

# Academic Misconduct Practical Advice for Students



## Introduction

Academic success at a university, staff or student level relies on academic integrity. It underpins the quality of our teaching, qualifications, research and ultimately the University's reputation.

Academic integrity is made up of six elements: honesty, trust and fairness, respect and responsibility, and the courage to uphold these values in the face of adversity.

An allegation of academic misconduct means one or more of these elements has been called into question.

This document provides some information and advice about the academic misconduct process, including common misconceptions and questions. It also outlines the different types of academic misconduct which breach the elements of academic integrity.

Ultimately, it is your responsibility to ensure you are aware of all the available information regarding the maintenance of academic integrity.

You should read this document alongside the [University's Academic Misconduct Procedure](#) and ensure you understand the different types of academic misconduct and the consequences of offending.

## Common myths and misconceptions about misconduct

### What is academic misconduct?

We define academic misconduct as activity which is likely to have the effect of gaining an academic advantage by the use of unfair and/or unacceptable methods, such as

- Plagiarism
- Self-plagiarism
- Collusion
- Cheating in exams or other formal assessment
- Contract cheating
- Falsifying data or material
- Breaches of research and ethical policies

This is an indicative list only and the University may judge that academic misconduct has occurred in instances which are not explicitly defined above. There are more details in the [University's Academic Misconduct Procedure](#).

### I didn't know I was committing academic misconduct.

Ignorance of the University's procedures or guidelines is not accepted as a defence for misconduct. It is *your responsibility* to ensure you understand the different types of academic misconduct and the consequences of offending.

Advice and guidance on how to avoid common forms of misconduct is available to all students during academic induction. Throughout the year [UniSkills](#) offers valuable workshops on the various aspects of academic integrity and how to avoid misconduct. There are also a number of [online, interactive toolkits](#) which focus on specific academic skills or topics. These are all ways of helping you maintain academic integrity in your work.

### I didn't know someone had copied my work – why am I being accused of misconduct?

Your work is your own intellectual property. It is your responsibility to guard against unauthorised access to your work by others, both before and after assessment. The University does not distinguish between intentional and unintentional misconduct.

For example:

You took a photo of your work and shared it with your group for information only. If another student retypes it and submits it as their own work, you may both be guilty of misconduct, as you did not protect your own intellectual property. Sending screenshots of your work to assist others may be classified as collusion.

### I helped a friend with their assessment but we are both being accused of misconduct – why?

If you knowingly permit another student to copy all or some of your work and that student submits it as their own unaided work, this is known as collusion. It is also collusion if you collaborate with another student to complete work which you then submit as your own unaided work.

You may think you are helping a friend by sharing your work, or working together but you could both be found guilty of misconduct. Protect your work and your friendships by finding other ways to help.

### It's all my own work – why am I being accused of plagiarism?

We define plagiarism as an attempt to pass off someone else's work as your own. However, if you submit the same piece of work for multiple coursework assessments without your module leader's permission, this is known as self-plagiarism.

A real-life example:

A student failed a practical assessment, but their resubmission had a 64% similarity score to their previous assessment. A third submission showed a 55% similarity score to previous submissions. The student was referred to an academic misconduct panel and explained that it was difficult to make the submissions different when the subject matter was the same. The student acknowledged that they could have sought support from their tutor or other sources, but did not.

Classification: Grave

Sanction: Failed in the specific assessment and required to resubmit. Whole module capped at the pass mark.

### I had a good idea of what the results would be and it was easier/quicker to make an educated guess.

You may feel confident in your work and believe you can predict results or outcomes, however submitting falsified data or material is an academic offence. Remember, you are taught by subject matter experts with years of experience. They can often recognise false information at a glance.

You are expected to plan your work around the deadlines for each module assessment. If circumstances make this difficult for you, you need to talk to your tutor. They may be able to grant you an extension or, if there are mitigating circumstances, may advise you to submit a Personal Circumstances form. Poor planning is not an accepted defence for misconduct.

