



Good Academic Practice  
and the Avoidance of Plagiarism

# Good Practice Guide for Staff

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The University of Strathclyde has a strong tradition and culture of personal and professional honesty and integrity in its approach to teaching, learning and research and aims to provide all students with:

- i. a proper understanding of the importance of academic honesty;
- ii. a knowledge of the appropriate standards for academic writing in their field of study;
- iii. an awareness of what constitutes academic dishonesty and how to avoid it.

For students, a University education should not simply be about passing exams to gain a good degree. It should be about growing as a member of the academic community by learning about the chosen discipline, developing research skills and finding a distinctive academic voice. As members of the academic community, students are responsible for ensuring that their work abides by the conventions and rules of that community. That includes ensuring that the correct citation and referencing conventions are applied in their work when using or quoting the work of other people. This ensures that everyone receives the credit due to them for their work and helps to demonstrate the individual student's intellectual integrity.

Developments on the internet and in technology, the fact that essay banks and ghostwriting services now advertise their services freely, the expansion of off-campus learning and the growth in the use of group work and assessed coursework rather than closed examinations have increased opportunities for plagiarism. At the same time, increasing pressures on students, whether external (i.e. caring responsibilities or the need to undertake paid employment) or internal (i.e. lack of time and doubts about the worth of their own work), have increased the temptation to plagiarise.

Opportunities and pressures notwithstanding, the majority of students continue to demonstrate their academic integrity by producing work which complies with academic conventions, taking care to ensure that sources are properly accredited. However, there are a number of students each year who have to face disciplinary procedures for plagiarism at Departmental or University level. Many of these state either that they had not intended to plagiarise or that they had not understood that what they had done constituted plagiarism. This suggests that there is still work to be done on educating students about good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism.

The University has subscribed to plagiarism detection software, Turnitin, provided through Northumbria Learning, not only to help academic staff identify and deal with cases of plagiarism efficiently and effectively, but also as a useful learning tool for students and it is recommended that students be enabled to submit draft assignments to Turnitin and that they be given the opportunity to discuss the resultant report with a member of staff.

# 1. Encouragement of Good Academic Practice

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- 1.1 While it is essential to deal appropriately and consistently with incidences of plagiarism when they occur, the emphasis should be on deterring such practices through the encouragement of academic integrity and good academic writing throughout the student body from the outset of the course.
- 1.2 Students should be made aware from the outset that, as members of the academic community, they are responsible for ensuring that their work abides by the conventions and rules of that community and that this includes ensuring that the correct citation and referencing conventions are applied in their work.
- 1.3 Within this context, students should be made aware that laboratory assignments, coursework, dissertations, examinations, projects, presentations and reports etc are assessed on the understanding that they are their own work and that the integrity of their final award depends upon adherence to these conventions and rules.
- 1.4 Staff are advised to:
- i. provide students early on in their academic career with a number of relevant discipline specific examples of good and bad practice and build in opportunities to discuss these in lectures and tutorials, as experience suggests that students often find it helpful to work through such examples and to discuss the issues with their peers and academic staff;
- ii. include information about what constitutes academic dishonesty and how to avoid it in relevant handbooks and course materials provided to all undergraduate and postgraduate students;
  - iii. remind students about the importance of academic integrity issues prior to the submission of assignments or dissertations and at other strategic points in their studies (See Appendix 1);
  - iv. ensure that students understand what they are being asked to do in assignments and that they understand the rules governing specific types of assignment such as individual work and group projects;
  - v. Give students opportunities to practice appropriate academic writing skills and receive feedback before they are summatively assessed;
  - vi. encourage students to submit an electronic draft of their assignment to Turnitin prior to the final submission date and arrange to discuss with them the originality report and what it shows about their use of sources, commenting on both good practice and areas which could be improved. See the publications list below for further advice on the use of Turnitin in this way.
- 1.5 Where students require more help with their academic writing than can be provided within the Department, they can be referred to the English Language Teaching Division or the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement as appropriate.

