

How to avoid Academic Misconduct – A Guide for Students

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Introduction

This guide will give you the knowledge and confidence to both avoid being accused of academic misconduct and improve your assessment grades. It's vital that you understand how to avoid academic misconduct, as the maximum penalty for an offence is exclusion from the University and ignorance of the rules is no defence.

The University and the Students' Union believe that many incidents of academic misconduct can be avoided by increasing the knowledge and skills available to students. This guide, as part of the University's policy on tackling academic misconduct, is intended to help you understand the nature of academic misconduct, the penalties involved and, most importantly, how you can avoid it by improving your study skills.

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Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

Tutors will suspect plagiarism if it appears that you've submitted work that is not referenced correctly. The University of Wolverhampton's Regulations and Procedure for the Investigation of Academic Misconduct (2007) defines plagiarism as:

...the act of taking someone else's work and passing it off as your own. This includes incorporating either unattributed direct quotation(s) or substantial paraphrasing from the work of another/others. It is important to cite all sources whose work has been drawn on and reference them fully in accordance with the referencing standard used in each academic school (p1).

Essentially, plagiarism is using somebody else's words or ideas as your own: a kind of 'academic theft'.

The University takes plagiarism very seriously. It's considered as a form of academic misconduct (along with collusion and cheating) and can attract severe academic penalties.

Plagiarism can be intentional or inadvertent – but an offence still exists. In other words, ignorance of the rules is no excuse. This is why it's vital for you to understand how to avoid it.

You cannot use other people's ideas, words, images and data in your assignments unless you provide full details of your sources.

You must acknowledge all the sources that you use by using the correct referencing system for your course (e.g. Harvard).

What is substantial paraphrasing?

Plagiarism is not *just* about copying and pasting from the Internet or copying direct from journal articles or textbooks without referencing. You also commit plagiarism if you 'substantially paraphrase' somebody else's work.

Substantial paraphrasing means taking somebody's words, without using quotation marks, and failing to put them into your own words. This can catch students out.

Some students may be tempted to take a text, change only a few words or the just the order of sentences and then put a reference at the end. Be warned! This is plagiarism in the form of substantial paraphrasing.

Any direct copying you do must be contained in quotation marks with an appropriate reference. Everything else must be in your own words and fully acknowledged with references.

Why shouldn't I plagiarise?

Some students fail to see what all the fuss is about and are tempted to take their chances. Many wish they hadn't done so after they've been through the academic misconduct disciplinary process. This involves you and your work being scrutinised by an academic misconduct panel.

Tutors have many ways of confirming whether a piece of work has been plagiarised – for example, the University now has software that can detect plagiarism. Just don't risk it.

Penalties

The penalties for plagiarism at the University of Wolverhampton range from failing the piece of work in question through to ***exclusion from the University*** (depending on your level of study, the nature of the plagiarism and whether you've committed previous offences).

You may also have your degree downgraded or you may fail the whole module that the plagiarised assessment relates to. See Appendix 1 for further details of the penalties for plagiarism.

Other Reasons not to Plagiarise

- It's essential to maintain the academic integrity of degrees awarded by the University. By allowing students who plagiarise to get away with it, the University would be doing an injustice to the majority of hardworking students who haven't plagiarised.
- Referencing correctly shows that you've researched the topic well. If the referencing is poor, it's likely that the content of the work will also be poor.
- Students must get used to referencing their work so that other researchers can quickly access the ideas used. This aids the whole research and learning process.
- Plagiarism is morally wrong. Students who plagiarise effectively steal other people's hard work and ideas and try to pass them off as their own. At best it's laziness, at worst it's deliberate academic theft.

Give me some examples of plagiarism

Here are some examples of scenarios where students can be accused of plagiarism. They are adapted from the University of South Australia's Learning Guide on Avoiding Plagiarism (2005).

- Expressing somebody's ideas without giving a reference. This includes ideas that are quoted directly **and those that are expressed in your own words**.
- Using somebody's exact words without quotation marks and a correct reference.
- Expressing ideas using some of your own words but neglecting to significantly change the author's original version. This is plagiarism in the form of substantial paraphrasing, even if a reference is given.
- Copying and pasting from numerous different sources and swapping them around to make a full assignment.