### Can I use AI for my assignments?

Use of AI is not prohibited, but it is important that you use it ethically and fairly and are aware of its advantages and limitations. Misuse of AI is taken seriously and is classified as academic misconduct.

The key principles to remember are as follows:

Fair and ethical use of AI as a tool	Unfair/unethical use of AI as a tool
Exploring initial ideas/key words for a topic	Presenting AI-generated content as your own work
Helping to gain and understanding of complex ideas/concepts	Using AI to generate your assignment or parts of it without any acknowledgement of sources or personal input

Fair and ethical use of AI as a tool	Unfair/unethical use of AI as a tool
Helping to locate sources	Using AI to deceive – making claims to knowledge and understanding that are not your own
Drafting ideas and planning or structuring	Improper referencing – using AI to generate references/bibliographies when you have not engaged with them yourself
To generate ideas for graphics, images and visuals	Asking AI to re-write your work in a way that changes the academic content
Gaining feedback on your work before submission (eg, using grammar-checking tools) to refine your style	
As a revision aid	

You can find this table and more information in the Student Guide to Ethical Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence, available on Blackboard.

### Please remember

If you have gained an unfair advantage over other students, the University classes this as academic misconduct.

It is a serious academic offence to use or attempt to use unfair means to enhance your performance or influence the standard of award obtained. Offences of this nature could result in your withdrawal from the University.

## The academic misconduct procedure

### What happens if misconduct is suspected?

If misconduct is suspected, the original marker of your work will advise the module/programme leader (or equivalent). If both parties suspect academic misconduct, you will be invited to an informal meeting with your tutor or lecturer.

This initial meeting is your opportunity to explain how you produced your assessment, to demonstrate that your work is your own or to explain why it is not. At this meeting you should declare any mitigating circumstances and or confirm whether you have an approved Personal Circumstances (PC) application.

The possible outcomes of this meeting are:

- No academic misconduct has been found and no further action will be taken

- Poor academic practice has been found
- Academic misconduct is still suspected and an investigation will take place to determine whether academic misconduct has occurred.

### What happens if poor academic practice is found?

The aim of this classification is to help you improve your academic integrity. It is not recorded as an offence, however a recommended outcome is still applicable.

This classification is normally only applicable to the following:

- Students at Level 4 or below
- Those studying modules on a standalone basis
- CPD/Masters/PGCE students who are returning to HE after a break of five or more years

If poor academic practice has been found in an assessment, your tutor will notify you. They may invite you to an informal meeting to discuss your work and how you can improve your academic integrity. In agreement with your tutor you will be allowed to repair your work and submit it for a full mark. You will also be required to attend a [Uniskills](#) workshop and/or complete the [Academic Integrity Toolkit](#).

If there are repeated incidents of poor academic practice, the classification may escalate and a sanction apply.

### What happens in an academic misconduct investigation?

The investigation may include any of the following

- A review of your submission and marking
- A second marking procedure, where appropriate and practical
- An oral investigation or 'viva'
- A departmental meeting

These initial steps are known as 'establishing a case'.

### I've been invited to a viva -what does this mean?

This method of investigation is more commonly used where there is reasonable doubt that a submission is not a student's own work. It is not a stand-alone test for academic misconduct and no sanction may be applied directly as a result of a viva.

The aim of a viva is to help us ascertain whether you understand the subject matter of the assessment in question and whether your original submission was your own work. It is an

oral investigation but you will not be asked to recount an entire assessment. Your invitation will provide more details and give you time to prepare for your viva.

A viva may be conducted on its own or as part of a departmental meeting. This will be made clear in your invitation.

### What happens at a departmental meeting?

The departmental meeting is another element of an investigation and provides you with the opportunity to respond to the allegation of misconduct.

You will be given at least five working days' notice of a departmental meeting. Your invitation will outline the purpose of the meeting and any evidence of the alleged misconduct. A departmental meeting may include a viva – you will be informed of this in advance and given time to prepare.

