

PLAGIARISM GUIDANCE

FOR STUDENTS of School of Mathematics 2014 – 2015

The quality of your degree to yourself and potential employers is based upon

- the maintenance of a system of values which underpin The University of Birmingham
- the development of effective personal skills and knowledge enhancement
- the quality of the teaching and learning process
- the quality of the assessment process.

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is an English word which is, in turn, derived from a Latin word which suggests 'plunder' of things and 'kidnap' of people. A dictionary definition of plagiarism is: 'to appropriate ideas, passages etc. from another work or author' (Hanks, P. (ed.), 1979, *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, p1119). A clearer definition for academic purposes is given by Spatt: 'the unacknowledged use of another person's work, in the form of original ideas, strategies, and research as well as another person's writing, in the form of sentences, phrases, and innovative terminology' (Spatt, B., 1983, *Writing from Sources*, p436, St. Martin's Press, New York). So, with plagiarism comes a strong implication of dishonest conduct. It should come as no surprise therefore to learn that The University of Birmingham regards deliberate plagiarism as a disciplinary offence and all plagiarism as a serious breach of the norms of good practice. In serious cases, plagiarism can lead to dismissal.

What is wrong with Plagiarism?

Plagiarism:

- breaks the University's code of values
- if it involves copying, prevents you from developing your skills and knowledge
- can lead to dismissal in serious cases
- can lead, if undetected, to unfairness in assessment
- can lead to inappropriate feedback to you and to everyone else
- can involve illegal behaviour where it infringes copyright.

Plagiarism by direct copying the work of others or by deliberately failing to acknowledge the work of others is a disciplinary offence. If you are not engaging in assessment activities as expected you are not giving yourself the chance to make ideas your own. As a result you will not get the right kind of feedback. If plagiarism is widespread it damages the University community and hence the value of your qualification. If plagiarism becomes widespread it could lead to a return to greater use of the formal unseen examination. If you allow someone else to copy your work, you are also failing to uphold the values in learning to which the University subscribes. If you give in to peer pressure on this, you are failing to be a good citizen of the University. If you take work from the Internet without acknowledging it you are probably breaking the law on copyright, and failing to show your own academic capabilities.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Deliberate plagiarism is cheating. By the end of this document you should know what plagiarism is. If, given this knowledge, you do plagiarise then sanctions can be used against you.

Unintentional plagiarism can be avoided by acknowledging, in a proper academic way, the contribution that others have made to the development of your ideas and to the quality of your answers.

So avoid plagiarism by:

- observing School rules governing individual and joint work
- observing School guidance governing practical work
- observing the referencing conventions within your discipline
- using your own words as far as possible when writing an assessment
- indicating clearly when a direct quotation is used and providing exact sources
- providing sources for any indirect quotations or paraphrased material
- making use of careful own-word summarisation, where appropriate, making sure that the source is given in the text and bibliography
- by keeping your work up to date or by negotiating new deadlines if you get behind
- by checking through your work to see whether you have observed the rules
- by asking for guidance
- by taking careful notes with full references and page numbers as you gather information for a topic, distinguishing between direct quotes and own word summaries.

A key skill in using sources is learning to use a given system of referencing. Like any other skill mastering a reference system takes time and practice. By the end of Stage 1 you ought to be able to use a simple system of text referencing. At Stage 2 you ought to be able to use a variety of written strategies for incorporating and referring to other peoples' work. By the time you come to write a dissertation or project at Stage 3, you ought to be able to use correctly the full range of referencing techniques, and textual strategies, for acknowledging the work of others