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Academic integrity and plagiarism

It’s your responsibility to do the right thing in all aspects of your academic work.

Academic integrity
Academic integrity is about doing the right thing in all aspects of your academic work. You should behave honestly in exams, class discussions, and assessments, particularly when it comes to crediting the work of other people (including your peers), and acknowledging the ideas of other people. Other people’s ideas and ways of expressing them are valuable property, just like a wallet, phone or car. And just like a wallet, phone or car, you shouldn’t use them as if they were your own. You should always credit the original author(s) or creator(s) and provide details of the source.

You may have heard of footnotes, endnotes, in-text citations, bibliographies, reference lists. These forms of referencing are your main tools of the trade to produce work with academic integrity. Whoever reads your assignment needs to be able to check out your evidence for themselves.

When you understand what to do, how to do it and most importantly, why it’s important, you will get better at managing the points of view in your assignments and putting forward your own view with a good supporting argument. In time, you’ll improve your grades.

STUDY SMART WEBSITE
Find this section on the Study Smart website here:

http://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/academic_integrity_and_plagiarism
What is Academic Integrity?

Academic integrity describes thoughts and actions which demonstrate respect and honesty toward your fellow learners and scholars. The acknowledgement of sources and a commitment to open, ethical conduct are the foundation of research, learning and teaching in higher education and beyond.

The University is committed to academic integrity, honesty and the promotion of ethical scholarship. Under the University’s Student Code of Conduct, you are expected to:

→ act honestly and ethically in the production of all academic work and assessment tasks;
→ give recognition to any direct quotes used from other authors or to those authors whose work has made an intellectual contribution to the contents of your work;
→ acknowledge shared ownership of ideas in group projects or assessment tasks.

If you do not behave with academic integrity, you are likely to face allegations of academic misconduct. The University’s Student Misconduct Rule defines academic misconduct as “conduct by a student that in any way undermines or otherwise puts at risk the academic integrity of any course, unit of study or assessment (including examinations) or the University’s academic reputation”.

Two of the most common forms of academic misconduct are plagiarism and collusion. You can find out more about these below.

For a comprehensive tutorial about strategies to avoid plagiarism and how to correctly use citations and references, visit the Academic Integrity and Plagiarism section on the Library Study Smart vUWS site

What is collusion?

Collusion is when two or more students, or a student and any other person(s), act together to cheat, plagiarise or engage in academic misconduct, or incite others to do so.

Sharing your academic work with others could be seen as collusion, even if that is not your intention. For example, leaving your laptop open while you go to the vending machine, or forgetting to collect your papers from the printer, could provide an opportunity for other students to plagiarise your work. You should always protect yourself from allegations of collusion by ensuring you keep your academic work secure.

It is also considered collusion to provide answers to a friend in an online quiz, submit a group assignment where perhaps all members have not contributed equally, or to use your electronic device or make gestures during an exam in order to share answers.

It can be difficult to understand the difference between collusion and collaboration, especially when you are required to complete assignments as a group. Group work involves skills such as negotiation and assertiveness, and it’s important that you feel comfortable with the level of contribution from group members and also that you can clearly state what your contribution to the group’s work has been. Ensure that you review the guidelines provided in the Learning Guide for group assessments, and contact the Unit Coordinator if you are not sure about group roles or responsibilities.
**What is plagiarism?**

The Macquarie dictionary online (2016) defines plagiarism as:

1. the appropriation or imitation of another's ideas and manner of expressing them, as in art, literature, etc., to be passed off as one's own.
2. a piece of writing, music, art, etc., appropriated or commissioned from another and passed off as one's own.

Furthermore, the Plagiarism.org website asserts that all of the following behaviours are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own.
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit.
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks.
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation.
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit.
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not.

*What is plagiarism?* (n.d.). Retrieved February 4, 2016, from What is plagiarism?

