Academic dishonesty and plagiarism

Responding to an allegation of plagiarism or academic dishonesty

Our top tips for what to do when you receive an allegation of plagiarism or academic dishonesty.

- **Get advice from us early**
  Wait until you have consulted with one of our [caseworkers](#) for advice before attending a meeting with the **Educational Integrity Coordinator (EIC)**, or investigator, or writing a response. In some cases, we may be able to attend a meeting as your support person.

- **Keep all of your paperwork**
  This includes all relevant emails, letters and other documents, such as early drafts of your assessment, as well as notes you may have taken of relevant conversations with University staff.

- **Request key documents**
  The faculty must give you relevant and marked-up assessment items and, if applicable, the associated Turnitin compatibility report.

- **Cooperate, but do not volunteer too much information**
  While you must be truthful and courteous in your dealings with the faculty, you do not have to disclose information that is not helpful to your own best interests.

- **Respect the process**
  Once you receive an allegation of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, a formal and confidential process has commenced. Do not contact your teaching staff, other students that were involved in group work for the assessment, or any another student involved in the allegation.

- **Remember, you can appeal**
  You can appeal any decision about plagiarism, academic dishonesty or academic misconduct, including appealing the form or severity of a penalty. If you are not happy with the decision made by the EIC, you should consider making an [academic appeal](#). [Contact us for advice](#).

- **If you are a higher degree by research (HDR) student**
  You should read about [academic honesty for HDR students.](#)

Academic dishonesty

Academic dishonesty can include:

- plagiarism

- recycling content from your previous assignments

- using fake or false research data

- getting someone else to complete or contribute to an assessment

- bringing unauthorised calculators, written notes or other banned items into an exam

- inappropriate use of electronic devices to access information during an exam

- wearing headphones during an online exam.

Academic misconduct

At its most severe level, academic dishonesty can constitute academic misconduct. **Academic misconduct investigations can lead to heavy penalties** that include suspension or exclusion from your degree. If you receive an allegation of academic misconduct, you should contact us immediately, before you respond to the University.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the written form of academic dishonesty. The most common types of plagiarism are:

- copying another person's work and presenting it as your own

- failing to reference another author's work properly

- poorly paraphrasing another author's text and then failing to properly reference that work.

Sometimes a student may be careless or not understand correct referencing, but even if the plagiarism was unintended, that is not a good excuse. The University always takes plagiarism, or potential plagiarism, very seriously.

How is plagiarism detected?

The University **detects** alleged plagiarism in 2 ways:

1. The person marking an assessment will sometimes notice plagiarism.
2. Software, such as Turnitin, is used to detect similarities.

Turnitin is text-matching software that compares similarities between an assessment and millions of other assessments, academic journal articles, web pages and other texts. Turnitin generates 'compatibility reports' that can trigger an allegation or be used as evidence of plagiarism.

Markers and examiners are required to report suspected plagiarism to the faculty's **Educational Integrity Coordinator (EIC)**.

What happens next?

The preliminary assessment

After suspected plagiarism is reported to the **Educational Integrity Coordinator (EIC),** the EIC (or a nominated academic) will look at why you were reported and make a preliminary assessment. The EIC will look at the allegation and decide whether what you have done:

1. **Is not plagiarism**. In this case you will be notified that there was **no impropriety** and your work will be assessed as usual without any academic penalty.
2. **Might be plagiarism or academic dishonesty, but that it most likely occurred due to poor skills in referencing.** In this case, you will usually receive a finding of plagiarism, and could be advised to compete an additional workshop on referencing or paraphrasing.
3. **Might be plagiarism or academic dishonesty, and they believe that it was not due to poor skills in referencing.** In this case, the EIC will then determine whether the matter will be:
   o dealt with by your faculty
   o referred to the Registrar (coursework)
   o or referred to the Director of Research Integrity (research).

More serious forms of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be referred to the Registrar.

Notification letter from your faculty

After the preliminary assessment, if the EIC does not refer your matter to the Registrar or Director of Research Integrity, then your allegation will continue to be handled within your faculty either by the EIC or a nominated academic.