How can I avoid plagiarising?

You're expected to back up your own words and ideas with support from other authors. This must be done via the referencing system that's relevant to your course.

Many courses across the University use the Harvard referencing system (see page 11). If you take the time to learn and use this properly, your chances of being accused of plagiarism will be minimal.

I rushed my assignment because of personal problems

This is never an excuse for plagiarism. You can use the extenuating circumstances procedure to notify the Board of any problems that may have affected your performance in, or ability to take, any of your assessment. Alternatively, you can take a Leave of Absence. Visit www.wolvesunion.org for further information and follow links to Advice and Academic Advice.

How can I develop my academic writing skills?

When you're using other people's work or ideas it's important to engage with their work critically. You can quote, paraphrase, summarise or critically review – and then you must provide appropriate references. Let's look at how you can use sources both to avoid plagiarism and gain higher marks.

Quoting

When quoting directly from a source you must use quotation marks and give the author's name, the date of publication and the page number in the main body of text. You must also provide a full reference in your reference section. When you quote you use the exact text that was originally written. For example:

Knight argued: "It is the student's responsibility to ensure he or she is fully aware of how to reference; however, universities should ensure that information is clearly publicised in, for example, award and module guides and that study skills support is readily available to all students" (Knight, 2005, p4).

You can, if you wish, introduce quotations longer than four lines with a colon, then two empty lines, then the quotation itself indented five spaces from the left margin, typed with single spacing. You then need to include in brackets the author's name, the date of publication and the page number. You don't have to use quotation marks for this type of quotation.

Knight emphasises it is more important to prevent than punish plagiarism:

It is important to apply appropriate penalties to those who attempt to pass off the work of others as their own, but it is essential to deal with the more wide-spread courses of plagiarism: sloppy referencing and the general lack of awareness among students about the subtleties of substantial paraphrasing. Only then will we begin to reduce the ever-increasing number of students caught in the plagiarism trap (Knight, 2005, p5).

It's best not to use quotations too often. Using quotes is not merely a way of filling out your word count. You should use quotes only to back up your own arguments or highlight original ideas from other authors.

See the section on Harvard Referencing on page 11 for further information.

Summarising

If you can master the skill of summarising, you'll be far less likely to be accused of plagiarism, and you'll be showing the genuine research and critical thinking skills that are essential for the higher grades at university level.

The essential thing to remember is that you must express ideas in your own words if you're not quoting directly. Seeing as you should not be quoting directly too often in an essay, what you write should be how you understand it, in your own style of expression.

Take a look at the following example. It shows an original text and a student's attempt to paraphrase it.

Original text:

"Plagiarism is a wide-ranging offence and, to avoid doubt, all universities should give a definition to students of what they regard as plagiarism. That puts both parties on an equal footing and provides an understanding of the ground rules in cases where plagiarism is raised as an issue" (Evans and Gill, 2001, p90).

Student's summary:

To avoid all doubt, universities should define plagiarism to their students because it is a wide-ranging offence. If they do this, both parties will be on level footing and the ground rules in cases where plagiarism is raised will be understood (Evans and Gill, 2001).

Do you think this is a valid paraphrase? It isn't, even though a reference has been included. This is substantial paraphrasing – it's too close to the original source. If you regularly use this type of summarising, you're committing plagiarism.

The best way to avoid substantial paraphrasing is to read a whole paragraph or small section, put your source to one side and then write in your own words what you've just understood. Refer back to the source and check that you've understood the meaning and context. You've then summarised the text in your own words.

Acceptable summary:

It is vital for universities to have a full written policy on what they believe constitutes plagiarism. This way, universities will make sure students are aware of what is expected of them and the same rules can then be applied to all students to ensure fairness (Evans and Gill, 2001).

Note that in this example the context and meaning of the original is kept but similar words and sentences are not used.

Critical evaluation

Quoting and summarising are very useful academic skills to acquire and they will go a long way to ensuring you are not accused of academic misconduct. However, to gain higher marks it is not enough to rely on other people's ideas. You must engage with the sources you are using and critically evaluate them.

