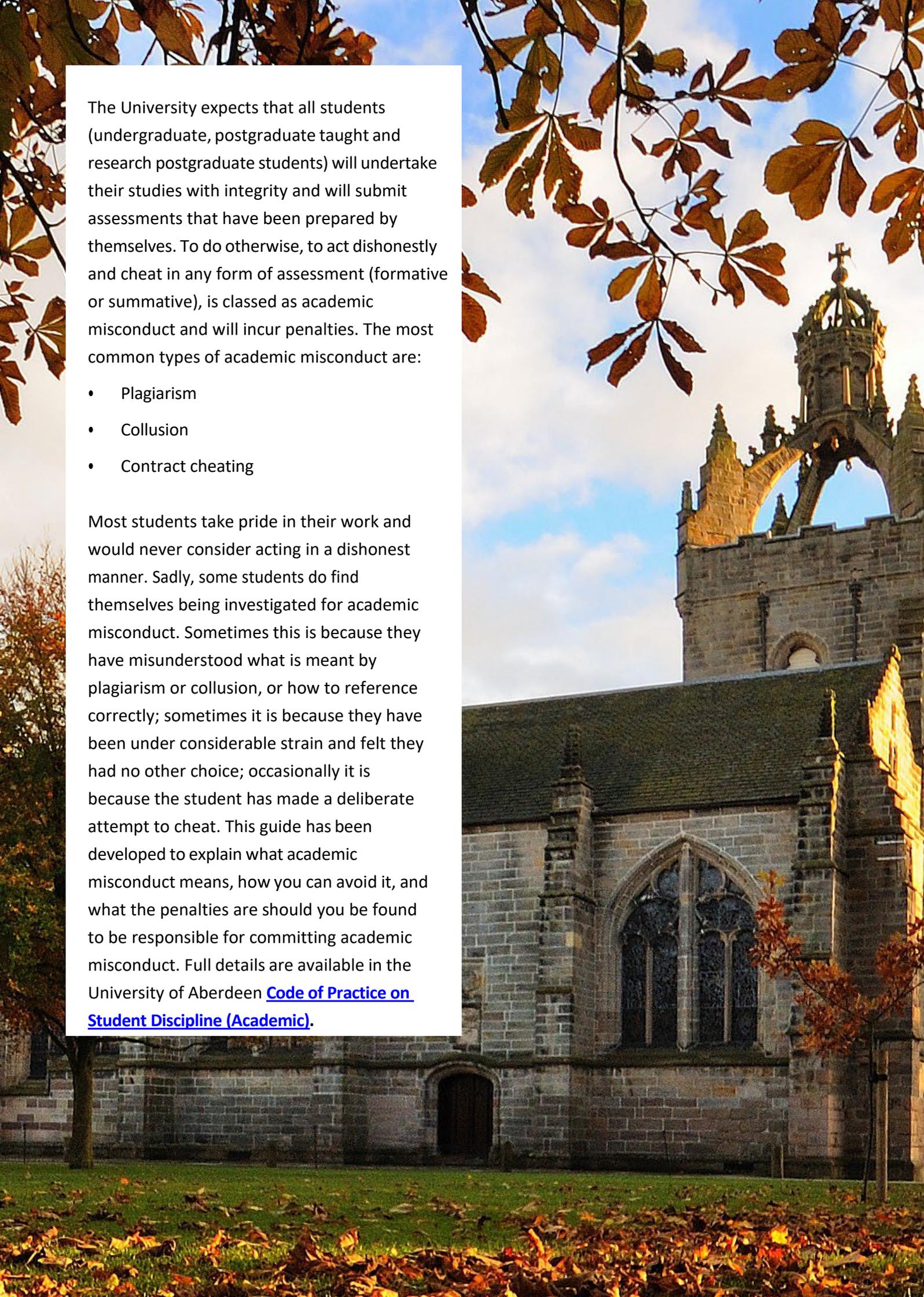


# Academic Integrity a guide for students

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The University expects that all students (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and research postgraduate students) will undertake their studies with integrity and will submit assessments that have been prepared by themselves. To do otherwise, to act dishonestly and cheat in any form of assessment (formative or summative), is classed as academic misconduct and will incur penalties. The most common types of academic misconduct are:

- Plagiarism
- Collusion
- Contract cheating

Most students take pride in their work and would never consider acting in a dishonest manner. Sadly, some students do find themselves being investigated for academic misconduct. Sometimes this is because they have misunderstood what is meant by plagiarism or collusion, or how to reference correctly; sometimes it is because they have been under considerable strain and felt they had no other choice; occasionally it is because the student has made a deliberate attempt to cheat. This guide has been developed to explain what academic misconduct means, how you can avoid it, and what the penalties are should you be found to be responsible for committing academic misconduct. Full details are available in the University of Aberdeen [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#).

# Plagiarism

**Plagiarism** is defined by the University as, “the use, without adequate acknowledgment, of the intellectual work of another person in work submitted for assessment”. This definition includes the unattributed use of any materials and applies to all types of assessment, including ‘open book’ assessments. Apart from the fact that it is dishonest to use another person’s words as though they were your own, copying and pasting from a source, including lecture slides or other course material, does not show markers or examiners that you have understood what that information means, and may impact on the grade you achieve for the work.

This type of academic misconduct also includes ‘self-plagiarism’, which is defined as the resubmission of a student’s own work for assessment that contains identical, or substantially similar content to a previously submitted assignment.

## What does plagiarism look like and how do I avoid it?

- **Copy and paste** – it is not appropriate to copy text verbatim (word for word) from any source and present it as your own words. If you use a direct quote (exact words) from a source you need to put that quote clearly in quotation marks and reference/cite the original source. Please note that some academic subject areas do not permit the use of direct quotes. You should also be aware that too heavy a reliance on direct quotes does not show that you understand the material, which may affect the grade you achieve for the work.
- **Paraphrasing** – just changing one or two words in a copied text, or changing the order of ideas slightly, is also wrong, whether or not you reference/cite the source of your information. You should either use a direct quote or, better, express the ideas in your own words. You would still need to acknowledge where the ideas came from, but at least this way you show the marker that you have understood those ideas, what they mean, and how they are relevant to the assessment criteria.

Further information on how to avoid plagiarism is available in the [Achieve](#) (UG) and [Achieve+](#) (PGT) skills development sites in MyAberdeen.

## What is the penalty for plagiarism?

The standard penalties that can be applied if you are found responsible for plagiarism are outlined in the [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#). A first offence will be dealt with at School level and the penalty may range from a reduced grade (because the plagiarised part of the assessment has been discounted), to the award of [Common Grading Scale \(CGS\)](#) G3 (0) for the assessment and a need to resubmit. Any resubmission is likely to be capped to a CGS D3 (9). Academic Schools would then normally take the opportunity to give you further advice on how to avoid plagiarism in the future. All subsequent plagiarism offences are considered by a University Investigation Officer and the penalty awarded will be dependent on the extent of plagiarism, and whether there were mitigating circumstances. Penalties can range from the award of CGS G3 (0) for the assessment, to CGS G3 (0) for the course, with a resit capped to CGS D3 (9). Multiple instances of plagiarism and/or collusion can result in expulsion from the University as it shows a systemic and sustained lack of academic integrity.

# Collusion

**Collusion** is another form of academic misconduct, and it is treated in the same way as plagiarism. Collusion occurs where there is unauthorised collaboration between students in the writing of an individual assignment. It does not refer to authorised group work that is assessed, for example, by a single group report, or group presentation.

## How do I avoid collusion?

Often, collusion occurs where students work on a project as a group but are expected to submit an individual report. Even if you have worked with other students on a project, unless you are asked to submit a single, group report, you must write your report independently. Discussing, for example, the data from a group project or the ideas of what the data might mean, is acceptable practice. When you start writing your individual report, however, you must make sure to use your own words, use your own way to present the data, use your own ordering of the discussion points and your own set of reading materials. Although some similarities may be expected in individual submissions from a group working on a project together, your report should show your independent thought processes. We would expect substantially different wording and different ordering of arguments and supporting evidence.

