

# PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism and the buying of essays are both traditional forms of academic dishonesty. With the advent of the internet and its widespread use, these methods have become far more sophisticated. By way of the cut-and-paste feature on computers, plagiarism has become extremely simple and takes little time.

Students are sometimes confused by the term “public domain” and how it applies to the internet. While information found on the internet is free and can be accessed by anyone, the general rules of citation still apply.

Internet paper mills are easy to access, with many offering money-back guarantees and custom paper services. Major credit cards are accepted at most sites. If you’ve never looked at a paper mill site, visit the sites listed below, which were active as of March 2011. To find more sites, use your search engine and type in words like “term papers” or “essays.”

[www.schoolsucks.com](http://www.schoolsucks.com) | [www.essaytown.com](http://www.essaytown.com) | [www.academon.com](http://www.academon.com) | [www.fastpapers.com](http://www.fastpapers.com)

Visit us online:  
[www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

## Plagiarism Prevention Techniques:

- Assign specific research topics and change them frequently.
- Do not allow last-minute changes of topic (the student may have purchased a paper and needs a slight topic change to make it applicable to your course).
- Divide a large assignment into multiple marked sections, e.g., separate due dates for bibliography, first 2-3 pages, first draft, final draft. This approach has many advantages:
  - it forces students to develop the paper over a specific time period (common reasons for plagiarism are poor time management skills and/or poor research skills),
  - it allows you to see the progression of the paper and provide marks and comments, and
  - it allows you to stop a plagiarism problem at the beginning of or during the process.

Instructors who have re-designed assignments in this manner have given positive feedback and indicate their marking time commitment is spread out over the term in smaller increments rather than all at once at the end of term.

- Require drafts be submitted with any final paper (allows you to see progression and a student will have difficulty providing a convincing draft for a purchased paper).
- Require a hard copy of any internet source be submitted with the paper (allows you to quickly check for proper citation and forces students to keep track of their source material).
- If a student’s language suddenly changes in an essay or if there is language you do not think the student is capable of, a Google search is an effective way of searching the internet for that language. Go to the Google search engine ([www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca)), type in the sentence or section you suspect and see if Google finds a match.
- State in your course outline that students may be asked to defend their papers orally (a student who did not write his or her own paper will likely have a difficult time discussing it in any depth).
- Use a consistent style when marking papers/exams so that if a student alters your grades you may notice it.

Academic Integrity Office  
McMaster University  
[actinteg@mcmaster.ca](mailto:actinteg@mcmaster.ca)  
MUSC 211  
(905) 525-9140, extension 24303

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

McMASTER UNIVERSITY



ETHICS

VALUES

PRINCIPLES



# CHEATING

## CHEATING IN TESTS/EXAMS!

There are many ways students can cheat in tests/exams. Here are a few:

- Using cheat sheets
- Using technology, e.g., sending each other text messages on cell phones
- Bringing formulas into the exam on the back of a calculator
- Copying answers on multiple-choice tests (working collaboratively) Students have various methods of communicating during exams, e.g., tapping or coughing noises, moving erasers in patterns, marking the correct answer in large print so others can see it, etc.
- Hiring another student to write the test for them
- Switching versions of a multiple-version exam to enable students sitting close to copy answers
- Altering a marked and returned test and then submitting it for more marks
- Stealing the test/exam
- Leaving the test room without handing in a test and later applying for a deferred test/exam, claiming the test was missed

## Multiple-Choice Exams:

- Multiple-version tests and exams are quite effective at preventing collaboration – the Registrar's Office can manage 4 different versions
- To create multiple versions, switch the order of the answers and/or questions of the test, creating 4 different tests using the same questions and making it much more difficult for students to copy from one another
- Multiple-version tests should be laid out in a pattern in the classroom in advance, ensuring that the same version is not within a student's viewing distance
- To prevent students from switching the version of test they are writing, photocopying each version on different coloured paper makes it easy for invigilators to note a switch

## Invigilation:

Proper invigilation can be quite effective at preventing cheating. It is important that invigilators know what is expected and what to do if they suspect cheating is happening.