A well-written piece of work is more than a series of quotes, summaries and paraphrases linked together. Your own opinions, backed up by evidence, need to be apparent in the text. The Napier Business School (2006, p16) gives excellent advice in this area:

- Identify common themes in arguments or schools of thought in the subject discipline
- Show how each author differs and where they disagree with each other
- Show how thought in the area has evolved
- Show how you would classify differing arguments
- Evaluate authors' arguments and indicate any shortcomings in those arguments, showing why you consider them to be shortcomings
- Indicate how much more work would need to be done to be sure certain arguments are valid
- Synthesise the evidence and arguments of several authors to reach a conclusion

What is Harvard referencing?

Harvard referencing

Harvard referencing applies to the majority of University of Wolverhampton students. Law students are a notable exception (see Oxford Referencing on page 13). If you're unsure what system of referencing applies to your course, check with your course leader.

Harvard referencing tips

When referring to an author's work in the body of your text, you should give the author's name and the year of publication in the following format:

Knight (2005) states that cases of plagiarism are treated as academic misconduct whether they are seen as intentional or not.

When you use a reference in the body of your text, you must also include a full reference in a list of references at the end of the assignment. This type of reference should appear as follows:

Knight, M. (2005) *How to avoid plagiarism*. 1st ed., Wolverhampton: SU Press.

See Appendix 2 for a checklist of what information to include in different types of references.

Making effective notes

It's important to take careful notes of the references you use as you go along. This way you won't be confused by the time it comes to writing your references or bibliography. Make sure you take all the relevant details. These will vary depending on the nature of the source.

The software programme Endnote is a very useful tool to help you organise your references as you write an assignment. Endnote can be found on the University's website: www.wlv.ac.uk/lib. Follow the links for study skills and referencing.

Ask in the Learning Centres for further details of training courses on Endnote. It could save you a great deal of time in the long run.

How can I use Harvard referencing to avoid plagiarism?

Imagine that you've found the perfect section of text to back up a point you want to make in an assignment. Here's an example:

Within the UK, the resources available to higher education from the state, whilst increasing in absolute terms, have diminished in relation to the number of students within higher education. Additionally, the penalties for failing to recruit students have become more significant – either in terms of reduced income from the funding council, or reduced income from tuition fees (overseas students and taught postgraduate markets particularly).

Reference:

McClelland, M. (2006) *Postgraduate Certificate Programme Handbook*. Manchester: Association of University Administrators.

How can you use this section of text without committing plagiarism? The following are legitimate ways to use the material cited above and the format is adapted from Fletcher (2004).

Quote it

“Within the UK, the resources available to higher education from the state, whilst increasing in absolute terms, have diminished in relation to the number of students within higher education. Additionally, the penalties for failing to recruit students have become more significant – either in terms of reduced income from the funding council, or reduced income from tuition fees (overseas students and taught postgraduate markets particularly)” (McClelland, 2006, p101).

Note the quotation marks at the beginning and end of the author's text. Also note the author, year of publication and page number is given. This could have also been quoted this in block format (see page 6).

Paraphrase, summarise and build upon it

The relative reduction in funding per student is compounded by penalties for not achieving government recruitment targets and, as a consequence, a reduction in tuition fee income. HEIs are particularly vulnerable to changes in the overseas and taught postgraduate markets (McClelland, 2006).

Note that this paragraph is in no way identical to the original, but the context of the original has been kept and built upon it with the student's own thoughts.

Quote it but not word for word

According to McClelland (2006), "Within the UK, the resources available to higher education from the state, whilst increasing in absolute terms, have diminished in relation to the number of students within higher education" (p101). HEIs are also in danger of losing out on funding if they fail to meet recruitment targets "either in terms of reduced income from the funding council or reduced income from tuition fees (overseas students and taught postgraduate markets particularly)" (McClelland, 2006, p101).

Note how the quotes have been interwoven with the student's own words. Be careful when doing this! It breaks up the flow of text so choose only quotes that strongly reinforce your own arguments.

