Cheating, Plagiarism and Unauthorized Collaboration: What Students Need to Know

What is cheating?
Simply stated, cheating is dishonest behaviour intended to gain academic advantage. Examples of cheating include but are not limited to:

- Looking at someone else’s test, getting information from someone else during a test, giving someone else information or allowing someone to copy from your test, or bringing a ‘cheat sheet’ into a test (even if you don’t use it)¹
- Submitting something in a class that has already been submitted and graded in another class (sometimes referred to as recycling papers).
- Including facts, references, or data that you know to be false in a lab, essay, report, oral presentation, or other assignment.

What is plagiarism exactly?
“Plagiarism means using another’s work without giving credit. You must put others’ words in quotation marks and cite your source(s), and you must give citations when using others’ ideas, even if those ideas are paraphrased in your own words.”²

What is a “source’?”
“The term ‘source’ includes published works (books, magazines, newspapers, websites, plays, movies, photos, paintings and textbooks) and unpublished sources (class lectures or notes, handouts, speeches, other students’ papers, or material from a research service).”³

REMEMBER: If you are in doubt about whether a piece of information needs to be cited, cite it. It is better to err on the side of caution than to accidently use work by someone else without giving proper credit.

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What is cheating?

Academic Integrity
Resources for Students

Western Libraries. Provides information on how to correctly cite bibliographic references in various academic disciplines:
https://www.lib.uwo.ca/services/styleguides.html

Nesbit – Johnson Writing Centre at Hamilton College. Includes information on how to properly cite sources, writing tips, and links to various discipline specific style guides (APA, Chicago, CBE, and MLA).
https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources

University of Alberta Libraries. This Website offers excellent online handouts for students on how to avoid plagiarism:
https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students/academic-resources/academic-integrity/plagiarism

The Office of the Ombudsperson. Resources include a student guide on Cheating Plagiarism and Other Scholastic Offences. You can view the guide on the following web pages:
undergraduate: https://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/academic/undergraduate/academic_integrity.html
graduate: https://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/academic/graduate/academic_integrity.html

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But what if I didn’t mean to plagiarize?

Unintentional plagiarism can be described as “careless paraphrasing or citing of source material such that improper or misleading credit is given” (Waltman qt. in Lathrop and Foss p. 163). Examples of unintentional plagiarism include forgetting to include quotation marks, citing a reference incorrectly because of poor note taking, or carelessly cutting and pasting information from the Internet. However, even if you didn’t mean to plagiarize you have still violated the University’s Scholastic Offence Policy.

REMEMBER: Carelessness or ignorance of the University’s scholastic offense policy is not a defense for plagiarism! Both intentional and unintentional plagiarism will result in an academic penalty.

In my culture the rules about writing are different. I’ve never been taught how to “cite sources.” What should I do differently now that I’m studying in Canada?

If you come from a culture where the definitions of plagiarism are different it is essential that you learn what is expected at a Canadian university. Fortunately, the University has many resources to help you do this. Read on for more information.

How do I avoid plagiarism?

Learn the proper method for citing direct quotes, paraphrased material, electronic information and other ‘sources’ previously listed.

Where can I get help with learning proper citation methods?

First, read the course outline to find out what citation format the professor prefers; and invest in a style guide that explains methods?

methods? What about joining a study group on Facebook?

If we’re just talking about an assignment is that still considered “unauthorized collaboration?”

It depends. While some online study groups may be fine, concerns may arise depending on the type of information that is discussed. Students who are interested in joining online study groups should check out the Facebook forums offered by the Centre for new Students at: [www.registrar.uwo.ca/cfns/index.cfm]. Finally, if you are unsure about what kind of behaviour is considered unauthorized collaboration ask your professor!

What is unauthorized collaboration?

“Unauthorized collaboration means working with another or receiving assistance from someone (a classmate, friend, parent etc.) without the specific permission of the instructor on assignments that will be submitted for a grade. This rule applies to in-class or take-home tests, essays, labs, or homework assignments. Students may not collaborate without faculty authorization.”

REMEMBER: All work submitted for a grade should be completed by the student working alone. If collaboration is permitted, students must follow the rules set out by the instructor and the course outline.

If I’m not afraid of getting caught why should I be concerned about any of this? Is cheating really that big a deal?

It is in your interest to care about cheating because honesty is important in all areas of life, and is the foundation of ethical behaviour. If you can justify compromising your academic experience, what’s to prevent this kind of attitude from affecting other areas of your life. In the words of Janis Joplin, “Don’t compromise yourself, you’re all you’ve got.”

1 Truth in Education Project. University of Alberta. www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/
2 Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship. Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. October, 1999
3 Avoiding Plagiarism: Mastering the Art of Scholarship. Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. October, 1999
4 Unauthorized Collaboration: What Students Need To Know. Student Judicial Affairs. University of California, Davis. October, 1999