- Make sure invigilators move around the room throughout the entire test
- The back of the room is one of the best places to invigilate from as sight lines can be observed
- Invigilators should look for cheat sheets and should check the back of all calculators and any allowed material, etc.
- Any suspicious behaviour should be documented in detail. Forms can be found at: [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/instructors/proc\\_forms/invigilation.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/instructors/proc_forms/invigilation.pdf)
- Students suspected of cheating should not be prevented from finishing the test, but rather should be moved and allowed to finish – an investigation and decision regarding the suspected cheating can happen after the test is complete
- Confiscate and do not return any cheat sheets or calculators with writing on them since they are important evidence – for a student with writing on his or her person (e.g. hand), copy out what is written before it can be rubbed or washed off
- For students who ignore time limits, make a note on the test and inform them nothing further will be marked

## Final Exams:

If a student is caught or suspected of cheating in a Registrar invigilated final exam, you will receive an e-mail from the Registrar Office describing the incident. Please contact the Office of Academic Integrity if you have questions on what to do.

# Test Cheating Prevention Techniques:

- Book an appropriate room for the test, e.g. a room large enough to space the students out; a flat floor room is best; a room with numbered seating is helpful
- Prepare a test that works well according to the room, e.g., if you have to book a room with sloped seating and plan on having a multiple-choice test, a multiple-version test is recommended (see section on Multiple-Choice Exams for more information)
- All personal belongings should be left at the front of the room (including cell phones, any kind of electronic device, etc.)
- Require students with baseball hats to turn the brim to the back (the brim is a common place to keep a cheat sheet)
- Keep a seating plan
- If the room does not have numbered seating, create your own seating plan (seating plans for many large classrooms can be found at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/instructors/suggestions/midtermtests/](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/instructors/suggestions/midtermtests/))
- Have students sign in (if you catch students collaborating, proving where they sat is often a critical part to charging them with dishonesty)
- For large classes it is recommended that Mac ID is mandatory, that invigilators check for imposters, and that the signature is correct
- Change test questions frequently
- Protect the security of your tests, e.g. lock your office door, protect your computer files, etc.
- Keep track of how many copies of a test are made, how many are handed out at the test and how many are handed back in so you know if one is stolen
- Use a randomized assigned seating plan – post student ID numbers and the seating arrangements outside the test room or on an overhead in the room. This is a good strategy if you suspect a group of students are cheating together and you want to spread them out.
- Have students write tests in pen rather than pencil so answers cannot be changed later and re-submitted for more marks (scantron sheets require pencil for the multiple-choice section however)
- If you suspect a student is tampering with his or her test after it has been marked and is re-submitting it for a higher grade, photocopy the next test before returning it
- When marking tests, draw a line through any blank space following an answer so a student cannot later add material and claim it was not marked
- Use a consistent style when marking tests so that if a student alters your grades you may notice it
- If a student wants to make up a missed test, first check the sign-in sheets to ensure the student was not present at the scheduled test date – if they were, the student should be charged with academic dishonesty

## What does the research say about cheating on tests?

---

According to Gregory J. Cizek in *Cheating on Tests How to Do It, Detect It and Prevent It*:

---

- Cheating is about grades, grades, grades. (pages 32 – 36)
- The strongest predictor for cheating is previous cheating or seeing others cheat or seeing cheating go unpunished. (page 123)
- “Students whose motivation for performance is to earn a grade (as opposed to learning) are significantly more likely to report engaging in cheating to accomplish that goal.” (page 105)
- “Larger classes, free seating, poor proctoring or supervision of the test, inexperienced faculty, the opportunity to cheat, and take-home tests are all associated with increased cheating.” (page 116)
- “Seating students apart during testing, the use of essay tests, and stiff penalties are among the factors students report as likely to decrease the amount of cheating.” (page 121)

---

Cizek, G. J. (1999) *Cheating in Tests, How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

# COLLABORATION

## COLLABORATION ISSUES

### Appropriate Collaboration:

Collaboration is often encouraged by instructors since it can:

- develop team/group management skills
- combine and encourage multiple perspectives
- make a labour-intensive assignment manageable
- encourage interdisciplinary exchange

### Inappropriate Collaboration:

Inappropriate collaboration occurs when students work together beyond what is outlined as expected, e.g., students hand in assignments with sections that are identical when the assignment was to be done individually. The chances of inappropriate collaboration increase when:

- there are ambiguous expectations around collaboration
- the same answers are required from all students
- the same assignment is given each year
- the assignment is popular in many courses and at many universities (e.g., “What is the motivation for Hamlet?”) so that it is easy to borrow or buy prepared answers

### Ways to Avoid Inappropriate Collaboration:

- Be very clear about what level of collaboration you will accept in a course. It is advisable to put this in writing in the course outline and discuss it in class. If you say, “This is an individual assignment and your work is to be original, but I encourage you to discuss the assignment together,” what *exactly* do you mean?
- When you are developing assignments, think about the purpose of the assignment. Is it necessary that students do it individually? Could there be benefits to allowing collaboration? What level of collaboration would be acceptable? Being clear in your own mind about the purpose of the assignment makes it easier to explain to students why they should or should not work together. Example: “This is a necessary skill you must learn individually if you are going to be successful with the course material.”
- Assign partner/group projects. If you know students are likely to work together, design assignments to be done in pairs or groups. There will be fewer assignments to mark and TAs can perform other duties for the course. Encouraging students to discuss group management issues is recommended; e.g., division of tasks, how to address lack of participation issues, etc. Devoting a portion of marks to peer review of participation in the assignment is also recommended.
- If assigning partner/group projects, introduce some competition with a reward for the top groups. Students are less likely to share information between groups if they are competing with each other.
- Change assignments regularly. It is very common for students to save old assignments and pass them to other students. If possible, change a small but critical part of the assignment, so students who are relying solely on the old assignment will have a lot of difficulty. Example: change a numerical value or the organism or the chemical compound. When composing new assignments, design them so you have many components that can be changed over the years.
- Reduce the grade values for questions or problems that are easy to cheat on.
- Carefully consider how assignments are handed in. Drop-boxes in the hallway are known to cause problems. Consider requiring assignments to be submitted electronically, or submitted to TAs at a specific time.

### Lab Assignments:

There are some innovative ideas that are in use at McMaster to try to reduce the amount of inappropriate collaborating on lab assignments. For example:

- Set pre-lab questions that are worth marks. These can be delivered on Avenue to Learn, and in answering the questions, students are learning the information they will need to complete the lab in a timely manner. It is recommended that there be a database of questions randomly assigned when students log on so the answers do not become widely distributed.
- Try to identify what students are finding difficult. Research suggests students are more likely to cheat when they are short of time. Are they having difficulty with areas because of lack of skill or lack of content knowledge? Explicitly teach the problem areas early. For example, provide labs at the beginning of term for students to learn how to use equipment or to learn specific techniques necessary to the course. Evaluate and grade the skill level achieved. With necessary skills mastered, students are more confident and complete labs in a more timely way.
- Create “informal” and “formal” lab assignments. An “informal” lab assignment may be a one-page set of questions students have to complete before leaving the lab. Carefully consider how these informal labs are handed in; e.g., have a TA collect them, get a signature from the student, count how many students attended the lab and how many assignments were submitted, etc. A “formal” lab assignment is the traditional lab assignment that students complete following the lab.
- Create a lab test to prevent students from copying without understanding the tasks at hand. Tell students that at appropriate intervals they will be tested on their *understanding* of the labs.

### An example:

McMaster's first-year Biology class 1A03 has developed the following grade breakdown in an attempt to reduce collaboration and to achieve teaching goals:

6 skills sets	3%
Pre-lab questions on Avenue to Learn	4%
3 informal lab reports (2% each)	6%
1 formal lab report	4%
Lab test	10%
<b>Total Lab Marks</b>	<b>27%</b>

*Different assignments are used for fall and winter classes to prevent the sharing of answers.*

*York University has an excellent website for faculty that provides information complementary to the above:*

<http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity/faculty/index.htm>