7. DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM

Academic integrity is essential to the foundation and ongoing viability of an academic community, including managers, researchers, teachers and students. It defines values held by those in the community and which serve to guide the community in its work. In particular, academic integrity involves a commitment to fundamental values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. It cannot be assumed, however, that students will behave with academic integrity; nor can we assume that their understanding of academic integrity is consistent with ours. As a place of learning and research, Curtin needs the ideals of academic integrity to be upheld and communicated to students throughout the duration of their course of study. If students understand and behave in accordance with the principles underpinning academic integrity, issues of plagiarism will be confined to instances arising from lack of knowledge or lack of appropriate instruction, rather than dishonesty.

Curtin has a plagiarism policy which supports a consistent approach to establishing the seriousness of an incident of plagiarism, and more explicit procedures for dealing with a plagiarism incident, imposing penalties and keeping records. The policy also requires each Faculty to have a plagiarism management plan that is consistent with the policy. Students must be informed of Curtin’s policy on academic integrity, including plagiarism see www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/. The full text of the policy is available at www.policies.curtin.edu.au/documents/plagiarism.pdf

Plagiarism means presenting the work or property of another person as one’s own and without appropriate acknowledgement or referencing. Plagiarised work that is presented for the purpose of personal gain or credit breaches principles underpinning academic integrity, breaches provisions of the Curtin Student Charter and compromises Curtin’s assessment policy and processes. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- copying of sentences, paragraphs or creative products which are the work of other persons (including books, articles, theses, unpublished works, working papers, seminar and conference papers, internal reports, lecture notes or tapes) without due acknowledgment;
- too closely paraphrasing sentences, paragraphs or themes without due acknowledgment;
- using another person’s work/s (including words, music, computer source code, creative or visual artefacts, designs or ideas) or research data without due acknowledgment;
- submitting work which has been produced by someone else (e.g. allowing or contracting another person to do the work for which you claim authorship);
- copying or submitting computer files, code or website content in whole or in part without indicating the origin of these;
- submitting one’s own previously assessed or published work for assessment or publication elsewhere, without appropriate acknowledgement (self-plagiarism); and
in the case of collaborative projects, falsely representing the individual contributions of the collaborating partners.

The most common forms of ‘appropriate acknowledgement’ of the work of others are citing and referencing. We do this in fairness to, and as a way of respecting, the intellectual endeavour or work of authors or scholars. Many new or first year students will be familiar with the concept of referencing but many will not know why they have to do it. They know that plagiarism is an offence, but will seldom be able to adequately explain why. Few will use in-text citations and any referencing will usually be inconsistent, inadequate and probably not conform to one style. Although the student guidelines booklet covers these issues, good practice will need to be continually reinforced through coursework.

**Paraphrasing** is when the ideas or themes of other persons are incorporated into one’s own work. Inexperienced students often think paraphrasing is simply ‘summarising’ or ‘putting it into your own words’ and will often change just a few words but preserve the basic structure of the text they are using. This is paraphrasing too closely. See the student guidelines booklet at [www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/studentbook.html](http://www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/studentbook.html) for more detailed guidance. Students may or may not acknowledge the original author even though this is the least they should do. As they develop scholarly writing skills and their own scholarly ‘voice’, they must become more expert in synthesising their own ideas by drawing on the ideas or words of others in the field, not copying them.

**Collusion** means an agreement with another person to deceive others. Two or more students who agree to plagiarise in some way are said to be colluding. It can occur if two or more students work together on an assignment that is meant to be individually completed and assessed (also referred to as ‘collaborating too closely’). If the outcome is deception about the ownership or authorship of work submitted, students can be accused of plagiarism. Students need (and are entitled to) firm and unambiguous guidelines on the extent of allowable collaboration.

At Curtin, any incident of plagiarism is classified initially into one of three levels of seriousness. This level determines who manages the incident and subsequent actions:

- **Level I plagiarism** (low level) is identified and dealt with at the unit or course level. The student may be given educational advice, required to undertake a remedial/learning exercise and/or given the option to revise and resubmit their work. No other form of penalty is permitted for Level I cases.
- **Level II plagiarism** is confirmed and dealt with at the school or department level. The student may be interviewed. A penalty will be imposed for confirmed incidents, and the student may also be required to undertake a remedial/learning exercise.
- **Level III plagiarism** (high level) is confirmed and dealt with at the Faculty or University level through a Faculty Hearing or a Board of Discipline. A significant penalty may be imposed if the student is subsequently found guilty.

**Strategies to prevent plagiarism through course and unit design**

1. Read the course guidelines from the perspective of the student. Is anything ambiguous? Ask students for clarification about ambiguities or lack of sufficient instructions when you first meet with them.
2. Refer students with poor writing skills to programs or resources that provide assistance e.g. The Learning Centre (see www.learningsupport.curtin.edu.au/).

