your paragraph and indented from the margins. The exact format for direct quotes is dependent on the referencing format required by the individual schools.

- **Paraphrase**

A paraphrase is when you state the thoughts of an author but you alter the words used. In this case, the words are your words, but the idea/concept is the author's. In the case of a paraphrase, there are no quotation marks to indicate it is not your original idea, therefore always make sure to indicate the source within the paraphrase: Panofsky suggests that.... And, as with making a direct quote, you must cite and reference the original work.

- **Summary**

A summary is different from a paraphrase in that, while you are using your own words, you are also summarizing or condensing the author's words into a more succinct format. In this case, you may give the author's main point or combine different points of the author's work into a condensed format, and cite and reference the source.

- **Concepts/Ideas/Words/Facts/Information/Data**

If you did not know the information you are using in your essay or you had not thought about the concepts or ideas before, this information did not come from you and therefore **must** be cited and referenced.

- **Images: Graphs, Tables, Charts, Photos, etc**

You must also cite and reference any image you use in your essay, no matter where you found it. This includes all images taken from the internet, class notes/slides, or texts that you've scanned into your document. The figure caption or legend should include an acknowledgement of the source.

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.

9. What is false citation?

Sources should be cited accurately, fully and in accordance with discipline-specific conventions. False citation is the use of an 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.

Avoiding false citation

To avoid making a 'false citation', always begin your research with good note-taking methods:

- Create an annotated list of references when you begin your research and include the full reference details of every source utilized when you begin taking notes.
- Keep notes organized by recording information from only *one source on each page* of paper/notecard
- At the top of each page of notes, include, at a minimum, the author, title, and page(s) of the original source, or create a clear system of codes corresponding to each page of notes with its one original source.
- When you encounter helpful information from a second source that is cited in the source you are currently utilizing, it is acceptable to use this information. However, it is best to acquire that second source and understand the content in its original context. When note-taking from the source in hand, make sure to distinguish between the content provided by the source in hand and that content provided by the 'cited source'. There may be times when you are unable to utilize the original source, in which case you must say 'as cited in' in your citation.

10. What is aiding and abetting?

Aiding and Abetting is a form of academic misconduct in which a student provides any form of assistance to a fellow student in committing academic misconduct. This can include, but is not limited to, allowing someone to copy results of a laboratory experiment, copy part (or whole) of an essay, or computer program. Both the copier and the original author may face proceedings.

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.

Avoiding aiding and abetting

There may be times when your friends are behind in their work or feel like they can't do the assigned work. They may ask you to help them, either by doing the work for them, by providing them with the work you did when you took the module, or assisting them in other prohibited ways. This form of assistance is *never allowed under any circumstances* because it will always give him/her an unfair advantage over the rest of the students.

A friend may ask to see how you did the assignment and promise not to copy or submit your work as their own. No matter how much you trust your friend, by providing him/her with your work in their moment of stress, you are only tempting them to cheat and are incriminating

yourself in the process.

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 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.

Falsification of data includes:

- Changing data to confirm the hypothesis
- Inventing data to meet with a quota
- Fabricating data to support the results of an experiment
- Excluding outliers of data (from charts, etc)
- Synthesizing experimental data
- Reporting experiments which were not conducted
- 'Massaging' data to enable it to fit with the hypothesis
- Excluding data which contradicts the hypothesis

Falsification of data can also occur outwith the laboratory in polls, surveys, and interviews.

Avoiding falsification of data

- Keep good data records
- Record results as you go, do not leave anything to memory
- Be honest
- If a result does not fit with others, do not ignore it
- Double-check that the data is correct
- If it is correct, it must be kept

12. 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. This also applies to work previously submitted at another academic institution.

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.

Avoiding multiple submission

As a student you will be aware of what you have written in the past and when/where that writing was submitted for assessment. If you have previously submitted a piece of work for assessment, whether at the University of St Andrews or another academic institution, that piece of written work is no longer available for submission.

13. What is coercion?

Coercion is putting pressure or attempting to put pressure on another student or member of staff. This may take the form of, but is not limited to, blackmail, intimidation (implied threats) or threats of any nature (psychological/emotional, social or physical).

14. What is contract cheating?

Contract cheating is where a student commissions or seeks to commission another party (paid or unpaid) that is offering its services to produce academic work on the student's behalf. These services are known as 'essay mills' but even asking a friend, a family member, or another individual to complete any aspect of assessed work is considered as contract cheating. This does not preclude the legitimate use of proof readers by students. Information and guidance on language correction and proof-reading services can be found in the University's policy on [Language Correction](#).

The work commissioned is most commonly in the form of essays but can also include written work pertaining to lab-based sciences, medicine, computer-related modules, or any other technical material.

Regardless of whether a student is successful in commissioning the work, or eventually submits the commissioned work for assessment, the act of seeking to commission work is considered contract cheating.

Avoiding contract cheating

Be careful about being drawn into websites that claim to be in support of student learning but are actually providing students with an unfair advantage.

Avoid posting details about assessments on social media or having conversations with contract cheating services should they contact you. Essay mills have extensive use of social media to find and engage with potential customers.

Note: essay mills do not always deliver what they promise, and any students engaging with these services are risking their personal details by giving them to unscrupulous individuals. Essay mills sometimes threaten to report students' use of them to the University unless the student pays an additional fee.

15. What is academic misconduct in exams/class tests?

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 in the [Written Proctored Examinations Policy](#). If in any doubt, please speak to the Chief Invigilator of the examination venue.

Avoiding academic misconduct in exams/class tests

Your best chance of avoiding academic misconduct in exams is knowing the rules before entering the exam venue.

Before entering the exam venue you should know what tools are acceptable for the exam, including calculators, and should take care to ensure that no prohibited materials are in your possession before seating for the exam.

16. What is academic misconduct in online examinations?

The rules that govern academic misconduct in assessments also apply to online examinations. Online examinations are 'open book', which means you are free to consult lecture notes, books and other resources (including online content) during the exam. You must acknowledge any sources by using in-text citations but there is no need to include a bibliography or reference list at the end of your exam script.

The following are examples of academic misconduct that students should be aware of in preparation for an online exam:

- Copying or paraphrasing text or material from other sources and presenting this as your own work
- Having another person complete the online exam or class test on your behalf
- Co-operating or contacting any other person during the exam or class test
- Sharing any information during or after the exam with any other person
- Failing to follow examination rules

Avoiding academic misconduct in online examinations

In order to avoid academic misconduct in online examinations, students must ensure that they are familiar with the contents of the University's Good Academic Practice Policy.

Exam answers should be entirely the candidate's work without unacknowledged input from others; should a candidate be in doubt, they should clearly acknowledge the origin of any material, text passages or ideas presented (e.g. through references and quotation marks).

17. How are 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. You should not assume that contract cheating is difficult to detect; teaching staff are alert to the risk of contract cheating.

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 further 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 via Microsoft Teams.

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

At these adjudication boards (School-level and University-level) 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 usually be handled by the Academic Misconduct Officer in your School but the Academic Misconduct Officer may take the case to an adjudication board at either School or University level, and penalties for students found guilty can range from a written warning to a mark of zero for that piece of work or zero for the module.

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

22. Can I appeal the decision?

You have a right of appeal against all decisions as outlined in the [Good Academic Practice Policy](#).

23. Where can I go for help?

The Academic Skills Consultant in the University's [Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development \(CEED\)](#) 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 [CEED](#) web pages. You may also approach [CEED](#) 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.

There are various useful sources of online guidance on plagiarism and other academic misconduct issues, collated and provided by [CEED](#).

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