The module/programme leader will be at the meeting, along with the first marker. The Faculty Assistant Registrar and/or a note-taker may also attend. The Chair will explain their suspicions and provide a copy of their evidence. You have the opportunity to respond to the allegations. If you have not already disclosed any mitigating/personal circumstances or that you have an approved PC, it is in your best interests to do so at this point.

Please note, that if you do not attend this meeting or ask for it to be rearranged it may still go ahead in your absence.

After the meeting, the department representatives will agree on whether misconduct has or has not occurred and establish the level of offence. You will receive written confirmation of the outcome and any sanction that has been applied.

### Can I submit a claim of personal circumstances (PC)?

If you have an approved PC for the assessment in question you should declare this as soon as you can, preferably before, or at the start of the departmental meeting.

If you have mitigating circumstances for the assessment in question but do *not* have an approved PC, you should declare your mitigating circumstances at the start of the departmental meeting.

A PC will not negate the misconduct, but in some cases it may be taken into consideration when determining any sanction.

### What kind of outcomes can I expect from a departmental meeting?

An overview of academic misconduct classifications and outcomes is shown in [Appendix 1](#).

If the departmental representatives agree that misconduct has occurred, they will establish the level of offence and appropriate sanction. A summary of the classifications and associated outcomes follows:

- First Minor: the offending sections of the work are set aside and a mark ascribed to the remainder
- First Major: student is failed in the specific element but may resubmit for a capped mark
- Grave: refer to an academic misconduct panel. Sanctions resulting from a panel are detailed in the [Academic Misconduct Procedures](#).

If you have been found guilty of misconduct before, this is known as a subsequent offence. In such cases you may be referred directly to an academic misconduct panel, regardless of the classification.

Classifications and example offences are detailed in [Appendix 2](#) of this document. Full details of all classifications, offences and sanctions are in Annex B of the [Academic Misconduct Procedures](#).

### I'm dissatisfied with the outcome of the departmental meeting – can I appeal?

If you are dissatisfied, you can request that your case is heard at an academic misconduct panel. Your request must be made in writing to the [Head of Student Casework](#) and detail the full circumstances for your request.

## Academic misconduct panels

### Why has my case been sent to an academic misconduct panel?

This normally happens when the Head of Department determines it is not appropriate to deal with the matter locally. This is usually because

- the allegation is so serious that the appropriate sanction can only be applied at a University-level panel, or
- the Head of Department believes local action has been exhausted and the case requires escalation

### What happens at an academic misconduct panel?

The process at a misconduct panel is the same, regardless of whether it was requested by you or your department.



At least five days before the meeting takes place, you will be notified in writing of the allegation and the date, time and venue of the panel meeting. You will be provided with a copy of the panel paperwork in advance and where possible this will include:

- a copy of the original work in which you are alleged to have committed misconduct
- any evidence in support of the department's case

You have the right to be accompanied to the panel meeting by a friend. There is more information about this in [Appendix 23 of the Academic Regulations – Role of a Student's Friend](#).

The panel reviewing your case will comprise:

- A Chair (this will be a Dean or Associate Dean of Faculty which is not your faculty, or Dean of Service)
- Two other members of academic staff who have no previous direct involvement with you
- An elected member of the Students' Union

A member of the Student Casework team will also attend to provide advice on regulatory matters and to take notes. This person is not a member of the panel and will not be involved in any decision making.

The agenda for an academic misconduct panel is found at [Appendix 3](#).

### What support is available to me?

Free independent advice and support is available from the [Students' Union](#) and we recommend that you [contact them](#) at the earliest opportunity. If you meet with a Students' Union adviser, please take any documentation referring to the allegation with you.

We recognise that any allegation of misconduct can be concerning and encourage you to contact the [Student Wellbeing team](#) for emotional support and advice.

If you have any questions about the regulations or the process of an academic misconduct panel please contact the [Student Casework team](#).

### What are the potential outcomes of an academic misconduct panel?

If the panel concludes that misconduct has not occurred, no penalty will be applied.

