



Good Academic Practice
and the Avoidance of Plagiarism

Guidelines for Students

Foreword

A University education is not simply about passing exams to gain a good degree. It is about growing as a member of the academic community by learning about your chosen discipline, developing research skills and finding your own academic voice to speak authoritatively in your areas of expertise.

As members of the academic community, you are responsible for ensuring that your work abides by the conventions and rules of that community. That includes ensuring that the correct citation and referencing conventions are applied in your work when you use or quote the work of other people. This ensures that everyone receives the credit due to them for their work and helps to demonstrate your 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 examination have increased opportunities for plagiarism. At the same time, increasing pressures on you as 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 your 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. These guidelines have therefore been written to encourage academic integrity and good academic writing, to help you understand what plagiarism is, and to help you to avoid plagiarism in your own work.

Your course/Department may use specific plagiarism detection software to assist academic staff to identify and deal efficiently and effectively with cases of plagiarism where they exist. The most common software currently in use across the University is Turnitin (see Appendix 1 for details of this software and its use).

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Please contact the Governance, Management and Policy Team
(r.kochanowska@strath.ac.uk, ext. 2002) if you have any queries.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's work or ideas, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and is **a form of intellectual theft**. Ignorance or lack of understanding, while perhaps understandable in a student in the early stages of their academic career, does not excuse plagiarism. Remember it is up to you, as a member of the academic community, to find out what the academic conventions are and to stick to them.

The following examples, which apply both to conventional sources and information downloaded from the internet, are illustrative and not exhaustive:

- inclusion of phrases or ideas from another's work without the use of quotation marks and appropriate acknowledgement of the source;
- summarising somebody else's work without acknowledgement;
- paraphrasing somebody else's work by changing a few words or altering the order of presentation without acknowledgement;
- copying somebody else's work;
- using somebody else's ideas, theories or opinions without acknowledgement or presenting work which is substantially somebody else's ideas as one's own;
- collusion or the representation of a piece of unauthorised group work as the work of a single candidate;
- duplication or the inclusion in coursework of material identical or substantially similar to material which has already been submitted for another assessment or for the award of another degree;

- commissioning, stealing or acquiring an assignment done by another person and submitting it as your own work;
- copying data/experimental results/statistics/references from whatever source (ie work of fellow students, notes provided by lecturers/tutors, textbook etc) without acknowledgement
- copying tables, graphs, diagrams or other visual material without acknowledgement

Why does it matter?

Adherence to the academic conventions on citation and referencing is very important as **the quality and reputation of your final award depends upon the academic integrity of your work**. Your degree is awarded, and your classification decided, on the understanding that the work submitted, other than in the case of formal groupwork (which has its own conventions), is your own and not that of somebody else. Should it be demonstrated at a future date that this was not in fact the case, you may be stripped of your degree.

Even if you were to get away with plagiarism now, it may come back to haunt you in the future. In recent years there have been a number of well-publicized cases from across the world in which established members of academic staff (from Vice-Chancellors down), broadcasters and others have had to resign from their posts or have had their works withdrawn because of the revelation of instances of plagiarism which had taken place as much as 20 or 30 years previously.

How can I avoid it?

Use your own words

Always seek to express your own ideas in your assignments, using your own words. An important part of your learning is the formulation of your own views and opinions, the ability to express these clearly and explain them to others, and the development of your own writing style. While you can, and indeed should, study ideas and information from a variety of sources, subjecting these to critical analysis and using them to support your own analysis and arguments, it must be clear to the reader what is your own work and what is brought in from elsewhere. It is helpful to comment on direct quotations to show, for example, why you have selected them, how they support your argument, or what they add to your discussion. If you wish to paraphrase or summarise an argument used by someone else try doing this without looking at the original, relying only on your understanding and memory of what you have read and your notes.

