

## The University of Manchester

### Guidance to students on plagiarism and other forms of academic malpractice

#### Definition of academic malpractice

Academic malpractice is any activity – intentional or otherwise – that is likely to undermine the integrity essential to scholarship and research. It includes plagiarism, collusion, fabrication or falsification of results, examination malpractice, contract cheating and anything else that could result in unearned or undeserved credit for those committing it. Academic malpractice can result from a deliberate act of cheating or may be committed unintentionally. Whether intended or not, all incidents of academic malpractice will be treated seriously by the University (taken from the University's *'Academic Malpractice Procedure'*: <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=639>).

#### Introduction

1. As a student, you are expected to cooperate in the learning process throughout your programme of study by completing assignments of various kinds that are the product of your own study or research. You must ensure that you are familiar with, and comply with, the University's regulations and conventions: ignorance of the University regulations and conventions cannot be used as a defence for plagiarism or some other form of academic malpractice
2. This guidance is designed to help you understand what we regard as academic malpractice and hence to help you to avoid committing it. You should read it carefully, because academic malpractice is regarded as a serious offence and students found to have committed it will be penalised. A range of penalties may be applied including the capping of marks, being awarded zero (with or without loss of credits), failing the whole unit, being demoted to a lower class of degree, or being excluded from the programme.
3. In addition to the advice that follows, your School will give you advice on how to avoid academic malpractice in the context of your discipline. It will also design assessments to help you avoid the temptation to commit academic malpractice. Finally, you should take note that work you submit may be screened electronically to check against other material on the web and in other submitted work.

#### Plagiarism

4. Plagiarism is the presentation, either intentionally or unwittingly, of the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement. It includes the copying of the work of any other person, including another student. Plagiarism may include the close paraphrasing, or minimal adaptation of another person's words, illustrations, computer code, graph, diagrams etc. Sources can be any available material, such as websites, articles, books and lecture slides. Where you need to synthesise material in an open book examination or assessment using a permitted source, you should still look to appropriately acknowledge the source and not plagiarise.

5. Self-plagiarism is the submission, in whole or in part, of a student's own work, where that work has been submitted for a different assessment, either at the University or at a different institution. Where you use a previous piece of work or publication in a future piece of work, you should ensure that you properly reference yourself and the extent of such use should not be excessive.

6. Obviously, the most blatant example of plagiarism would be to copy another student's work. It is therefore essential to make clear in your assignments the distinction between:

- the ideas and work of other people that you may have quite legitimately exploited and developed, and
- the ideas or material that you have personally contributed.

7. To assist you, here are a few important do's and don'ts:

- Do get lots of background information on subjects you are writing about to help you form your own view of the subject. The information could be from electronic journals, technical reports, unpublished dissertations, etc. Make a note of the source of every piece of information at the time you record it, even if it is just one sentence.
- Don't construct a piece of work by cutting and pasting or copying material written by other people, or by you for any other purpose, into something you are submitting as your own work. Sometimes you may need to quote someone else's exact form of words in order to analyse or criticize them, in which case the quotation must be enclosed in quotation marks to show that it is a direct quote, and it must have the source properly acknowledged at that point. Any omissions from a quotation must be indicated by an ellipsis (...) and any additions for clarity must be enclosed in square brackets, e.g. "[These] results suggest... that the hypothesis is correct." It may also be appropriate to reproduce a diagram from someone else's work, but again the source must be explicitly and fully acknowledged there. However, constructing large chunks of documents from a string of quotes, even if they are acknowledged, is another form of plagiarism.
- Do attribute all ideas to their original authors. Written 'ideas' are the product that authors produce. You would not appreciate it if other people passed off your ideas as their own, and that is what plagiarism rules are intended to prevent. A good rule of thumb is that each idea or statement that you write should be attributed to a source unless it is your personal idea or it is common knowledge. (If you are unsure if something is common knowledge, ask other students: if they don't know what you are talking about, then it is not common knowledge!)

8. As you can see, it is most important that you understand what is expected of you when you prepare and produce assignments and that you always observe proper academic conventions for referencing and acknowledgement, whether working by yourself or as part of a team. In practice, there are a number of acceptable styles of referencing depending, for example, on the particular discipline you are studying, so if you are not certain what is appropriate, ask your tutor or the course unit coordinator for advice! This should ensure that you do not lay yourself open to a charge of plagiarism inadvertently, or through ignorance of what is expected. It is also important to remember that you do not absolve

yourself from a charge of plagiarism simply by including a reference to a source in a bibliography that you have included with your assignment; you should always be scrupulous about indicating precisely where and to what extent you have made use of such a source.