Sometimes, collusion occurs when a student offers to let you read their report or essay and you depend too much on that report/essay rather than writing it yourself. In such a case, it is important to note that it will not be just you who is investigated for collusion, but your friend/fellow student will also be investigated. The friend/fellow student who has inadvertently allowed their work to be copied has also committed an offence and will be investigated for academic misconduct and receive a similar penalty, if found guilty.

## What is the penalty for collusion?

The standard penalties that can be applied if you are found to be responsible for committing collusion are outlined in the [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#). The penalty for collusion is like that for plagiarism and this type of academic misconduct is investigated in a similar manner. Multiple instances of collusion and/or plagiarism can lead to expulsion from the University, as it shows a systemic lack of academic integrity.



# Contract Cheating

“**Contract cheating**” is an umbrella term used by the University to describe a form of academic misconduct where a student submits work that has been wholly or partially produced by someone other than the student (e.g.: friend, family member, third party), whether this has been paid for or not. This practice is sometimes referred to as ‘ghost writing’.

Contract cheating is often associated with ‘essay mill’ sites, although it is important to note that ‘essay mills’ also process assignments other than essays. These sites, which are widely advertised on social media, including WhatsApp and Facebook, enable a student to register a request for someone to “help” write an assignment. This type of request for “help” can lead to the student entering into a contract with the ‘essay mill organisation’, or the individual who responds to their request, to complete the assignment. Whereas plagiarism can often be an unintentional act by the student, contract cheating is seen as a more deliberate, planned action and thus exacts a harsher penalty than would be given to a student who has plagiarised.

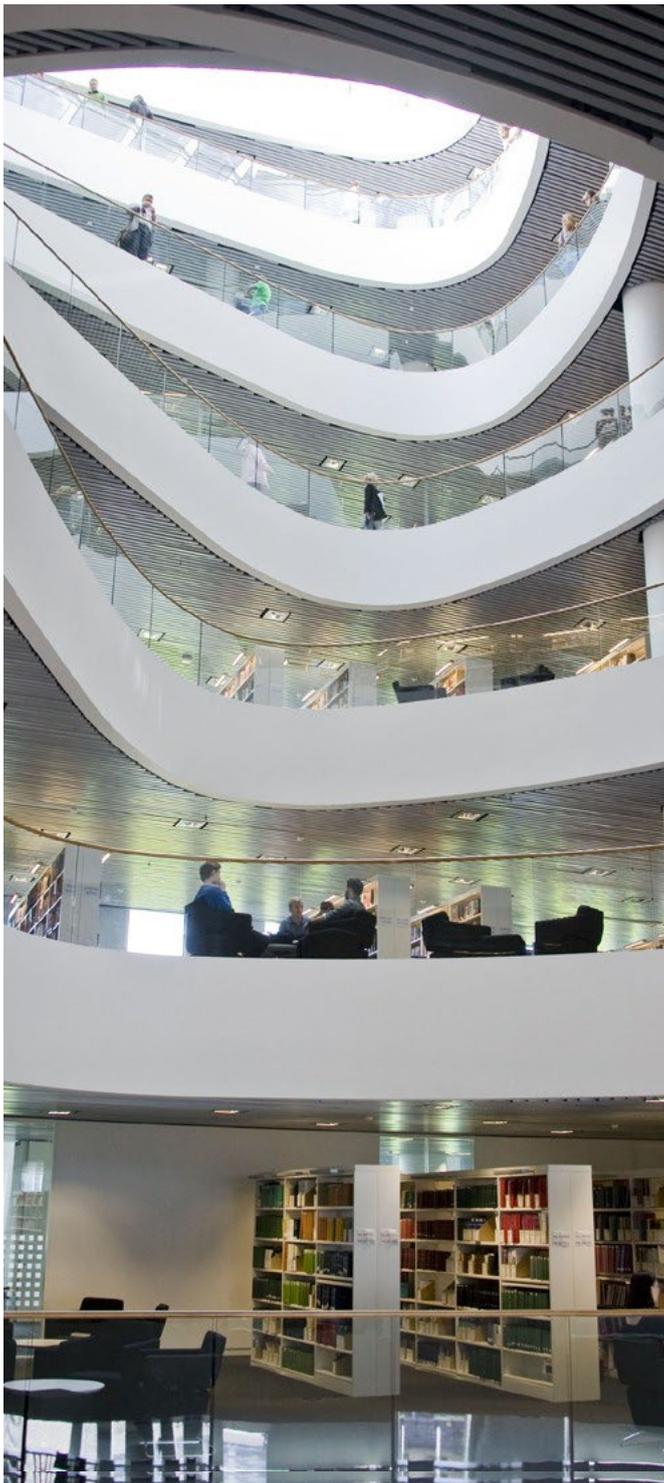
Essay mills often advertise their services to students as academic writing or proofreading services, and these may be attractive options for students for whom English is not their first language. Genuine proofreading services will, however, only suggest changes to spelling or draw attention to grammatical errors; they would never re-write your work. Any “proofreading” site that gives options for different levels of service (low, medium, or high levels of “editing”) is not likely to be a genuine proofreading site and students should not use this type of service. The University has [guidance on proofreading](#), which explains what proofreading companies can, and cannot, do; if you need to have your work proofread, make sure you follow the guidance in the University’s proofreading guide.