When it comes to plagiarism, it's not your intention that matters: the University considers plagiarism to be the act of presenting material as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement, even if you didn't intend to do so. 'Appropriate acknowledgement' is defined as the conventions of citation recognised as acceptable to the University, as detailed in the Referencing styles policy.

You also need to be aware that it is considered self-plagiarism to submit work that you have done for a previous unit of study (at any institution) for a current assignment. When you sign the University's standard assignment cover sheet or submit electronically via Turnitin, part of the statement you agree to says that you have not submitted any part of the work previously, except where appropriately referenced, and with prior permission from the Lecturer/Tutor/Unit Coordinator for the unit. If you feel that it is appropriate for you to include work you have done previously, you must always discuss this with the Unit Coordinator before doing so.
Why is Academic Integrity important?

Academic integrity is important to you and important to the University.

You are investing your time and effort in studying for a degree, which will be a stepping stone to success in your chosen field or career. The knowledge you acquire at university will set the foundation for your professional knowledge and practice. So it’s important to give yourself the best chance of success by completing your assessment tasks with an open and honest attitude.

The University’s reputation also depends on the success and reputation of its students and staff. In order for the community to have confidence in the degrees awarded by the University, it’s crucial that course requirements and assessment standards remain consistent and transparent. That’s why the University takes the issue of academic misconduct very seriously. As one of Western’s Alumni, you will feel proud of the high standards you achieved, knowing that your learning was based on the foundations of truth and respect.

Correct referencing of sources is important in academic assessments because:

- it enables the person marking your work to see where ideas influencing your work have originated;
- it shows a path for how new knowledge is built;
- it gives the appropriate attribution to those from whom you have sourced information and ideas.

When you learn how to incorporate the ideas and research conclusions of others into your own work, with appropriate attribution, it demonstrates your understanding of the material you have read. It also gives clarity to your analysis of an issue or topic.

It’s also important to ensure that you approach tutorial tasks, quizzes and exams with a high level of integrity. These forms of assessment are designed to test your knowledge, so you are cheating yourself if you do not complete the task using your own knowledge and abilities.
Studying with integrity

Your key strategies for studying with integrity are preparation, planning, and consistency.

→ Manage your time to avoid completing assignments ‘at the last minute’.
→ Read all of the information provided to you so that you are fully aware of all the requirements for each unit of study. Information is provided in Unit Outlines, Learning Guides, vUWS sites, vUWS announcements, lectures and tutorials, and through your student email.
→ Ask any questions you need to ask of your Unit Coordinator and tutor. If you don’t, these unanswered questions could block your progress.
→ Develop your note taking skills. Keep detailed, accurate records of the sources you read and refer to so that you have this information at hand when you need it for your reference list or bibliography.
→ Check your work before you submit it and ensure you have included correct referencing and citation. Make use of Referencing and citation resources to help you attribute a quote or an idea correctly.
→ If available, pre-submit your work to Turnitin and revise your work on the basis of the Originality Report before you submit it the final time for assessment.
→ Use the Academic Integrity Checklist to assess your work’s academic integrity before final submission.
→ Seek assistance from academic literacy staff based in your School or through the Library’s Study Smart Advisor service.
Academic integrity frequently asked questions

Q: A student in the year ahead of me offered to sell me an assignment answer. Would it be OK to change it a bit and then submit it as my answer this year?

A: There is no situation in which it would be acceptable to buy or be given an assignment answer from a fellow student. University assessments are designed to develop and assess your skills, and for this reason the work you submit must be the result of your own efforts.

Q: I’m stressing about deadlines and I’m considering buying an essay online and submitting that as my assignment – the essay website says it’s not plagiarism if I do that. Is that right?

A: The essay website wants to take your money. They don’t care if you fail the assignment or have a student misconduct finding added to your record. Save your money and invest the time and effort in yourself instead by doing the research and writing work that is needed to demonstrate your learning. You get a much more positive return on that investment!

Purchasing an assignment answer and submitting parts of it or all of it as your own work is definitely considered to be serious academic misconduct. There is no situation in which this would be acceptable.

