

Preventing Academic Misconduct including Plagiarism Staff Guidance

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This staff guide has been developed to provide advice on the prevention and detection of academic misconduct particularly plagiarism. It also provides information on how to educate students on the development of good academic practice.

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1. Introduction

Academic misconduct and plagiarism are not new issues. However, Bidgood et al (2010) suggest that they often go undetected. Today, technology enables students to plagiarise their assignments with ease so it is vital that students develop good academic practice and understand the regulations relating to academic and examination offences.

The QAA stipulates universities' responsibility:

'to operate processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice including plagiarism, cheating, collusion and impersonation'. QAA Quality Code: B6 Assessment (2013)

Plymouth University's [Examinations and Academic Offences Regulations](#) (2014) specify the guidelines and procedures which must be adhered to by all students. However it is acknowledged that there can be contextual variation within subject disciplines.

Plymouth University encourages preventive rather than punitive measures which include:

- Good assessment design that reduces academic misconduct
- Comprehensive induction each academic year in good academic practice including referencing
- The use of originality detection software in formative and summative assessments
- Ongoing dialogue with, and feedback to, students on good academic practice

At Plymouth University the number of academic misconduct offences is slowly improving:

Academic Year	Proven allegations
2013/14	181
2012/13	224

2. What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct is the abuse of the university academic conventions and the use of dishonest academic behaviour to one's own benefit. Different forms of academic misconduct include but are not limited to:

i) Plagiarism

Plagiarism is only one form of academic dishonesty or cheating, but is the most widely known issue. It is normally defined as the representation of another person's work as your own, without acknowledging the source. (Race 2001, p.18) Plagiarism is often confused with other forms of academic misconduct including falsifying and fabrication (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Plagiarism may include **music, photographs, diagrams, ideas, structures and performances**. Most plagiarism, especially with first year undergraduates, is not intentional but students are guilty of plagiarism even if they did not intend to imply that the work was their own.

ii) Copying

Copying from texts, diagrams, photographs, digital media, structures, performances, ideas, concepts without referencing the source.

iii) Misrepresenting

Misrepresenting research outcomes, data and results.

iv) Paraphrasing/ summarising

Rewording other people's work without referencing the source.

v) Self-plagiarism/duplication

Submitting a piece of assessed work or material, which is identical or substantially similar to material that has already been submitted for another assessment. This applies to UK and overseas institutions. Where students do draw on their own previous work, whether submitted as coursework for their current degree, or from a previous degree or qualification, this must be clearly stated and referenced. Coursework submitted for one module may not be used for another module without acknowledgement and prior approval. Exceptions may be permitted for research proposals which are then reflected in dissertations, projects or theses.

vi) Cheating

Cheating is a deliberate attempt to gain an unfair advantage in an assessed piece of work including in course work and exams.

vii) Collusion

Collusion is passing off another's work as one's own for personal benefit and in order to deceive. Where the owner of the original work knows of its use and cooperates with the student, both are committing an academic offence.

viii) Falsifying data

The presentation of data in reports, projects and so on, based on work purported to have been carried out by the student, which have been invented, copied, misrepresented or obtained by unfair means.

ix) Fabrication

Reporting on experiments or other work never carried out by the candidate, or fabricating data.

x) Purchasing work for assessment

There are now numerous sources offering students the option to purchase or commission essays and course work. For example a search in eBay or Google produces numerous opportunities to purchase off the shelf essays.

xi) Ghosting

The use of other people to write part or all of a student's assessed work, eg using a 'ghost writing' service. Students providing such a service are also committing an academic offence (see collusion vii).

xii) Bribery

Seeking to gain an unfair advantage in an assessed piece of work through offering a payment or in kind reward to a staff member.

3. Distinguishing plagiarism from poor academic practice

Poor academic practice is another wide-ranging term. It can cover everything from poor study skills (including poor referencing) to a lack of understanding of what is expected at a particular level of study (Open Learn Works, 2014). Students need to be aware that poor academic practice will result in a mark reduction.

3.1 Examples of poor academic practice include:

- Inconsistent use of referencing styles in the text or bibliography
- Poor quality referencing, for example errors made through carelessness or misunderstanding
- Overuse of low quality sources e.g. Wikipedia and other wiki-based internet sites
- Excessive use of referencing
- Excessive use of long quotations though the text is correctly referenced (here there may be discipline variations)
- Low level duplication without citation, for example errors made through carelessness or misunderstanding

4. Is Plagiarism a clear cut issue?

Unfortunately a simple definition is not enough to clarify what plagiarism means. There are inevitably areas of ambiguity, disputed meaning and subject disciplines vary in what is acceptable practice.

Consider the points below. Where do you draw the line?