## 2. Prevention of Plagiarism

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- 2.1 Information about plagiarism (relevant definitions, explanations, illustrations) and the rules for referencing the work of others, whether taken from conventional or electronic sources, should be included on the web and in the relevant course/student handbooks or materials provided to all students.
- 2.2 It might be helpful to include examples of penalties applied by the Senate Discipline Committee so that students fully understand the possible implications for their future studies of a decision to take a short cut and use someone else's words or ideas. (See Appendix 2)
- 2.3 Academic tasks should as far as possible be designed in ways that reduce the possibility of plagiarism, collusion and duplication. Different tasks will require different approaches.
- 2.4 The following examples of good practice will not all be appropriate for all circumstances and staff will need to consider carefully which approaches might be most suitable for a given assessment in their discipline:
- i. Require students to sign a formal declaration for each piece of work forcing them to check off a list of factors and acknowledge that if they are subsequently found to have cheated they may, ultimately, be referred to the Senate Discipline Committee. Examples of factors for the list are:  
  
this is my own work;  
I have referenced all documents used according to the rules set out in .....; and  
I have not copied another student's work in any way.
  - ii. To reduce collusion, use seen examinations where students write their answers to known questions under supervision, rather than 'take-away' coursework done in unsupervised conditions.
  - iii. Set group assignments (possibly with a related individual section on the group activity). Perhaps require group members to determine the way the marks are allocated between them. This may require training on group working and peer group marking.
  - iv. Give students individual topics for assignments, allocated by, or negotiated with, the tutor (an assessment contract) or allocate X topics among the Y students, such as five students per topic.
  - v. To prevent copying from previous students' submissions or submitting the same work for different assessments, do not allow totally free choice of assignment or project tasks but get students to choose from an approved list.
  - vi. Change the topics regularly; do not set the same assignment year on year.
  - vii. Design submission and return procedures to ensure that late submissions cannot be copied from earlier ones that have already been assessed and returned.
  - viii. Require part-time and off-campus students to relate assignments to their personal work circumstances.
  - ix. Set assignments which require synthesis of material from several sources and which cannot be adequately tackled using a single text book.

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- x. Do not set assignments for which there is an entirely unique response. For example, in quantitative assignments include a discussion task, or make the task sufficiently complex to ensure that there are many ways of tackling it.
  - xi. Link assessment to (compulsory?) seminars for which the seminar leader is also the assignment marker.
  - xii. Set up (compulsory?) tutorials in which students may be required to talk about their work in many assignment areas.
  - xiii. To reduce invention/copying of data for write-ups of laboratory sessions sign-off the data as the student leaves the laboratory and require the signed-off sheet to be submitted along with the write-up.
  - xiv. For major group-assignments, projects and dissertations ensure that the written submission follows close supervision involving several meetings between staff and students so that the likely quality and content of the finished product is known in advance.
  - xv. For larger (e.g. honours) assignments or projects include more than one test of the same work. Possibilities are:
    - a. an oral examination;
    - b. a presentation;
    - c. a written learning points paper reflecting on the main task;
    - d. an in-class test/short exam relating to the main task (e.g. write a short account of how the project relates to the literature);
    - e. a written self-assessment of the main task; and
    - f. a learning log.
  - xvi. Set interim assignments relating to the final one and require that feedback from the tutor to the student is taken account of in the final submission.
  - xvii. Require students to submit notes, rough work and early drafts along with the final submission.
  - xviii. Increase the number of formative assignments and compare the abilities of the student across these and the summative assessment.
  - xix. Decrease the number of assignments and require individuals to talk about them more.
  - 2.3 Try to avoid assessment deadlines which all fall at the same time to reduce the temptation for students who run out of time to cut and paste text from other sources.
  - 2.4 Staff are encouraged to request electronic submission of all written work and to process an agreed sample/percentage of that work through Turnitin, rather than just using the software on an ad hoc basis when plagiarism, collusion or duplication is suspected. Use in this way will ensure a fairer and more consistent approach to detection.

### 3. Further Reading

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3.1 A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education Jude Carroll, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, 2002

3.2 Student Plagiarism in Universities: What Are We Doing About it? John Walker, Massey University, Higher Education Research and Development, Vol 17, No 1, 1998.