Let your reader know that you're aware of the material and that it has helped to form your argument

There has been plenty of research to show how universities are experiencing an overall reduction in funding (see, for example, McClelland, 2006).

Further information on Harvard referencing

For a comprehensive guide on how to use Harvard referencing, including referencing journals and electronic sources, please see the Learning Centre's booklet, Harvard Style Referencing, available from Learning Centres, the Students' Union's Advice and Support Centre or online at www.wlv.ac.uk/lib (follow the links for study skills and referencing).

See also the referencing checklist in Appendix 2.

Oxford referencing

Oxford referencing is used by a minority of students (e.g. Law) and differs from Harvard referencing in that it uses footnotes. Further information can be found at www.wlv.ac.uk/lib (follow the links for study skills and referencing).

Referencing and Bibliographies

Your referencing section must contain, in alphabetical order, all the sources that you've included in your assignment. These must be laid out using the style of the referencing system used on your course (for example, Harvard).

Some tutors may also require a bibliography in addition to or in place of a reference section. A bibliography is a list of all the sources that you've engaged with in relation to the assignment (for example, background reading). You may not have used all these sources in your assignment, but a bibliography shows how you have read around the subject.

Plagiarism summary

- Don't copy directly from sources unless you provide fully quoted references.
- Don't rely on direct quotations to fill out your word count.
- Don't substantially paraphrase. Make sure **everything** is in your own words unless you're quoting direct.
- Use academic skills such as quoting, summarising and critical evaluation to avoid academic misconduct and increase your learning and overall grades.
- Make sure you're familiar with the referencing system used on your course.
- If you need help with referencing, make an appointment with a Study Skills Adviser at one of the Learning Centres (see What Extra Help Can I Get?).

Collusion

What is collusion?

Tutors will suspect collusion if two or more very similar pieces of work have been submitted. The University's Regulations and Procedure for the Investigation of Academic Conduct states that collusion occurs when

"...two or more people combine to produce a piece of work for assessment that is passed off as the work of one student alone. The work may be so alike in content, wording and structure that the similarity goes beyond what might have been coincidence. For example - where one student has copied the work of another, or where a joint effort has taken place in producing what should have been an individual effort" (p1).

Why shouldn't I collude?

Penalties

The penalties for collusion at the University of Wolverhampton range from failing the piece of work through to **exclusion from the University** (depending on your level of study, the nature of the collusion and whether you have committed previous offences).

You may also have your degree downgraded or you may fail the whole module that the collusion relates to. See Appendix 1 for further details of the penalties for collusion.

Other reasons not to collude

- It's essential to maintain the academic integrity of degrees awarded by the University. Can you imagine being treated by a nurse who had qualified by submitting the work of other students?
- By allowing students who collude to get away with it, the University would be doing an injustice to the majority of students who have worked hard on their own.
- This is your degree, not someone else's. It's your name that will appear on your degree certificate. Therefore, you have to put the work in.
- You will gain essential research, organisation and motivation skills from independent learning that will be invaluable to you in your future employment.

Can I copy work from other students?

Copying from other students is never acceptable. The rest of this section contains very useful advice adapted from Napier University Business School's (2006, p5-6) guidelines for students.

My friend said I could use his work...

This is never acceptable and will be penalised.

- The penalty can apply to the student who has copied AND the student who has provided the work to be copied.
- If your friends ask you how to approach an assignment and you give them a copy of your work, the chances are they will copy it, even if they claim they won't. YOU and the other student(s) can be penalised if this happens.
- However, discussing your work and ideas with others after you've all received your results may help with deeper understanding and revision of the topic. This is acceptable and encouraged – but you must not, for example, jointly produce model answers to exam questions based on these discussions.
- You can critically evaluate previous students' unpublished dissertations, but you must provide the appropriate references in your work.

I took my friend's work without her knowing...

Copying from another student without their consent will be treated as serious academic misconduct and is likely to lead to your exclusion from the University or the downgrading of your degree.