3. Space out assignments so that they are not all due at the middle or end of semester.

4. Use fewer assignments but require students to submit drafts of different stages of the work to give you a better insight into what they can and can’t do. Keep copies of early drafts (or part thereof).

5. Be sensitive to the pressures students are under and reassure them by providing the information they need to succeed. Make sure they know they can contact you with their concerns about plagiarism (for many students, having to ask a teacher for assistance can be a daunting experience).

Strategies to prevent plagiarism through assessment design

1. Design assignments around topics of interest or personal relevance to students or relevant to local or unique issues or perspectives.

2. Design assignments that integrate specific classroom experiences or responses to an issue.

3. Assess work done in class (with possible prior preparation).

4. Avoid assignments for which the necessary prior information is readily available in succinct form (e.g. on the Internet or Intranet). Ask for analysis and evaluation.

5. Give clear instructions for assignments, particularly in relation to collaboration or group assignments.

6. If group work is involved, plan how students will report on this process. Indicate, if necessary, how students are to inform you of their individual contribution in a group assignment.

7. Provide clear marking criteria to students before they begin an assignment.

8. Have students sign a statement that their assignment work is their own and that they have not previously submitted the work (or a large part of it) in another unit. This could form part of the first page of the assignment and could be discussed in class when you are making explicit your expectations in terms of academic integrity. The statement could also include a checklist e.g. all direct quotes are correctly cited; all sources are appropriately referenced; up-to-date references have been cited.

9. Ask students to include with the references a brief summary (or photocopy) of each source and where they obtained it, or collect an annotated bibliography prior to the assignment due date.

10. Require students to give an oral report about their paper.

11. Use specific tasks or topics, requiring students to choose one.

12. Avoid reusing assessments from one group to the next. A repeated assignment is an open invitation to plagiarism.

13. Include specific or a limited range of resources or conditions for the assignment e.g. specify the references, specify recent references only, require an interview or oral defence.


Detecting plagiarism: Plagiarism must not be ignored. If you are unsure about any student’s work, discuss it with the unit coordinator. The lowest level of plagiarism (Level 1) is not punitive and students receive the educational advice they require to improve their writing.
Students will get the message that all plagiarism will be acted upon and deliberate plagiarism penalised.

**Turnitin:** Turnitin is an electronic text matching system that compares text in a student assignment against electronic text on the Internet, in published works (including ABI/Inform, Periodical Abstracts, Business dateline, and electronic books), on the ProQuest and Gale commercial databases, and in assignments previously submitted to Turnitin by students in universities all over the world, including assignments obtained from 'paper mills' (Internet sites which sell papers). The system operates through a web site and is accessible by standard web browsers - [www.turnitin.com/static/home.html](http://www.turnitin.com/static/home.html). No additional software is required and the interface is reasonably user-friendly.

After checking the submitted document (which can take some time), Turnitin provides an 'originality report' in which similar text is underlined, colour-coded, and linked to what Turnitin deems to be either the original source or a similar document on its database. Turnitin has several features that can assist with the process of checking originality reports. For instance, the 'side-by-side' originality report is a feature which splits the viewing screen so that the submitted document is on the left and any similar text is on the right, thereby making the checking process more straightforward. You can see an example of an annotated sample report at [www.turnitin.com/static/popups/sample_report.html](http://www.turnitin.com/static/popups/sample_report.html).

It should be noted that Turnitin is not really a plagiarism detection system; rather it is a text matching system. Turnitin only reports on the degree of text matching, lecturers must still review Turnitin's reports to determine if plagiarism has occurred. For example, Turnitin does not differentiate between correctly cited references and unacknowledged copying. This means, for instance, that legitimately used direct quotations are not separated from information that has not been referenced appropriately. The originality report needs to be assessed by the lecturer to determine whether similar text has been properly acknowledged or not.

It is important to note that the originality percentage scores cannot be directly used as a measure of plagiarism; they are a measure of the proportion of similar text in an assignment. The percentage of text, which is typically similar in a set of assignments, will differ according to disciplines and the extent of quoted text expected in an assignment and the availability of relevant documents in electronic form.

**Turnitin at Curtin:** Unit coordinators or teachers intending to use Turnitin as an aid to help students develop their scholarly writing skills or to monitor students’ work for plagiarism must ensure that they include the relevant information in unit outlines. Use the Unit Outline to direct students to the Turnitin section of the Academic Integrity website ([www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/students/turnitin.cfm](http://www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/students/turnitin.cfm)) for information about Turnitin, as well as their rights and responsibilities with regard to submitting their work to the Turnitin service.

For full information on Turnitin, how it works, and how you might use the service, go to [www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/staff/turnitin.cfm](http://www.academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/staff/turnitin.cfm) and follow the links. Accounts can be created quite quickly. See also [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).