- A first year student quotes someone's work, but genuinely forgets to cite the source;
- A group of students discuss their ideas, and they submit work that is similar in many respects.

Assessment panels face challenges when considering the scale of an offence:

How much have students cut and pasted without referencing?

Have students used direct quotes without indicating this in their work?

How many times have students referenced the same source?

What proportion of an assignment is the similar to a student's earlier piece of work?

4.1 Collaboration and cooperation:

Collaboration is where students work together for their mutual benefit and learning with no intention of deception. This might include a group of students discussing an assignment to increase their understanding of an important issue prior to starting to write. When setting group work which results in an individual assessment submission the onus is on the module leader to clarify with students how group discussions contribute to, but must be separate from, individual work. There can be subject variation so it is important that module handbooks clarify the regulations.

4.2 Common Knowledge

Common knowledge can be subject-specific: concepts and information that are widely known in environmental science, for example, may not be widely known in art history, and vice versa. There is no need for students to reference common knowledge as this is knowledge in everyday use or is in the common domain.

Examples of common knowledge include:

- Paris is the capital city of France
- Henry VIII of England ruled from 1509–1547
- Body Mass Index (BMI) is an accepted measure for calculating obesity

How do your students understand what is common knowledge in your discipline?

5. Avoiding academic misconduct and plagiarism

5.1 Designing plagiarism out of assessment

The most effective way to minimise plagiarism is through good design. This includes:

- ✓ Change assessment methods frequently in each module
- ✓ Avoid giving similar assignment questions each year
- ✓ Integrate and link assessment tasks within a module
- ✓ Create individualised assessment tasks
- ✓ Design assessment criteria that aim to minimise plagiarism
- ✓ Ask for student opinions and analysis rather than descriptive essays
- ✓ Once an assignment is designed, 'Google' the questions and see what information is identified
- ✓ When setting problem-based or case study assignments avoid using large national or international organisations. It is easy for students to access and plagiarise work from students at other universities and information from large organisations' websites
- ✓ Use examples from small south west or Plymouth based organisations
- ✓ Require students to submit essay plans or formative work for feedback
- ✓ Prevent potential plagiarism incidences before they occur through formative feedback
- ✓ Require students to provide reference lists and bibliographies
- ✓ Use student peer group review processes to help deter and detect plagiarism

Good practice examples:

Navigation and Maritime Science:

Students are assessed through an accident investigation report as part of their assessment. Each student is given a different accident scenario on which to write a report.

Psychology:

Statistics assignments require students to work on a data set which is 'hashed' with their unique Student Registration Number, the final six digits being added or subtracted from each value in the set as 1% of the original value. This meant that the pattern of inferential statistical effects remained unchanged, but each student has a predictably different set of means and SDs to report. If they had used another student's work or data, markers could tell who had copied work from whom, and both could be penalised.

Marketing MKT206 Professional Sales:

Students are each assigned a distinctive product or service to sell and are assessed on a reflective portfolio (in which they discuss their experiences as a salesperson, what they have learned, and their relative strengths and weaknesses as sales professional), sales simulations and presentations and sales materials. Some of the assessments are undertaken in the classroom context. (For example there is an assessed in-class sales simulation).

5.2 Educating students in good academic practice

Traditionally, students are informed about academic misconduct through programme and module handbooks and in lectures during first year induction. Research conducted by Gullifer & Tyson (2014) identified that students suffered from overload at the beginning of their studies and then as the semester progressed, time pressures and motivational factors affected students' ability to retain information about academic misconduct.

To achieve maximum student learning the timetabling of good academic practice sessions is crucial.

Good practice example:

Psychology:

Stage 1 students have hour-long group tutorials every two weeks with their personal tutor, and in the second of these, students work through a 'What is Plagiarism?' worksheet containing examples of acceptable, poor, and unacceptable writing.

Initially all students need to understand what is *academic honesty*. Moon (2012) suggests the adoption of habits that meet agreed academic conventions and thereby avoid the various forms of academic misconduct should be the focus of student induction.

- ✓ Timetable mandatory sessions on good academic practice in each year of the degree programme
- ✓ Use the first year intensive module to develop good habits and understanding of good academic practice
- ✓ Clearly define, explain and discuss what plagiarism is with all students
- ✓ Distinguish plagiarism from poor academic practice
- ✓ Ensure all students know where to access and understand the University regulations
- ✓ Use examples of assignments that illustrate plagiarism for students to assess and discuss
- ✓ In each module clarify the required referencing tradition through programme and module handbooks and the DLE
- ✓ Consider offering a period of exemption/ apprenticeship in the first term module to enable students to practice referencing and academic skills
- ✓ Reinforce understanding of Plymouth University requirements throughout the diverse student community. Cultural variations in what is acceptable means that tutors have to be particularly sensitive when working with international students. Hussin & Ismail (2013) argue that plagiarism can be difficult to eradicate since in some cultures 'copying the master' is a sign of respecting authority. However, it is important not to over-generalise about cultural differences.
- ✓ Provide additional sessions on the regulations at Plymouth University and academic good practice for 2nd and 3rd year direct entry students
- ✓ Reinforce these messages through comprehensive module information on plagiarism

Plymouth Business School:

Our international students can be over-represented at academic misconduct panels; this may be partly because 'lifted' work at times is easier to spot in the work of non-native speakers.