Citation and Referencing

Citing the work of others is a means of strengthening and supporting your own ideas and arguments, not replacing them. In addition, it allows you to comment on the validity and usefulness of their ideas or arguments. Obviously, you must state the source of any direct quote but, even when you summarise or paraphrase the work of others, you must properly cite the original source in accordance with the conventions of your academic discipline. **You will not be accused of plagiarism if the sources of any information, ideas or writing you have used have been properly acknowledged.**

The conventions on citation and referencing can vary between disciplines so it is very important that you read any materials on this subject provided by the department(s) in which you study and **seek clarification from your lecturers and tutors** if you are still unsure about the conventions which apply. If in doubt, however, it is always best to cite your sources.

Advice can also be obtained from the following websites

A Quick Guide to Referencing

<http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheets/tipsheet3.pdf>

http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp06_AQuickGuideToReferencing.pdf

Effective Note-taking

In addition, it is helpful to learn to take notes effectively, putting direct quotations in quotation marks and including details of your sources for ideas, quotations, results, tables, diagrams etc so that these can be readily referenced when you come to complete your assignment or other piece of work. If you do choose to cut and paste something directly from the internet or other e-resources into your notes, be sure to put the pasted text in quotation marks and to note down the source (including the URL and the date viewed).

You should also refer to the following:

Being an information literate researcher: tips for avoiding plagiarism

http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp11_

[BeingAnInformationLiterateResearcher.pdf](#)

How can people tell if something has been plagiarized?

Often a member of academic staff recognizes the source as something which he or she has read (or indeed written!) or realizes that references are being made to works which you cannot have accessed. Also, it is often possible to detect a difference in writing style or command of the English language. Any suspicion can usually be quickly checked by using a search engine on the internet or through discussion with other members of academic staff who may well recognize the source.

In this context, the University now subscribes to plagiarism detection software – Turnitin – which is becoming increasingly widely used across the University. Some departments are using it to check on suspected cases of plagiarism; others now require all students to submit their assessments electronically so that all, or a sample of the total, can be uploaded into Turnitin for checking. Departments may also make the software available to you as a learning tool so that you can check your work at the draft stage.

You might like to view the following:

Identifying Plagiarism in Student Work
[http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/
documents/tipsheetsv3/tp04_](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp04_IdentifyingPlagiarismInStudentWork.pdf)
[IdentifyingPlagiarismInStudentWork.pdf](http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/documents/tipsheetsv3/tp04_IdentifyingPlagiarismInStudentWork.pdf)

What will happen if I am suspected of plagiarizing?

If you are suspected of plagiarizing, you will be called to a meeting with your Head of Department and asked to explain any similarities between your work and that identified as the possible source of material that you may have used without proper acknowledgement. If the Head of Department concludes that you are guilty of plagiarism, collusion or copying, you will be asked if there are any mitigating circumstances. After consideration of all the facts of the case, the Head of Department has the authority to refer you to the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement for assistance with academic writing, and/or to reduce marks for poor scholarship (including reducing marks to zero), or to require you to repeat the assignment or class, or to decide that you cannot progress on your course, or to refer your case to the Senate Discipline Committee. A note of the meeting will be taken and the outcome noted. You will have an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this note which will be kept on your file.

Where can I get advice and support if I am accused of plagiarism?

Cases must be referred to the Chief Operating Officer if the alleged plagiarism is considered to be sufficiently serious (for example, if you have been found guilty of repeated plagiarism, have lifted significant amounts of text from other sources without acknowledgement, or are in the final stages of your degree programme), or if the appropriate penalty would have serious consequences for your academic career (for example, if it would result in a lower classification or in the award of a lesser qualification, or indeed no award). The Secretary of the University then decides whether the case should be referred to the Senate Discipline Committee for consideration.

In this case you may be asked to appear before the Committee, which is convened by the Vice-Principal assisted by two members of the University Senate and two members of the Students' Executive. The Committee will interview you and a representative(s) of the Department to decide whether or not an offence has occurred and, if so, to consider any mitigating or aggravating circumstances. You and the Departmental representative(s) will be asked to leave the room while the Committee deliberates. Once a decision has been reached, you will be called back in to the meeting to hear the outcome of that deliberation.