You will be notified of the allegation through a **notification letter.** In the letter you will be invited to either attend an **interview**, or to submit a **written response** to the allegation.

How to respond

Try to stay calm. The process is designed to be fair to you and **you have the right to**:

- be told about the specific allegation in sufficient detail
- a reasonable amount of time to prepare your response, including time to seek advice from us
- invite a support person to be with you in any meeting to discuss the allegation – this can be a friend or one of our caseworkers.

Outcome

Based on your response and the evidence, the EIC will decide whether the conduct is plagiarism, academic dishonesty or potential academic misconduct. They may also find that there was 'no impropriety', meaning you have done nothing wrong.

What are the penalties?

If your faculty makes a decision of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, this will usually result in penalties. Penalties could include:

- a mark of zero for the assessment
- zero and a fail grade for the unit of study
- a deduction of some marks from the assessment.

The actual penalty will depend on the nature and extent of the plagiarism or academic dishonesty, and on whether you have had a previous finding. If you have previously been found to have engaged in academic dishonesty, **a second finding will usually mean a more severe penalty**.

Academic misconduct

If the EIC decides that the actions might constitute academic misconduct, research misconduct, or a breach of the Student Charter, they will refer the matter to either the Registrar (coursework) or the Director (research). You will receive a notification asking you to participate in a misconduct investigation.

A common form of academic misconduct is when another person writes or contributes to your assessment, otherwise known as **contract cheating**. Helping another student by writing their assessment for them, or giving your assignment for them to copy and submit as their own work, is another form of academic misconduct.

Academic misconduct investigations can lead to heavy penalties that include suspension or exclusion from your degree. If you receive an allegation of academic misconduct, you should contact us immediately, before you respond to the University.

Contract cheating

When another person writes or contributes to your assessment, this is known as contract cheating. This form of academic misconduct is one that the University takes very seriously. Contract cheating has 2 main forms:

1. When you use a commercial service or business (even if you do not pay).
2. When a friend, family member or fellow student contributes too much to your work.

Never get someone else to do your university work for you.

Contract cheating services

Do not use commercial services or businesses that offer:

- tutoring in a particular Usyd assessment task
- ghostwriting (someone writing your assessment for you)
- plagiarism checking
- file sharing (e.g. sharing of study notes).

Avoid tutoring businesses that are:

- not approved by senior members of your faculty
- advertised on WeChat
- offering courses delivered in languages other than English.

It is likely that these businesses have copied or re-used the work of past students, which will lead to a high similarity index in the Turnitin compatibility report when you submit your assignment. Tutoring firms which give students the answers to an assessment task do not actually provide an ethical learning experience.

These businesses can put you at risk. Contract cheating services can also have very poor data security, which means it can be easy to find out who is using them. Some of these businesses have used students' personal details inappropriately, posing a security risk to you and your university. Be suspicious of services that are only promoted by other students or student societies. **Avoid commercial services that are not approved by or affiliated with the University, and always check with your faculty.**

Be careful of sharing documents such as unit of study outlines and lecture slides on **platforms like Course Hero**. These documents are the intellectual property of the University. Sharing these with external parties could lead to an allegation of academic dishonesty or academic misconduct.

Help from friends and family

Never ask a friend or family member to contribute to or complete your individual assessment for you. Never complete work for another student. Students who are friends might exchange ideas but if this results in similar

wording and ideas in your submitted assessments, you will receive allegations of academic dishonesty. Changing words or phrases is not enough to disguise collaboration.

Read the University's advice on contract cheating, academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

Need assistance?

Contact us for assistance from our caseworkers.

The Learning Centre can assist with paraphrasing and referencing workshops.

Check the University policy register, in particular:

- Academic Honesty in Coursework Policy 2015 and Academic Honesty Procedures 2016
- Research Code of Conduct 2019
- University of Sydney (Student Discipline) Rule 2016
- Student Charter 2020
- Educational Integrity Decision-making and Penalty Guidelines 2018

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