#### Web resources

3.3 Why do Students Plagiarise?  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp02\\_WhyDoStudentsPlagiarise.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp02_WhyDoStudentsPlagiarise.pdf)

3.4 Deterring, Detecting and Dealing with Student Plagiarism  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/resources/JISC-BP-Plagiarism-v1-final.pdf>

3.5 Identifying Plagiarism in Student Work  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp04\\_IdentifyingPlagiarismInStudentWork.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp04_IdentifyingPlagiarismInStudentWork.pdf)

3.6 Designing out Plagiarism  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/designingout.php>

3.7 Reducing Plagiarism through Assessment Design  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheets/tipsheet2.pdf>

3.8 Good Practice Guide  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/oxfordbrookes.php>

3.9 Case Studies  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/casestudies.php>

3.10 Plagiarism Detection  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/plagiarismdetection.php>

3.11 Using Electronic Detection Tools  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/teachingpractice\\_guide7.php](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/teachingpractice_guide7.php)

3.12 Six Things to think about when starting out with Turnitin UK  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp09\\_SixThingsToThinkAboutWhenStartingOut.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp09_SixThingsToThinkAboutWhenStartingOut.pdf)

3.13 Tutor Turnitin FAQ  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheets/tipsheet4.pdf>

3.14 TurnitinUK Plagiarism Detection Service: UK Data Protection Act Fact Sheet  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/legal/DataProcessing\\_FactSheet\\_Revision.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/legal/DataProcessing_FactSheet_Revision.pdf)

3.15 TurnitinUK Plagiarism Detection Service: UK Copyright Fact Sheet  
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/legal/CopyrightAndTurnitin\\_FactSheet\\_Revision.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/legal/CopyrightAndTurnitin_FactSheet_Revision.pdf)

#### Video Resources

3.16 Plagiarism – An Overview  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/jcarolvideo.php?s=6>

3.17 An Introduction to Turnitin Plagiarism Detection Software  
<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/video/gillvid.php>

## Appendix 2

Penalties imposed recently by the Senate Discipline Committee include:

### Example 1

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *first year undergraduate student* for two classes had substantial elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student, who had admitted to both cases of plagiarism stating lack of time as the explanation for this, did not attend the hearing. Noting that the student had not submitted information about any mitigating circumstances the Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

The marks for the two pieces of coursework be set to zero  
The student be formally reprimanded  
The student be suspended from the course for the following session

### Example 2

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *third year part-time undergraduate student* for two classes had substantial elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student did not attend in person but was represented by the Ask Advisor from USSA who circulated a statement from the student including details of mitigating circumstances. Although the Committee was sympathetic to the student's circumstances it upheld the case and resolved that:

The mark for the two pieces of coursework be set to zero, and  
The student be required to withdraw from the course.

### Example 3

It was alleged that coursework submitted by a *third year undergraduate student*, for two classes had elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student attended the hearing and admitted copying the work of others but averred lack of awareness that this constituted plagiarism. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

The marks for the assignments in question be set to zero  
The student be not permitted to proceed to Honours year  
Should the student's academic record require re-attendance at the current year of study, the Department should ensure that the student received personal tuition regarding plagiarism.

### Example 4

It was alleged that the dissertation submitted by a *final year undergraduate student* had elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student attended the hearing. The student did not dispute the allegation but stated that the method used for note-taking had led inadvertently to the use of text from a book as the student's own work. The Committee resolved that:

The mark for the dissertation should be set to zero  
The student should not be awarded an honours degree.

### Example 5

It was alleged that the project submitted by a *taught postgraduate student* had substantial elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student attended the hearing with three representatives and gave details of mitigating factors. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

The student be formally reprimanded  
The mark for the assignment be set to zero

Given the mitigating factors presented, the Committee also resolved that:

The student be permitted to resubmit the assignment and that the subsequent mark be recorded as a second attempt  
Prior to resubmission, the student should meet with the department to confirm the content of the resubmission, the rules on academic dishonesty and the timescale for resubmission  
This instance of academic dishonesty should not bar progression to the masters qualification which should be judged on academic merit.

### Example 6

It was alleged that the final dissertation submitted by a *distance learning taught postgraduate* had substantial elements plagiarized from identified sources. The student did not attend the hearing and declined the used of video-conferencing facilities. Consideration was given to aggravating circumstances. The Committee upheld the case and resolved that:

The student not be permitted to graduate with the Masters award but be considered for the maximum award of Postgraduate Diploma  
The student be formally reprimanded.