If you are accused of plagiarism you may seek support and advice from ASK in the Students' Association and from the Student Advisory and Counseling Service. If you have to appear before the Senate Discipline Committee you will be permitted to bring a representative with you. This might be a member of ASK, of the Student Executive, a friend or advisor.

What penalties can be imposed by the University?

Plagiarism is something which the University takes very seriously. It is subject to both academic and disciplinary procedures. For example, while an allegation of *intentional* plagiarism may be dismissed, you may still incur an academic penalty for poor scholarship because the work you have submitted has few, if any, of your own ideas or arguments (ie loss of marks, including the reduction of the mark to zero). Offences are assessed on a case by case basis. The existence of intention is important in determining whether or not disciplinary action should be taken and what kind of penalty should be imposed. Relevant aggravating and mitigating factors are also taken into consideration and can affect the severity of the outcome.

The penalties for academic dishonesty are formally set out in Regulations 5.4 and 5.9 in the University Calendar (see Appendix 2 below).

In each of the real examples given below the Chief Operating Officer had decided that the allegations and/or the penalty proposed by the Department were sufficiently serious to go before the Senate Discipline Committee.

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 use 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.

Appendix 1

What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is a software programme which has been developed to facilitate the speedy comparison of students' work against a whole host of electronic sources. It can be a useful learning tool to enable you to identify your own poor academic practice and improve your academic writing, but it can also assist the lecturer or tutor in the detection of plagiarism, including collusion, by checking students' work for matches much more quickly than they can do themselves using a search engine. Turnitin does not decide whether or not there has been plagiarism in a particular piece of work. That decision is made by the member of academic staff.

How does Turnitin work?

- 1) Either you or a member of staff uploads your work into the software.
- 2) Turnitin then checks it against its databases. These include a current and archived copy of the internet, a database of books and journals and a database of the student papers previously submitted to Turnitin.
- 3) Turnitin produces an originality report which highlights sections of text within the piece of work which have been found in other sources within the database, including those which have been correctly cited and referenced, and gives you a direct comparison with the source.
- 4) The lecturer/tutor or student reviews the report and identifies any passages which have either been incorrectly cited or which are unacknowledged.
- 5) Decisions can then be taken on what actions are required.

What are the draw backs?

The text highlighted in the originality report includes all duplicated text, including that which has been correctly cited and referenced. However, the software now includes a feature which allows you to exclude quoted and bibliographic material from a search.

Who uses Turnitin?

Turnitin currently covers over 9.5 million high school, college and university students in over 90 countries. It is used by approximately 90% of Universities in the United Kingdom.

How is it used?

Different institutions use it in different ways. A study carried out by the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education in November 2006 showed the following patterns of usage:

- Available for use by students as an educational tool to help them recognize plagiarism and improve their writing skills;
- Available for students as a submission tool only;
- Used by all staff, University-wide, and every piece of student work is submitted and checked as a matter of policy;
- Used by particular departments/faculties/colleges/schools for particular programmes for which every piece of student work is submitted and checked as a matter of policy;
- Used to sample student work;
- Available for staff to use on an ad hoc basis, as and when suspicion arises.

It can be used within WebCT, Blackboard and Moodle and can be used with open or anonymous marking.

At present the pattern of usage at Strathclyde varies between Departments. However, staff are now being advised to ask all students to submit their work electronically and either to upload all student work for a particular assessment or to upload a sample (say 15%) of that work. Staff are also being advised to permit you to upload your own work onto Turnitin to assist you to improve your citation and referencing skills and academic writing more generally.

Appendix 2

REGULATIONS FOR STUDENT DISCIPLINE EXTRACT FROM THE UNIVERSITY CALENDAR

5 Regulations for Student Discipline
[Note: These regulations are to be read in conjunction with Ordinance 12, Regulation 4 and the University's Procedures and Guidelines: Dealing with Instances of Academic Dishonesty]

5.3 Offences Relating to Academic Dishonesty

5.3.1 The University's degrees and other academic awards are granted in recognition of a candidate's personal achievement.