9. So far, plagiarism has been described as using the words or work of someone else (without proper attribution), but it could also include a close paraphrase of their words, or a minimally adapted version of a computer program, a diagram, a graph, an illustration, etc taken from a variety of sources without proper acknowledgement. These could be lectures, printed material, the Internet or other electronic/AV sources.

10. Remember: no matter what pressure you may be under to complete an assignment, you should never succumb to the temptation to take a 'short cut' and use someone else's material inappropriately. No amount of mitigating circumstances will get you off the hook, and if you persuade other students to let you copy their work, they risk being disciplined as well (see below).

### **Collusion**

11. *Collusion* is when a student or students permit or condone another student or students, to share a piece of work subject to assessment in order to gain a mark or grade to which they are not entitled. Students who allow another student to copy their work are also committing collusion and both the copier and the provider of the work are liable to be penalised. The methods of collusion may include, but are not limited to, sharing of work, ideas or plans by social media or other electronic communication means, and/or physical sharing of work, ideas or plans. Collusion may happen asynchronously outside of an assessment and/or synchronously within an assessment.

Students who allow another student to copy their work are also committing collusion and both the copier and the provider of the work are liable to be penalised. Where it is proved, collusion will be subject to penalties similar to those for plagiarism.

12. On the other hand, *collaboration* is a perfectly legitimate academic activity in which students work in groups as part of their programme of research or in the preparation of projects and similar assessments. If you are asked to carry out such group work and to collaborate in specified activities, it will always be made clear how your individual input to the joint work is to be assessed and graded. Sometimes, for example, all members of a team may receive the same mark for a joint piece of work, whereas on other occasions, team members will receive individual marks that reflect their individual input. If it is not clear on what basis your work is to be assessed, to avoid any risk of unwitting collusion you should always ask for clarification before submitting any assignment.

### **Fabrication or falsification of results, figures or data**

13. Fabrication or falsification of results, figures or data is the presentation or inclusion in a piece of work, by individual students or groups of students, of figures or any data (quantitative or qualitative) which have been made up or altered and which have no basis in verifiable sources; this may or may not involve other instances of academic malpractice.

14. For many students, a major part of their studies involves laboratory or other forms of practical work, and they often find themselves undertaking such activity without close academic supervision. If you are in this situation, you are expected to behave in a

responsible manner, as in other aspects of your academic life, and to show proper integrity in the reporting of results or other data. You should therefore ensure that you always document clearly and fully any research programme or survey that you undertake, whether working by yourself or as part of a group. Results or data that you or your group submit must be capable of verification, so that those assessing the work can follow the processes by which you obtained them. Under no circumstances should you seek to present results or data that were not properly obtained and documented as part of your practical learning experience. Otherwise, you lay yourself open to the charge of fabrication or falsification of results.

### **Examination malpractice**

15. Malpractice in examinations is when a student, during an examination, intentionally or unwittingly contravenes set exam conditions, such as by using or possessing unauthorised materials or devices, sharing (including electronically) exam questions, answers or related information (e.g. discussions) with others, and sitting or allowing someone to sit an examination in place of the student supposed to be taking the examination (this list should not be considered to be exhaustive). The student need not have gained a benefit from the malpractice nor does the input need to be pertinent for this definition to be met. This definition applies to all forms of exams including 'in-person' exams (e.g. based in an 'exam hall') and/or online exams.

### **Contract Cheating**

16. Contract cheating is the commissioning of a piece of work by a third party, beyond basic proofreading. This may be where a student engages an essay mill or individual to request that they produce a piece of assessed work, in full or in part, for the student. This may also include the use of crowdsourcing, where a student obtains content from, or allows editing by, others and fails to acknowledge the contribution. Contract cheating may most often be associated with summative and/or coursework assessments, but may also be found in online examinations.

### **Finally...**

17. If you commit any form of academic malpractice, teaching staff will not be able to assess your individual abilities objectively or accurately. Any short-term gain you might have hoped to achieve will be cancelled out by the loss of proper feedback you might have received, and in the long run, such behaviour is likely to damage your overall intellectual development, to say nothing of your self-esteem. You are the one who loses.

18. Students are advised to refer to the various plagiarism, academic malpractice and referencing resources and information available through the [University of Manchester Library My Learning Essentials](#), including workshops and online resources such as

- Getting started with referencing: <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/introducing-referencing/>
- Avoiding plagiarism: <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/avoiding-plagiarism/>

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