



Guidance for Students on Avoiding Plagiarism

1. Introduction

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and can have serious consequences for your studies. Ignorance is not a defence in cases of suspected plagiarism. It is therefore very important that all students understand what plagiarism is and take steps to avoid it.

2. What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the act of including in one's work the work of another person without providing adequate acknowledgement of having done so, either deliberately or unintentionally.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is contrary to the principles of academic study. It is regarded by the University of Edinburgh as academic misconduct and is a punishable offence under the University's Code of Discipline for students:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/GeneralStatementDiscipline.pdf>
<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/CodeofDiscipline.pdf>

Plagiarism is unfair to the vast majority of students who play by the rules and it risks devaluing the University's high academic standards. The University does not tolerate plagiarism in any form and will investigate all reports of suspected plagiarism.

Plagiarism can take a number of forms, for example:

- Including in your work extracts from another person's work without using quotation marks and acknowledging of the source. The source might be a book, another research paper, a website, another student's work, comments or notes from a member of staff, data, or pictures.
- Summarising another person's work without acknowledging that it is a summary of their work and not your own;
- Using someone else's ideas or assistance without due acknowledgement. That might include assistance with statistics or data processing, the provision of materials, or help receive via external collaboration.
- Collaborating with other people (including fellow students) on assessed work that is required to be completed and submitted individually.¹
- Cutting and pasting from electronic sources without explicit acknowledgement of the URL and the author, and without explicitly marking the pasted text in inverted commas, or labelling the source of the diagram or illustration. The inclusion of large amounts of pasted material, even if acknowledged, always raises doubts about how much of the work presented should be credited to

¹ This type of plagiarism is called collusion. This may be defined as the unauthorised and unattributed collaboration of students or others in a piece of assessed work.

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the student. The same applies to over-quotation from a traditional, printed source

Students assisting someone else in plagiarising, for example by allowing them to copy their work, have also committed a cheating offence and may be subject to disciplinary action.

3. Avoiding Plagiarism

All work submitted by students is accepted on the understanding that it is their own.

Students can avoid plagiarism by ensuring that any sources used in submitted work are adequately acknowledged and properly referenced, and that appropriate standards for academic practice in the relevant subject area are adhered to.

This should include:

- providing full citation of all sources (books, articles, websites, newspapers, images, artefacts, lecture handouts, data sources etc.) used in the preparation of a piece of work.
- properly referencing the sources of the arguments and ideas used in an assignment, using the recognised reference system for the subject area. Both quotations and paraphrased or summarised versions of arguments or ideas should be referenced in this way.
- following any other guidelines for preparing and presenting coursework as provided by the subject area.

Guidance on the practices that apply in the relevant subject area and discipline should be obtained from your course organiser or programme director, or your supervisor(s) in the case of postgraduate students.

Particular difficulties might be encountered when undertaking assessed group-work. If you are unsure as to what is required you should seek guidance from the group-work supervisor, for example, on questions such as when group members should stop working as a group and write up individually. If you copy material from another student, such as by collaborating on a piece of assessed work which should be completed and submitted individually, this is collusion and is a form of plagiarism. Some group-work assignments may involve informal discussions in groups, followed by submitting a report individually. Other group-work may be longer term and involve completing a project together. It is perfectly acceptable to discuss ideas in groups when asked to do so by a lecturer or tutor. The point at which students need to take care is in preparing work for assessment. Students should ensure that they understand when work is to be completed as part of a group effort work and when it is to be completed by the individual without collaboration.

4. Plagiarism Detection Software

In order to assist with the detection of possible plagiarism most areas of the University routinely use 'Turnitin' plagiarism software to check work submitted for assessment. Turnitin software works by comparing the content of an uploaded assessment to a vast database of digital content, papers, journals and publications. The software cannot identify whether or not plagiarism has occurred but it does highlight sections of text that are duplicated in other sources held in the database. Passages directly or very closely copied from existing sources is identified by the software and both the original and the work submitted are displayed for the marker to

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view. Where any highlighted sections are appropriately attributed and referenced within the work this will be evident and no action will be taken.

Further information on 'Turnitin' is available at:

http://www.submit.ac.uk/resources/documentation/turnitin/sales/Answers_to_Questions_Students_Ask.pdf

5. Suspected Plagiarism

The University takes all cases of suspected plagiarism very seriously. Information on the University's procedure for dealing with cases of suspected academic misconduct, including plagiarism, can be found at:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/AcademicMisconductProcedures.pdf>

If you are suspected of having plagiarised, you will be notified in writing and will be informed as to the nature of the problem and the likely next steps. Depending on the extent of the suspected plagiarism and whether you have been found to have offended previously, you may be invited to a formal academic misconduct interview with the College Academic Misconduct Officer.