5.3.2 Any action that circumvents the established academic practice regarding assessments may be deemed to be academically dishonest.

5.3.3 Any action on the part of a candidate that involves academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism or cheating in examinations that are assessed as part of the requirements for an academic award) shall be regarded as a serious offence pending investigation.

5.3.4 Potential acts of academic dishonesty are subject to both academic and disciplinary procedures. Both forms of procedure may be appropriate and relevant in that an allegation of academic dishonesty may be dismissed but the student may still incur an academic penalty for poor scholarship.

5.3.5 Where an apparent case of academic dishonesty is detected by an examiner or assessor either directly or, for example, through a report from an invigilator or an external examiner, this shall be formally reported by the examiner or the Course Supervisor or the Head of Department to the relevant undergraduate or postgraduate Board of Examiners, stating the course of action taken, be it:

(i) that the examiner was satisfied that the matter required no further formal action but should be noted by the Head of Department; or

(ii) that the nature and/or extent of the academic dishonesty was such that, in the opinion of the examiner and/or the Course Supervisor or the Head of Department or nominee, the matter required further formal action. In such a case, the examiner, upon agreement with the Head of Department or nominee has the discretion to adjust the marks and results to the point where the academic rating for the piece of work in question is reduced to zero with whatever consequences would normally follow from such performance. Alternatively, a candidate may be asked to resubmit an assignment or repeat a practical examination; or

(iii) that the nature of the academic dishonesty, and/or its extent, was so significant that it was the opinion of the examiner and the Course Supervisor and/or the Head of Department or nominee, that sanction over and above the disallowance of work is appropriate and that the case should be referred to the Chief Operating Officer, whom failing the Director of Corporate Services (or nominee), who shall decide whether the matter should be referred to the Senate Discipline Committee. The student shall be allowed to continue with their studies (or take any outstanding resit examinations) pending this decision or the hearing of the Senate Discipline Committee. Where a meeting of the Senate Discipline Committee is involved the relevant Board of Examiners shall be informed and shall defer any decision concerning that particular student.

5.3.6 If a matter has been referred to the Senate Discipline Committee, the relevant Course Supervisor and/or Head of Department or nominee shall inform the student concerned in writing that such action has been taken and that they will be contacted in due course by the Chief Operating Officer, whom failing the Director of Corporate Services (or nominee), with information on the procedure to be followed.

5.9 Senate Discipline Committee: Penalties

5.9.1 A student who is deemed to be in breach of discipline may be liable to one or more of the following penalties:

- (i) an admonition;
- (ii) a reprimand;
- (iii) a fine;
- (iv) in the case of abuse of any of the University services or facilities, disqualification from using these services or facilities for a stipulated period;
- (v) requirement to make good to the satisfaction of the University any damage or injury caused to the property of the University or an institution attended as part of a University course;
- (vi) in the case of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism and cheating in examinations, the deduction of marks in a particular assessment or assessments, and/or the requirement to resubmit an assessment or assessments, and/or the requirement to resit a class or a diet of examinations, and/or the requirement to reattend any part of the course, and/or preventing progress to the next stage of the course, and/or the capping of degree classification, and/or the withholding of award (final or exit), and/or the deferment of an award for up to twelve months. Other penalties may be imposed such as, but not exclusively, those stated in Regulations 5.9.1(vii) and 5.9.1(viii);
- (vii) suspension from attendance at the University for a stipulated period;
- (viii) expulsion from the University;
- (ix) such other penalties as may be appropriate.

The above list of disciplinary penalties is not exhaustive and the University reserves the right to impose other penalties it deems appropriate and proportionate to the offence.

5.9.2 Any of the above penalties may be suspended for a period of time on specified conditions.

5.9.3 Where a student is found to be in breach of discipline, the Senate Discipline Committee may defer sentence for a period not exceeding six months. For the avoidance of doubt, such deferral shall be without further disruption to the student's studies.