International students are less likely to have previous experience of referencing requirements and standards.

Many international students are direct entrants on top-up programmes at stage 3 and have to catch up with peers who have already studied at Plymouth for 2 years.

5.3 Use originality checking software

The university has a policy for the [use of originality checking software](#) (extract)

1.1 The University seeks to ensure that all students, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students develop good academic practice, including the correct citation of material within assignments.

1.2 The University's primary focus in using originality checking software (currently Turnitin) is to provide a means whereby students may enhance their knowledge and understanding of good academic practice in order to reference material correctly, thereby minimising the risk of submitting plagiarised work in summative assessments.

1.3 Turnitin may also be used to assist with plagiarism detection where there is concern that an assignment contains plagiarised material

'Turnitin' is located within the DLE and can be used by staff and students in a number of ways:

- ✓ 'Turnitin' allows for the comparison of submitted material with other sources including web pages and e-journals to check for originality.
- ✓ 'Turnitin' reports can be made available to students formatively as an originality checking and referencing learning resource.
- ✓ 'Turnitin' can help student improve their academic writing skills and learn more about plagiarism.
- ✓ 'Turnitin' should not be used as a proxy for academic judgment.
- ✓ When 'Turnitin' reports a high percentage score it does not mean the student's work is not plagiarised. Staff must use their academic judgment when analysing reports.
- ✓ 'Turnitin' is integrated directly within the DLE in the assignment e-submission activity; however the setting needs to be turned on.

DLE training sessions enable staff to learn how to use both e-submission and Turnitin <https://dle.plymouth.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=11516>

6. Plymouth University Examination and Academic Offences Regulations (2014)

[Academic offences regulations](#) (extract)

Academic offences occur when activity is undertaken which could confer an unfair advantage to any candidate(s) in assessment. The University recognises the following (including any attempt to carry out the actions described) as academic offences, regardless of intent:

- a) Copying or paraphrasing of other people's work or ideas into a submitted assessment without full acknowledgement (plagiarism).
- b) Unauthorised collaboration of students (or others) in a piece of work (collusion).
- c) Making false declarations in an attempt to obtain either modified assessment provisions or special consideration (e.g. of extenuating circumstances).
- d) Persuading another member of the University or partner institution (student, staff, or invigilator) to participate in any way in actions which would be in breach of these regulations.
- e) Misrepresenting research outcomes and results.
- f) Being party to any arrangement which would constitute a breach of these regulations.
- g) The inclusion in a piece of assessed work (other than an examination or test) of material which is identical or substantially similar to material which has already been submitted for any other assessment within the University.
- h) Any other activity not described above which could confer an unfair advantage to any candidate(s).

7. Detecting and dealing with plagiarism

Traditionally plagiarism was detected by tutors recognising the source of material in student assignments or noting that two or more assignments look similar. This has become increasingly difficult with large groups (often involving more than one marker) and with the explosion of information available to students online (much of which tutors may not be familiar with).

7.1 Indicators of Plagiarism

There are many indicators of plagiarism for academics to look out for. Clough (2000) Cox (2001) & Harris (2002) suggest that markers should pay particular attention to:

- The tone as well as the style of writing.
- Changes in fluency or a patchwork of different types of text.
- Particular sections written with unusual confidence
- Changes in font and layout
- Bibliographies that contain a large number of books that are unavailable in the University library
- The unattributed use of non- British English. Web plagiarists often reproduce material without anglicising the spelling
- Mixed referencing styles
- Lack of references/quotes
- Introductions and conclusions written in a different style to the main body of the assignment
- Work which exceeds the usual level for the year group
- Unusual formatting
- Anomalies of diction (cutting and pasting paragraphs of varying levels)

7.2 Dealing with suspected academic misconduct or plagiarism – what do I do once it is suspected or detected?

If you suspect academic misconduct you must inform the module leader who, with the Faculty Registrar (or Programme Administration Manager in Academic Partnerships), will investigate the alleged offence following the school and University regulations.

[Plymouth University Examination and Academic Offences Regulations](#) contain the following:

- Procedures for investigation of allegations
- Procedures for students contesting allegations
- The Academic Offences panel procedures
- Penalties that can be imposed for academic misconduct
- The appeals process.

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