Help to ensure other students don't copy your work by avoiding the following:

- Saving your work on a hard drive of a computer where other students may have access to it.
- Losing a disk or USB drive, or leaving a printed copy of your assignment where other students may find it.
- Asking someone else to submit your assignment for you, especially if you are handing it in advance of the deadline.
- Showing your work to other students

In the above situations the student whose work has been stolen will also be accused of collusion. The onus will be on BOTH students to prove what has happened. If you believe your work has been stolen, contact your module leader straight away.

But my friends and I like to share ideas...

Sharing ideas with others is often an excellent way to learn, as you can bounce ideas off each other and find alternative points of view that you wouldn't have thought of yourself.

However, there's a fine line between sharing ideas in this manner and colluding. If you produce common ideas, common structures or common words and quotes, then you make it more likely that your assignments will be seen as similar, and therefore more likely that you, and the rest of your group, will be penalised for collusion. Similarity in assignments would not occur if you studied independently.

To avoid this make sure you always write your assignments up on your own, away from your friends. There's nothing wrong with discussing points with your friends, or even sharing ideas about what research to use, but you should be 100 per cent confident that your work is different from their work. Don't, for example, use similar quotes or structures to your friends.

Group work

Group work is a reality of working life and is seen by many module leaders as an important part of learning. When working on individual assessments, however, it's vital that you work alone and that the work you produce hasn't been seen or discussed in detail with another student. If you're in any doubt about whether or not you should be working in a group, contact your module leader in good time before the deadline.

Give me some examples of collusion

The following scenarios are adapted from Chris Rook's (2007, p1) guide for Computing students at the University of Northumbria.

Example 1

Student A has trouble with a part of an assignment and asks student B for help. Student B shows his assignment to student A to demonstrate how he's tackled the assignment. Student A takes notes and adds them to his own assignment. Both students are finalists with no previous record.

This is collusion and student A will be fail the module and have to come back the following year to retake it. The retake will be capped at D5 and student A will have to pay tuition fees for this module. Student B will receive a warning. But BOTH students could be penalised if there is evidence that student B knew student A was going to copy his work.

Example 2

Student C and student D sit side-by-side on University computers and knowingly use each other's work as they go along. They submit very similar pieces of work. Both students are studying at Level 2 and have committed academic misconduct twice before.

This is collusion and both students will be excluded from the University.

Example 3

Student E has trouble with a concept and asks student F for help. Student F verbally explains some of the theoretical principles that student E is having trouble with and gives advice on general sources. Both students go away and write separate assignments.

This is acceptable and a useful process for both students.

Collusion summary

- You should be confident that every sentence of your assignment is your own (unless quoting direct from another author) and you should be able to explain concepts fully if asked to do so.
- Do not show your assignments to others
- If you agree to help out other students, do so by improving their understanding, not by giving them the answer. Alternatively, tell them to plan in advance and ask the module leader, who will be happy to help them iron out any difficulties.

Cheating

What is cheating?

The university takes cases of cheating very seriously. The Regulations and Procedure for the Investigation of Academic Misconduct defines cheating as

“...any attempt by a candidate to gain unfair advantage in an assessment by dishonest means, and includes, for example, all breaches of examination room rules, impersonating another candidate, falsifying data and obtaining an examination paper in advance of its authorised release” (p1).

Cheating attracts the University’s most severe penalties. It’s classed as serious misconduct and if proven is likely to lead to your exclusion from the university or the downgrading of your degree.

Give me some examples of cheating

Example 1

Student A, an undergraduate, sits a seen examination question and, in defiance of the exam regulations, brings in a prepared answer. He pulls his prepared answer out of his jacket after 15 minutes and puts it on his desk. The invigilator walks round after 20 minutes and notices that student A’s paper contains far more words than a student could be expected write in that amount of time.

Student A’s degree class will be downgraded from an honours degree to an ordinary degree for breaching exam regulations. He would be excluded from the University if he were studying at postgraduate level.

Example 2

Student B, an undergraduate, looks at student C’s assignment without student C knowing, in order to steal the text and design and incorporates it into her own assignment. This is deliberate cheating, although initially both students will be accused of collusion.

Student B will have her honours degree downgraded to an ordinary degree for serious misconduct, providing student C can show evidence that she did the work on her own (for example, by providing drafts and study notes and being able to demonstrate knowledge of the topic).

