

Fact Sheet 6

Plagiarism: A Guide for Learners



THE ADAM SMITH COLLEGE, FIFE
INSPIRING LEARNING

Most College courses require you to submit coursework for assessment. This could be a project, portfolio, essays, reports or artefacts. The marks you are awarded for this work contribute towards your final grade for a unit or course. This factsheet tells you about some of the things you must and mustn't do when submitting coursework – either for internal marking by your lecturers or external marking by an awarding body.

Coursework provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate your skills and knowledge in a subject. Using information from other sources as the building blocks for your own work is a great way to expand your knowledge – but you mustn't try to pass this information off as your own. You need to make sure that you give proper references for everything you use in your work. If you don't, you will be committing plagiarism – and that's cheating.

What Is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism involves taking someone else's work or ideas and trying to pass them off as your own. This includes failing to acknowledge sources of information that you have used in your work. Some examples of plagiarism are:

- ⇒ Copying, re-wording or summarising someone else's work and submitting it as your own without acknowledging the source.
- ⇒ Including parts of someone else's work in your own without using quotation marks and identifying the source. This includes cutting and pasting information from the internet.
- ⇒ Not labelling diagrams/illustrations that you have used.
- ⇒ Working together with other students on a task that should have been done on your own.

These are all forms of cheating – something that the College takes very seriously.

How Is Plagiarism Spotted?

There are many ways to identify plagiarism, including:

- ⇒ Lecturers checking work may spot changes in the style of writing and the use of language.
- ⇒ Lecturers marking your work are highly experienced subject specialists who are very familiar with the topic concerned – they may well have read the source you are using (or even marked the work of another student that you have copied from).
- ⇒ Sophisticated computer software can be used to detect changes in grammar and style of writing or punctuation and to mark phrases or pieces of text with original sources.

The Penalties For Plagiarism

If plagiarism is identified in work that you have submitted, one of a range of penalties will be applied:

- ⇒ The piece of work will be considered a fail and you will receive no marks. In addition you will receive an oral or written warning.
- ⇒ Your entry for the unit concerned may be cancelled.
- ⇒ Your entries for all of your units/courses for that year may be cancelled.

The College and/or the awarding body will decide which penalty is appropriate in the circumstances.

These are severe penalties and not ones which are applied lightly. However, these penalties are imposed because plagiarism is a very serious offence and if you are found to have submitted work that is not entirely your own, one of these actions will be taken.

Full information about how the College deals with plagiarism and other forms of cheating is contained in the College Academic Deceit Procedures [QP2.07].

Preparing Your Coursework – Advice and Good Practice

There are some simple things that you can do to ensure that you don't risk having any of these penalties applied to your work:

- ⇒ Clearly acknowledge/reference your sources of information. Use quotation marks around any text that you are using from other sources and include a bibliography at the end of your work. Your lecturer will be able to explain in more detail how to do this.
- ⇒ If you need more guidance on how to acknowledge the sources which you have used, ask your lecturer – it's better to be safe than sorry.
- ⇒ Make sure that you clearly label any diagrams/illustrations that you are using.
- ⇒ Make sure that you meet the deadlines that your lecturer gives you for submitting drafts and final pieces of work. Your lecturers are there to guide and assist you – showing them your work as it progresses will allow you and your lecturers time to address any areas of concern as they arise.
- ⇒ If you have been off sick or are having trouble meeting your deadlines, talk to your lecturer – there may be something that can be done to help you.
- ⇒ Don't be tempted to use essays from online essay banks – they may not be any good and you will also be running the risk of being caught out. Electronic tools are used to detect this sort of copying.
- ⇒ Don't be tempted to work with other students on tasks which you have been instructed to do on your own – it's your award, so it needs to be your own work.

Of course you can talk about your work with your friends and family, share their experiences and seek advice, but always remember that, when the time comes to hand in your work, what you submit must be your own. You must make sure that you properly reference everything. If you don't, you run the risk of being caught cheating and having a penalty imposed.