

- ▶ What is contract cheating?
- ▶ Why do students engage in contract cheating?
- ▶ How can I design a task that reduces students cheating?

What is contract cheating?

Contract cheating occurs 'when a student submits work that has been completed for them by a third party, irrespective of the third party's relationship with the student, and whether they are paid or unpaid (Harper et al., 2018).

Why students cheat

Key factors identified in research are:

- ▶ Low satisfaction with the teaching and learning environment
- ▶ Perceived lack of connection with teaching staff, anonymity and lack of academic support
- ▶ Workload, deadlines, cost of study
- ▶ Pressure to succeed, parental pressure, personal factors
- ▶ Peer culture, normalisation of cheating
- ▶ Low likelihood of detection, lack of consequences for cheating
- ▶ Demographic factors (age, gender, discipline, English language proficiency)

Why is it happening?



Do cultural norms matter when it comes to cheating attitudes?

Domestic/International and English/LOTE students all shared comparable attitudes about the 'wrongness' of cheating behaviours

Lack of a 'Personalised Teaching and Learning Relationship'

The cheating group reported significantly lower levels of agreement for three key teaching and learning items:

- Ensuring understanding of assignment requirements
- Receiving sufficient feedback
- Approachability of teaching staff



From '7 Outsourcing behaviours investigated' infographic, available from the Contract Cheating and Assessment Design website: <https://cheatingandassessment.edu.au/publications-presentations/>

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Assessment types with a lower incidence of cheating

Research suggests students may be more likely to cheat on some forms of assessment than others, although contract cheating is prevalent across all forms of assessment including invigilated exams (Bretag et al, 2019). The tasks which students report they are least likely to cheat on are:

- ▶ Real-world (authentic) tasks
- ▶ In-class assessment tasks
- ▶ Personalised and unique questions
- ▶ Viva
- ▶ Reflections on practicum

Important factors in reducing contract cheating

While some types of assessment task have a lower incidence of reported cheating, no assessment type is immune. If students perceive it is easy to cheat with a low risk of detection, then we can expect the incidence to be higher. By integrating assessment tasks with tutorial activities and academic staff interaction, the opportunity for a student to present work they did not do is reduced. Cheating is reported to be more prevalent when students do not feel they have sufficient support and guidance about assessment requirements from tutors. This can put students under undue stress, particularly if English is not their first language. It is important to ensure that there is interaction, guidance and support for students, and that academic staff know what their students are capable of. Some assessment tasks may be done in stages and integrated with class activities. Some examples of approaches to assessment design are as follows.

Source: Baird and Clare (2017)

Discipline: Business

Issue	Approach	Lessons Learned
High levels of anonymously reported contract cheating on a capstone Business project.	Students worked on their business projects in groups. One member from each group was moved to another group half way through the project. Assessment structured around project development stages. Academic integrity was made an issue. There was a process for anonymously reporting cheating.	Consider revisions to learning activities that support assessment that reduce the risk of contract cheating while increasing student engagement. Consider introducing an institution level anonymous feedback mechanism for students to report suspected contract cheating.

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Source: Sivasubramaniam (in TEQSA, 2017)

Discipline: Biomedical/Pharmacology

Issue	Approach	Lessons Learned
Marks for coursework were generally higher than marks in the exam.	<p>Assessment task on analysing information changed to peer-assisted in-class activity</p> <p>Students incorporate academic feedback and write the report in class, with no chance to buy papers.</p> <p>Example of Student-Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies (SCALE-UP).</p>	Incorporating peer and academic feedback in class not only prevented cheating but enhanced students' learning and performance.

Source: Rogerson (2015)

Discipline: Organisational behaviour

Issue	Approach	Lessons Learned
Many students purchased assessment responses from essay mills in a unit with a high proportion of NESB students and a range of academic literacy levels.	<p>Students were instructed in writing annotated bibliographies, extracting information from journal articles, and integrating bibliographies to form coherent text.</p> <p>Reflection tasks were based on in-class discussion linking theory and practice.</p>	<p>Student feedback indicated they learned academic skills that improved their academic outcomes in general.</p> <p>Reflective tasks were found to be difficult to copy, and copies usually omitted key information.</p>

Source: Skaik (n.d.)

Discipline: Project management (postgraduate)

Issue	Approach	Lessons Learned
Frequent contract cheating in written tasks (critical review and research proposal) and time wasted on detection.	Assessments were structured as a series of sub-tasks requiring incorporation of feedback and peer evaluation.	<p>Students acquired skills to complete the assessments without cheating.</p> <p>Staff effort was justified by improved outcomes.</p>

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Recommendations

1. Do not assume that any specific form of assessment, including invigilated exams or authentic assessment will remove the risk of contract cheating. Precautions need to be taken to minimise cheating in all assessment types.
2. Design assessment tasks to minimise opportunities for contract cheating:
 - Relate examination questions, particularly take home exams, to specific tutorial or practical activities that cannot be accessed by external providers. Request working calculations and sources for further integration.
 - Individualise or personalise questions to avoid sharing solutions.
 - Separate quiz type examinations into shorter, more-frequent quizzes.
 - Where possible, ensure that tutorial sizes are not too large, and make tutorial activities interactive, to enable lecturers/tutors to know their students and their capabilities. This will assist tutors to recognise instances when the work is not the student's own.
 - Integrate assessment tasks with tutorial activities, e.g. through in-class and online individual or group activities that are submitted during class; staged assignments so that early notes or drafts are submitted for review and feedback before the final paper; peer review/feedback on drafts; vivas; presentations followed by peer/tutor questions.
 - Ensure contact between student and academic staff in authentic tasks. Have students provide progress reports to confirm the work is genuine and that the final report submitted is the student's own. Include personal reflection and follow-up discussion.
 - Design tasks that incorporate 'participation, sharing, delivery or use in a real-world setting' (Ellis et al. 2020) and include some external supervision where possible.
3. Follow good practice strategies such as providing clear task instructions, breaking down tasks into smaller components, providing webinars or instructional podcasts to help students understand task requirements, providing a list of relevant resources such as readings and support in accessing them, and transparency in marking by preparing effective rubrics.
4. Continue to share good practice examples and evidence of impact of these so that this can be compiled and shared with staff.

Technical considerations

- ▶ Plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, is important, however it will not detect original work written by a third party.
- ▶ Where possible have students show working for exam questions. This may be done by submitting a photograph of handwritten notes.
- ▶ Turnitin Quickmark can be used to improve the quality of feedback on assignments. Improved guidance through feedback can reduce assignment stress.
- ▶ Turnitin Peermark can be used to enable peer review to increase engagement with tutorial activities and assessment.

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References

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- Skaik, S. (n.d.). Redesigning high-risk assessments to engage students and address contract cheating. *TEQSA Academic Integrity website*. <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/redesigning-assessment-cqu.pdf?v=1588831025>

Useful links

- Contract Cheating and Assessment Design website: <https://cheatingandassessment.edu.au/>
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2017. *Good Practice Note: Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity*. www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/good-practice-note-addressing-contract-cheating.pdf?acsf_files_redirect