Example 3

Student D, an undergraduate nurse, cannot find his supervisor in time to sign off his practice documents. He forges his supervisor’s signature and hands in the work. His tutor suspects he has signed it off himself. Student D has previously been penalised for serious misconduct.

Student D will be excluded from the University.

How can I avoid being accused of cheating?

- Familiarise yourself with the exam regulations, which are available online at www.wlv.ac.uk/polsregs.
- Don't take notes into an exam room unless you have been given permission.
- Don't be tempted to cut corners by forging signatures and documents
- Don't take other students' work and try to pass it off as your own.
- Keep all draft work and study notes so that you can show you've worked independently.

What Extra Help Can I Get?

- Study Skills Advisers. Based in the Learning Centres, these advisers can help students with all aspects of studying. Phone 01902 322300 or book an appointment at your local Learning Centre's reception.
- See the Harvard Style Referencing booklet, which is available from the Learning Centres, the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre or online at www.wlv.ac.uk.
- Endnote Training. Contact the Learning Centres (01902 322300) for details on how this software can make referencing easy for you.
- Module/Award Leaders. If you've got any doubts regarding academic misconduct, contact your module leader or award leader for clarification.
- Sharpen Up Your Skills. Visit the website for help with study and personal skills: www.wlv.ac.uk/skills.
- Your Academic School Office can provide you with advice on your course.
- The Students' Union's Advice and Support Centre is a free and confidential service that provides advice on academic, financial, housing and international students' issues. Visit www.wovlesunion.org/advice.

References

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University Of South Australia (2005) *Learning guides: Avoiding plagiarism* [online]. University of South Australia [cited 28th July 2005]. Available from World Wide Web:
<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/students/Lguides/!18plagiarism.rtf>

University of Wolverhampton (2007) *Regulations and Procedure for the Investigation of Academic Misconduct* [online]. Wolverhampton: University of Wolverhampton [cited 10th August 2007]. Available for the World Wide Web: http://www.wlv.ac.uk/Docs/aca_acad_misc.doc.

Appendix 1: Penalties for academic misconduct (plagiarism, collusion and cheating)

Offence	Penalty
A first offence committed by a student in their first year of study on a University of Wolverhampton award	Failure of the assessment task in question (grade F0). The student will be permitted to re-sit the assessment at the next opportunity and the grade will be restricted to D5
A first offence committed by a student not in their first year of study Or A second offence committed by any student on a University of Wolverhampton award	Failure of the module in question (F0). The student will be permitted to retake the module at the next opportunity and the grade will be restricted to D5. The student will normally be charged for the retake.
A third offence committed by a student on a University of Wolverhampton award	Exclusion from the University.

Serious offences

Serious academic misconduct is defined as any case of deliberate, premeditated cheating, which has either been admitted by a student, or which a panel has judged to be a premeditated attempt to deceive and gain unfair advantage. For example – theft of another student’s work or cheating in an examination.

Offence	Penalty
First serious offence at undergraduate level	Restriction of the award a student can ultimately achieve
Second serious offence at undergraduate level	Exclusion from the University
First serious offence at postgraduate level	Exclusion from the University

In cases where students are excluded from the University, they will receive the award to which they were entitled to at the time of the exclusion. For example – instead of receiving a BA (Hons) degree, an excluded student may be entitled to a Certificate in HE, a Diploma in HE or an Ordinary Degree, depending on the credit achieved at the time of exclusion.

For the University’s full regulations on academic misconduct visit www.wlv.ac.uk/polsregs.

Appendix 2: Referencing checklist*

	Author	Year of publication	Title of article/chapter	Title of publication	Issue information	Place of publication	Publisher	Edition	Page numbers	URL	Date accessed
Book	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			
Chapter from book	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Journal article	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Electronic journal article	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Internet	✓	✓		✓						✓	✓
Newspaper article	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		

*Taken from Napier Business School's "*Plagiarism and how to avoid it – guidelines for students*" (2006, p27), which was adapted from Pears, R. and Shield, G. (2004) "*Cite them right: referencing made easy*", Northumbria Press