If the panel agree that misconduct did occur, the outcome will depend on the severity of misconduct committed. In all cases where misconduct is proven, a sanction must be applied. Full details of all the potential outcomes can be found in Annex B of the [Academic Misconduct Procedures](#).

We will write to you with the outcome within five working days of the panel taking place.

### Can I appeal the outcome of an academic misconduct panel?

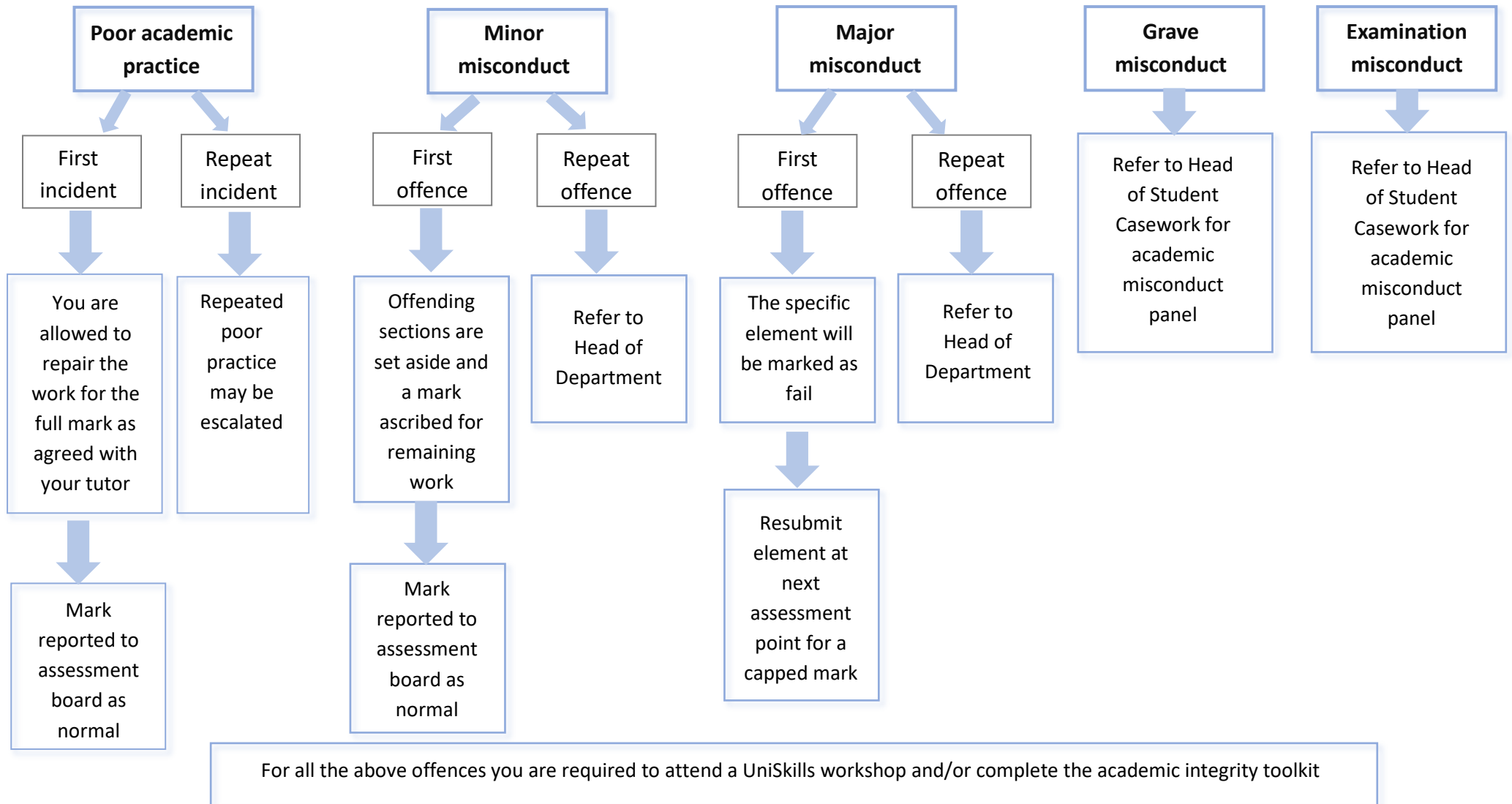
You may submit an appeal against an academic misconduct panel outcome however the application must meet at least one of the University grounds for appeal. These are

