Plagiarism Policy

What constitutes plagiarism or cheating?

If you submit an assignment that contains work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker (acknowledging your sources), you are committing ‘plagiarism’ and this is an offence. This might occur in an assignment when:

- using a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across
- copying word-for-word directly from a text
- paraphrasing the words from a text very closely
- using text downloaded from the internet
- borrowing statistics or assembled facts from another person or source
- copying or downloading figures, photographs, pictures or diagrams without acknowledging your sources
- copying from the notes or essays of a fellow student
- copying from your own notes, on a text, tutorial, video or lecture, that contain direct quotations.

Although you are encouraged to show the results of your reading by referring to and quoting from works on your subject, copying from such sources without acknowledgement is deemed to be plagiarism and will not be accepted by the University. This means that you must make it clear which words and ideas are yours and which have come from elsewhere, through the use of quotation marks as well as in-text citations.

Such poor academic practice may occur due to inexperience. So you should study the ‘Developing Good Academic Practices’ website http://learn1.open.ac.uk/site/DGAP001. You should also read carefully all the module specific study advice that you receive in your mailings, especially statements concerning plagiarism and how to reference your sources. Where plagiarised material is included in assignments, tutors are likely to notice the shifts in style and may be aware of the source. Seek their advice on this early on in your study. The University also uses text comparison software which it applies to electronic assignments as well as scanned or retyped assignments.

The temptation to plagiarise may arise from lack of self-confidence or from a lack of understanding about the aims of the assessment and about what is required of you. Assignments provide a vehicle for assessing your performance during your module and contribute to your overall module result. However they also assist you in understanding your subject and aid your learning on the module. When you attempt to use the ideas and terms of the module independently you learn more thoroughly and develop your own writing style. You are likely to perform better in examinations if you have learned how to write your own answers to questions in assignments. By submitting work that is not your own you are denying yourself the benefit of this valuable learning strategy. Copying the work of others would be counter-productive to your goal of understanding the module work and to real achievement. Most students will not wish to take such a negative approach to studying, and the University does not tolerate it.
You are encouraged to collaborate with others in studying, but submitted work copied from or written jointly with others is not acceptable, unless collaboration is required in the particular assignment. Therefore you will be asked to acknowledge a statement to confirm that all assessment work you have submitted is your own and that you have not cheated.

Submitting work that has been done by someone else and persistent borrowing of other people’s work without citation are obvious instances of plagiarism and are regarded as cheating. Copying answers from social networking sites is cheating. Paying for work from other sources and submitting it as your own is also cheating. It is intellectually dishonest to cheat and thus give one student an unfair advantage over others. Passing on your assignments to others, with the knowledge that another student may plagiarise the assignment will also lead to a penalty. If a case of plagiarism is proven, this is a serious offence and the Open University disciplinary procedures will be followed, as described under the Student Regulations SA 1.6 and SD 4.3.

**Summary of change made in this Policy during 2013**

- Aug 2013 – appendix added
Appendix 1

Text comparison software for eTMAs

You may have seen in current press reports there is concern among Higher Education institutions about increasing awareness of cases of plagiarism. This primarily takes one of two forms:

i) students misusing information from the web or other reference sources, where they ‘cut and paste’ sections of text from these resources directly into their assignments without acknowledging the original source;

and

ii) students working too closely with one or more individuals to help solve and/or answer an assessed task or question, resulting in the production of a joint answer or solution (whether intentionally or not) to gain an unfair advantage over others in their assignments. This form of plagiarism is called collusion.

To check students are working in a fair and academically appropriate manner, The Open University uses two types of text comparison software to detect potential cases of plagiarism in work that is submitted for assessment. These are:

- **CopyCatch** which compares work submitted by one student with assignments submitted by all other students on the module (as well as previous presentations of the module where appropriate). The main use of CopyCatch is to check for cases of collusion.

- **Turnitin**, which carries out the equivalent of an internet search, looks for matches between the text included in a piece of work submitted by a student with all forms of information and resources publicly available on the internet. The main use of Turnitin is to check for cases of direct copying, and/or not properly referencing various types of source materials. It can also be used to compare each student’s assignments with the module materials and other commonly used or provided references.

When using these systems, The Open University will not submit any personal details about you to either of them, although it is likely your work will have your PI number on it from which you can be identified. Furthermore, your work will not be stored on any external system and so will not be accessible to anyone outside of The Open University.

For each assignment submitted to Turnitin, an ‘originality’ report is produced showing the percentage of text that matches specific websites. Copycatch produces ‘similarity’ reports between matched pairs of scripts. These reports will be made available to the module team and in some cases they may decide to take the matter further. This may result in some further guidance about academic conduct and support to avoid any further incidents, or if more serious, may result in further action taking place.

Depending on the questions being asked and the format of the submitted answer, some level of matching between scripts and with other sources is expected. For example, you may have used information obtained from other sites and/or scientific papers as a direct quote to support your answer or illustrate a particular point (making sure that you have referenced this in the appropriate and expected manner). Likewise, you will probably use terms and phrases,
which can be described as ‘common knowledge’ within your particular subject area and level of study, which do not need to be referenced, but are likely to arise in a similar format on a number of sites and other students’ answers. The module team will take all such matters into account when reviewing each of the reports and deciding whether a student has plagiarised.