If you receive notification of suspected plagiarism you are strongly encouraged to contact the EUSA Advice Place where a EUSA Academic Adviser will be able to help you understand the process and provide advice on possible options. Contact details for the EUSA Advice Place are available from the EUSA website at:

<http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice/>

It is in your interest to be honest and to participate fully in any investigation that is carried out into suspected plagiarism. It is never a good idea to ignore a notification of suspected plagiarism. If you are invited to attend a formal academic misconduct interview you will have the right to be accompanied by a member of the University of Edinburgh community, for example, a EUSA Adviser, or your Personal Tutor or Supervisor. Investigations are carried out as a priority but the time taken will depend in part on the seriousness of the case. Consideration will also be given to any upcoming examinations or dissertation deadlines, and the investigation may be delayed so as to avoid causing additional stress whilst you are preparing for these.

6. Further information

The sites below offer guidance on preventing or avoiding plagiarism. They include examples of what constitutes plagiarism and of study skills that can help you avoid it:

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>

<http://www.plagiarismadvice.org/advice>

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/pages/plagiarism.html>

Please note: the above web addresses link to external sites and are not compiled or controlled by the University. The links are included here for reference only. Please note that the University's regulations and procedures take precedence over any other source of information on plagiarism.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I know about plagiarism from previous / undergraduate studies. I didn't encounter any problems then, so can I assume that it is safe to carry on the same way?

Different types or levels of study or studies undertaken in different countries may have different requirements in relation to referencing. You should ensure that you understand the requirements of your particular programme and assessment. If you are in doubt you should raise any queries with your course organiser, programme director or supervisor. You may also find it useful to refer to your course or programme handbook.

2. I find it helpful to discuss my ideas with others. Is this putting me at risk of plagiarising or of helping others to plagiarise.

Most people find it helpful to discuss ideas with others and in many courses you might be encouraged to discuss issues with classmates or tackle questions in small groups. This is not unusual and is not normally problematic. However you do need to take care at the point of preparing work for assessment. This includes the preparation of any notes to help you write the assessment. Unless you are advised explicitly that the work to be submitted is to be completed as group work, you should assume that the work you submit is to be your own submitted on your own behalf. You also need to be careful if you are using someone else's note. Take care not to base any assessed work too closely on the content and structure of their notes as this could lead to the potential for plagiarism.

3. Is it enough to change the words used in the source and convey the information or ideas in my own words?

No. Changing the wording is not enough to avoid plagiarism. You need to cite the source whenever you have borrowed ideas as well as wording.

4. I have included ideas and/or comments from my tutor in my work. I don't need to reference these do I?

Yes. You should reference all ideas or material that is not your own regardless of whose they are.

5. What happens in an interview with the College Academic Misconduct Officer?

The format of the interview will vary depending on the College Academic Misconduct Officer involved and the nature of the incident under investigation. The purpose of the interview is to find out more about what has happened in order to decide on a way forward. You should therefore be prepared to answer a range of questions about your study skills, how you prepared the work under investigation and how you account for the evidence of suspected plagiarism. You are entitled to be accompanied to the interview by a member of the University community, such as a EUSA advisor. EUSA advisors can also give you advice on preparing for your interview and what to expect at different stages of the University's academic misconduct procedure.

6. I didn't plagiarise deliberately so I won't be punished will I?

You might be. Plagiarism is the act of copying or including in one's own work, without adequate acknowledgement, **intentionally or unintentionally**, the work of another, for one's own benefit. Ignorance is not an excuse. All plagiarism cases, whether intentional or unintentional, will be investigated. Unfortunately, even if you weren't aware of committing plagiarism, you might have benefited from it and your mark might be reduced to reflect the quality of the academic work without the plagiarised section in it or you might receive a penalty reduction of marks as a result of the plagiarism. This is why it is so important to avoid committing plagiarism in the first place.

7. What is the penalty for plagiarism?

The penalty will depend on the nature of the case and on whether or not it is a first offence. In minor cases no marks will be awarded for content in any plagiarised sections and the student will be issued with a formal warning. In serious cases a penalty of 15% or 30% of the maximum available mark may be applied to the mark or a mark of 0% may be awarded. Very serious offences of plagiarism or offending repeatedly can result in referral to the University Student Discipline Committee. The Discipline Committee has the authority to suspend or exclude students.

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<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/AcademicMisconductProcedures.pdf>

8. How can I be sure I haven't plagiarised?

Make sure that each step in preparing work for assessment is thorough and rigorous in referencing and acknowledging sources. Make sure that you prepare your notes carefully. If you copy down data, a quote or an idea from a source in the library, on the internet, or even lecture notes, laboratory or tutorial handouts then your notes should reflect where you got the information from, not just the content. When you use the notes in the piece of work for assessment, make sure that you reference it properly. Copying from another student is just as much a form of plagiarism as copying from an established author or source, so be careful about the way in which you work with other students.

9. What if plagiarism is detected after I have graduated from the University.

The University will still investigate the case. You will be informed in writing of the investigation and will have the opportunity to comment. If an offence is found to have occurred, the University has the authority to reduce the classification of the degree conferred or to revoke the degree.

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