- Procedural irregularity in the process
- Bias or perception of bias
- Exceptional mitigating circumstances, details of which were, for good reason, not previously available to the academic misconduct panel

Your appeal must be submitted within 10 working days of the panel's decision being made. For more details on the appeal process please read [Appendix 22 of the Academic Regulations \(Academic Appeals\)](#).

If you are still dissatisfied after all the University's processes have been exhausted, you may take your case to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education \(OIA\)](#). Please note, however, that the OIA will only consider complaints relating to academic misconduct which are based on the grounds listed above. Matters concerning academic or professional judgement are not normally accepted by the OIA.

## Appendix 1: Overview of academic misconduct classifications and outcomes



## Appendix 2: Misconduct classifications and example offences

Classification is a matter of academic judgement and is informed by the following guidelines:

Classification	Example offences
<p><b>Poor academic practice</b> (no offence committed). This classification is only applicable to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students at Level 4 or below</li> <li>• those studying modules on a standalone basis</li> <li>• CPD/Masters/PGCE students who are returning to HE after a break of five or more years</li> </ul>	<p>Includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• poor or careless writing/referencing skills</li> <li>• incomplete or unattributed citations</li> <li>• lack of knowledge of academic writing</li> <li>• lack of understanding of academic protocols</li> <li>• misunderstanding of the expected academic conventions of the department</li> </ul> <p>May include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• plagiarism, where this is identified as resulting from a lack of understanding</li> <li>• unattributed use of AI</li> </ul>
First or subsequent: <b>Minor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unattributed graphic images</li> <li>• Several sentences of direct copying without acknowledgment of the source</li> <li>• Inappropriate paraphrasing</li> <li>• Poor referencing</li> <li>• Unattributed quotations</li> <li>• Incorrect or incomplete citations</li> <li>• Subsequent/second naïve act</li> </ul>
First or subsequent: <b>Major</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copying multiple paragraphs in full without acknowledging the source</li> <li>• Copying some of the work of a fellow student with or without their knowledge or consent</li> </ul>
First or subsequent: <b>Grave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking an essay or multiple essays from the Internet without revealing the source</li> <li>• Copying much of the work of a fellow student with or without their knowledge or consent</li> <li>• Contracting a third party to produce work and submitting it as your own. This includes paid and unpaid contracts and using essay mills</li> <li>• Any form of cheating in a formal examination</li> </ul>

Please refer to the [Academic Misconduct Procedure](#) for full details. If you are on a postgraduate research programme, you are subject to the misconduct procedures outlined in the [Research Degree Regulations, Schedule B](#).

## Appendix 3: Agenda for an academic misconduct panel

Before the meeting formally begins, panel members will deliberate in private to discuss the case and highlight any areas which they believe require discussion.

The panel will then normally conduct its hearing as follows:

1. The Chair will invite the student and tutor presenting the case into the room and will
  - a. Welcome the student and tutor, and introduce each member of the panel
  - b. Outline the panel's remit
  - c. Outline the procedure for the hearing
2. The Chair will invite the tutor to present the case and invite any persons present to ask relevant questions
3. The Chair will invite the student to respond to the allegation(s) and invite any persons present to ask relevant questions
4. When the Chair is satisfied that all relevant information has been provided, they will explain to the student that the panel will now consider their decision in private.
5. The Chair will confirm that the student will receive written confirmation of the outcome within five working days
6. The student and tutor will then leave the meeting
7. The panel will deliberate in private
8. The meeting will close