Q: My friend is studying the same course as me, but she’s really struggling this semester. She asked me to sit with her while she does this week’s quiz, in case she picks the wrong answers. I know she’s a good student most of the time, so that’s OK isn’t it?

A: If a friend or fellow student is struggling with workload or personal issues, or is having trouble understanding an assignment, you could advise them to seek assistance from staff in the School or the Library to resolve this. A range of student support services (opens in a new window) are available across the University.

If you help another student with an assignment, quiz or exam when an individual effort is required, it’s considered to be collusion, which is a form of academic misconduct.

Q: When my mates and I go to the Library we all share the articles and books we find. Is that against the rules?

A: In general, it’s not considered misconduct to share reading lists with other students, or even to discuss aspects of a topic in general terms. Be careful to keep your academic work private, though: don’t discuss your approach to the assignment question, the structure of your answer, or what you plan to write, because this could unintentionally become a case of suspected collusion if someone else submits an assignment that is very similar to yours.

Q: I feel like I can’t write as well as other students, even though I know what I want to say. Can I get another student to proofread my work and help with corrections to make it sound better?

A: There are a number of options for you to improve your academic writing skills, but you are responsible for the quality of the work you submit at University. Asking another student to help with these sorts of things leaves you both at risk of collusion allegations.

Instead, take advantage of online self-help resources (Library Study Smart and Clarity English (opens in a new window)), and remember you can book an appointment with a Study Smart Advisor at five of our campus libraries.
Study Smart Advisors are not proofreaders and it is not a proofreading service. But they can give suggestions and show you how to proofread for yourself. You also have access to YourTutor, a service which gives you access to online subject and assignment help after-hours.

**Q:** When we do group work, there always seems to be one person who doesn’t turn up to the meetings. It doesn’t seem fair when they don’t do any work and the whole group gets marked down because of their bad behaviour. What’s the best way to handle group work?

**A:** Group work requires you to develop and use your skills in assertive communication, planning, and supportive teamwork. Visit the Group work section for some useful tips. Make sure everyone is aware of the assignment guidelines about what is expected of group members.

If things aren’t going to plan, contact your tutor or unit coordinator and keep records of group discussions. Usually, the whole group will be responsible for the work that is submitted in a group assignment.

**Q:** I used a synonym checker to replace some words in a paragraph and then put it in my essay. I referenced it properly but I still got negative feedback and the tutor said it was a form of plagiarism. I don’t understand why because I changed the words and referenced it?

**A:** Paraphrasing (opens in a new window) is NOT just changing the words around or substituting some words for synonyms. You need to retain the author’s idea, but express it in your own way, choosing appropriate vocabulary and changing the structure so that it’s clear you’ve understood and are not just parroting the author’s expression.

It is a form of plagiarism to just change some words but keep the structure the same, even if you reference it. The issue is that you are not directly quoting, but nor have you used original expression.

Sometimes it might be tempting to use an online translation tool to produce a new version of a sentence or paragraph, but the result will usually not make sense.

**Q:** Why do I need to put references into my paper in a particular style? It seems like there is so much drama about getting the full stops in the right place!

**A:** It may seem as though there is undue emphasis on ensuring you reference correctly in a particular style, but try to look beyond the full stops to understand the purpose of referencing. Many different referencing styles are used across academic disciplines, but the purpose is always to give the reader all the information they need to find and review the sources you have used in your work.

In some styles, the particular punctuation, italics, or different pieces of information help the reader identify what type of resource is referred to as well as how to find it. Consistency and respect for academic tradition are important, and that’s why your tutors care so much!

You will improve over time if you use the helpful referencing resources (opens in a new window) on the Library website.

**Q:** What will happen if I get in trouble for academic misconduct?

**A:** The University treats academic misconduct seriously; however, the response will depend on the extent and circumstances of your case.

If an allegation is made, the best way to approach it is with honesty and humility so that you can learn from the experience. There is more information for students (opens in a new window) about academic misconduct proceedings available on the University website.