

Plagiarism and collusion

Plagiarism means attempting to pass off someone else's work as your own, while collusion means passing off joint work as your own unaided effort. Both are unacceptable, particularly in material submitted for examination purposes. Plagiarism and collusion are regarded by the College as examination irregularities (i.e. cheating) and are taken extremely seriously. UCL uses a sophisticated detection system (Turnitin®) to scan work for evidence of plagiarism and collusion, and the Department reserves the right to use this for assessed work. This system gives access to billions of sources worldwide, including websites and journals, as well as other work submitted to the Department, UCL and other universities. It is therefore able to detect similarities between scripts that indicate unacceptable levels of collusion, as well as material taken from other sources without attribution.

If plagiarism or collusion are suspected, on the basis either of the Turnitin® software or other evidence, it can be dealt with informally only in the case of first offences. All other cases must be dealt with formally, which involves adjudication by a departmental panel and/or College Examinations Irregularities panel. If the panel finds that an offence of plagiarism or collusion has been committed, a penalty will be imposed. Penalties depend on the severity of the offence, and range from being awarded zero marks for the work in question up to exclusion from all further examinations. They can also include a formal reprimand, which will be entered on the student's departmental and College records.

What isn't acceptable?

Students sometimes find it difficult to know what counts as plagiarism or collusion. The following list is not exhaustive, but gives some indication of what to avoid. It is based on guidelines developed by Nick Hayes of the UCL Pharmacology Department. You may **NOT**:

- Create a piece of work by cutting and pasting material from other sources (including websites, books, lecture notes and other students' work).
- Use someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Making notes while discussing an assessment with a friend, and subsequently using these as the basis for all or part of your submission.
 - Telephoning another student to discuss how best to carry out a particular piece of analysis.
 - Employing a professional ghostwriting firm or anyone else to produce work for you.
- Use somebody else's ideas in your work without citing them.
- Ask a lecturer in the department for help with assessed work, unless you make it clear to them that the work is assessed.
- Help another student with their assessed work. If you do this, you will be deemed to be guilty of an examination irregularity.

What is acceptable?

The following practices do not constitute plagiarism / collusion:

- Quoting from other people's work, with the source (e.g. book, lecture notes, website) clearly identified and the quotation enclosed in quotation marks.
- Summarising or paraphrasing other people's work, providing they are acknowledged as the source of the ideas (again, usually this will be via a reference to the book, journal or website from which the information was obtained).
- Asking the course lecturer for help with difficult material, providing it is clear that the

question is in connection with the assessment. The lecturer will be able to judge for him or herself what is an appropriate level of assistance.

Some examples

Unfortunately, each year there are some students in the Department of Statistical Science who submit work that contravenes the regulations. The consequences can be severe.

Example 1: Final-year student A had a lot of coursework deadlines in the same week as an important job interview. One of the coursework deadlines was for an extended piece of data analysis, set two weeks previously. Because of his other commitments, student A did not start this piece of coursework until shortly before the deadline, at which point he discovered that he did not have enough time to do it. He asked student B for help. The result was that both students submitted essentially identical work using exactly the same computer output. A departmental panel was convened to investigate the matter. The panel suggested that student B had passed electronic material (computer output and graphics files) to student A, who had pasted this material straight into his own submission. Although student A admitted asking student B for help, both students denied exchanging electronic material. They were, however, unable to explain how the same electronic files came to appear in both submissions. As a result, the allegation was upheld and both students were penalised. Student A was recorded as "non-complete" for the course in question (this meant that he had no possibility of passing it that year), and student B was given a mark of zero for the coursework component.

Example 2: Students C and D both had to submit some computer code for an assessment, which was worth one third of the total mark for a course. There was considerable flexibility in how to go about the assessment. Although the students submitted code that looked very different, closer inspection revealed that they were carrying out the same procedures in more or less the same order, and that the methods they used to carry out these procedures were essentially the same. Further, these procedures and methods were not used by other students in the class. On investigation, it transpired that the students had discussed the assessment over the phone while sitting in front of their computers. This is unacceptable, and as a result the marks of both students for this piece of assessment were halved.

Example 3: The in-course assessment for a particular module was organised as a multiple choice exam taken via Moodle outside of lessons. Each student could attempt the one-hour exam at any time of their choosing within a ten day window, but were clearly advised that they must work alone. After the exams had been graded, it was noticed that students E and F had given identical answers to every question (including incorrect answers). Inspection of the Moodle logs revealed that the students had started and finished their attempts at exactly the same time, using IP addresses that were traced to adjacent PCs in the same computer cluster. Students E and F admitted colluding on the in-course assessment and were both given a mark of zero.

How to avoid plagiarism and collusion

If you are found to have committed an offence of plagiarism or collusion, it makes no difference whether or not you intended to do so. Ignorance is no excuse. To avoid committing an offence, a useful rule of thumb is: if in doubt, don't do it. Make sure that any work you submit is your own unaided effort. More specific guidance is as follows:

- Plan your work schedule carefully, to allow enough time to complete each piece of assessment.
- If you have genuine problems in meeting a deadline, don't take the easy way out and borrow a friend's work. Discuss your difficulty with the course lecturer in the first instance.

- If you are stuck with an assessment, don't ask another student for help. Discuss it with the course lecturer.
- If another student asks you for help with an assessment, or asks to see your work, suggest that they approach the course lecturer instead. Remember: if somebody else copies or uses your work, you will be penalised as well, even if you didn't expect them to use your work in this way.

More information can be found at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/guidelines/plagiarism>, and in the UCL Library Services WISE courses.