‘Essay mill’ sites can advertise their services as guaranteeing plagiarism-free submissions, but the use of such services constitutes serious academic misconduct, which can result in expulsion from the University. As a result, this will impact on your employability and your ‘fitness to practise’ in professional environments.

Students need to be aware that there have been cases (at this University and others) of contract cheating companies resorting to blackmail, threatening to expose the student to the University, or to their employer, unless the student pays additional money. Should you be subject to such threat, you should contact the University immediately ([academicservices@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:academicservices@abdn.ac.uk) or [student.support@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:student.support@abdn.ac.uk) or the Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) at [ausaadvic@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ausaadvic@abdn.ac.uk)) for advice and guidance. The University will give you support and will look sympathetically on you admitting to the misconduct; the fact that you have told us will remove the hold the contract cheating site has on you. Using ‘essay mill’ services may seem like a ‘quick fix’, but the process may become a bigger and more stressful issue later.

## What happens if I am accused of contract cheating?

The process that will be followed, if you are suspected of contract cheating is outlined in the [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#). Essentially, you will be called to a meeting with representatives from the School and will probably be asked questions about the work you submitted, to determine your level of understanding of that work.



## What is the penalty for contract cheating?

The standard penalty that can be applied if you are found guilty of contract cheating is outlined in the [Code of Practice on Student Discipline \(Academic\)](#). Contract cheating does not occur by accident, it does not happen because you have misunderstood what you must do, or because you failed to reference your sources properly. Contract cheating requires you to have planned for someone else to undertake the assignment, in part or wholly, for you, which you submit as though you had written it. This planned, pre-meditated action, normally incurs the harshest of penalties, i.e.: [Common Grading Scale \(CGS\) G3 \(0\)](#) for the assessment and expulsion from the University.

Standard penalties can, of course, be reduced by the University Investigation Officer depending on the extent of cheating and whether there are any mitigating factors that can be taken into consideration. Where you have admitted to contract cheating, perhaps because you were being blackmailed by the contract cheating site, the Investigating Officer may be able to reduce the standard penalty unless other circumstances, e.g.: multiple instances of contract cheating, come to light.





## And finally...

If you are struggling with academic assessments or your studies, remember to ask for help.

- Speak to the Course Co-ordinator or Tutor for advice if you are unsure of the assessment criteria.
- Seek support if you have extenuating circumstances and you feel you need more time to complete the assessment.
- Use the [Academic Integrity Infographic Guide](#) to help develop your assessment literacy.
- Contact the [Student Learning Service](#) if you require support with academic writing, or consult the skills development sites [Achieve](#) (undergraduate), or [Achieve+](#) (taught postgraduate) in [MyAberdeen](#).

This Guide was developed by Dr Joy Perkins & Dr Mary Pryor at the Centre for Academic Development.

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