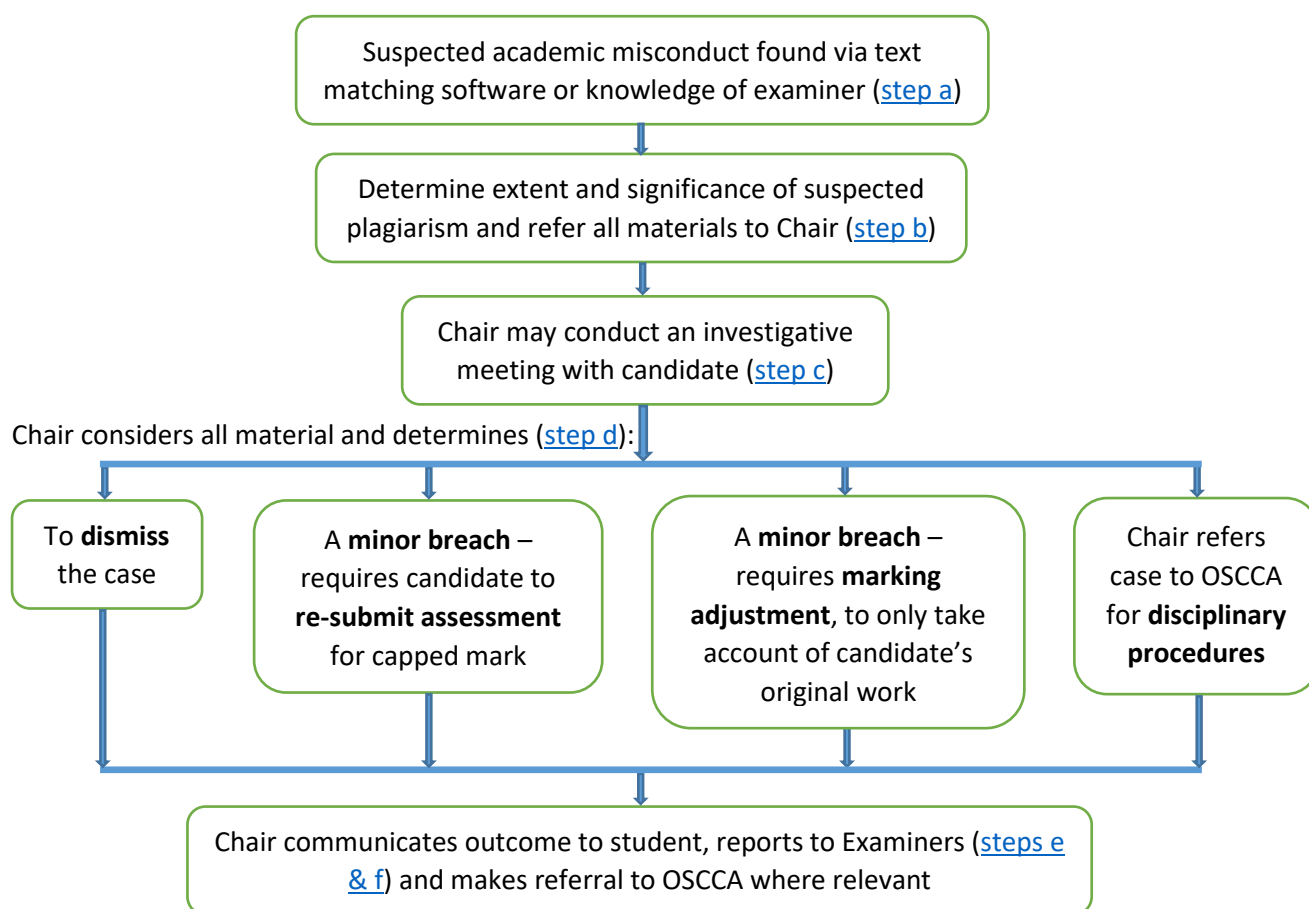


Staff guidance document – Suspected academic misconduct

This guidance outlines the process to be followed for suspected academic misconduct, for example plagiarism, in student’s work submitted for summative assessment. The same regulations and process apply to all students, whether primarily taught or research.

Guidance relating to formative assessment is available on the University’s [Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website](#)¹.

A flowchart of the action to be taken for suspected plagiarism



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¹ See the document “Plagiarism and good academic practice: notes for Supervisors, Directors of Studies and Tutors”

1. What is academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct includes any practice that may unfairly advantage a student's academic assessment. All types of academic misconduct can result in sanctions. The University outlines different types of academic misconduct in its Rules of Behaviour² within the Student Disciplinary Framework including (as a non-exhaustive list):

- **Plagiarism:** submitting as one's own work, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgment
- **Collusion:** Working with others and using the ideas or words of joint work without due acknowledgment, or collaborating with others when this is unauthorised
- **Contract cheating:** commissioning work from a third party (for instance; an essay mill) and submitting it as one's own
- **Self-plagiarism:** Using one's own words, ideas or data previously produced and submitted for formal assessment or publication, without due acknowledgment
- **Cheating:** Any attempt to obtain, or to give assistance in an examination or formal assessment, through the use of unauthorised materials or by not respecting specific exam regulations
- **Fabrication and falsification:** Presenting fictitious or manipulated data, evidence or results and knowingly making use of such material

Plagiarism forms a notably high portion of reported academic misconduct and can include:

- Direct plagiarism: copying and pasting words of others (research, online sources, lecture handouts or transcripts, etc.) without proper attribution
- Paraphrasing: rephrasing or rewriting others' ideas and points as if they were one's own
- Mosaic or patchwork plagiarism: copying material from several sources and re-arranging such material without due acknowledgment and in an attempt to pass off work as one's own

Plagiarism can occur in respect to all types of sources; text, illustrations, graphics, codes and materials downloaded from online sources, as well as unpublished/published material, including lecture handouts and other students' submitted works.

Using any form of 'Artificial Intelligence' within a summative assessment, unless explicitly permitted within the assessment brief, constitutes academic misconduct. A University statement on Artificial Intelligence and the University's approach for Easter Term 2023 is available at:

[AI bots academic integrity.pdf](#).

Academic misconduct & intent

Academic misconduct can occur without the deliberate intention to deceive. Such examples include:

- A student taking notes and copying sections from others' work into their notes without making it clear which parts are quotes, paraphrased or their own original ideas, and coming back to their notes at a later time, believing that ideas or phrases within are their own;
- A student forgetting to acknowledge others' work or running out of time to reference correctly
- A student claiming they misunderstood, or did not receive, the appropriate referencing skills or they were unaware that referencing was required;
- A student sharing their coursework with others prior to the submission deadline.

² <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/definition>

2. What action can a Department take?

While all academic misconduct is in breach of the Rules of Behaviour, it is accepted that there are occasions where a breach may be considered as 'minor'. Decisions about what constitutes a minor breach must be made on a case-by-case basis but a non-exhaustive list of examples could include:

- Scattered poor attempts at referencing throughout the assessment;
- Incorrect attempts to acknowledge sources;
- Apparent confusion or misunderstanding regarding the referencing requirements;
- Where the assessment has minimal significance on the academic award;
- Where it appears that the student has not been provided with sufficient opportunity to learn about academic integrity and referencing.

It is the Chair of Examiners' (or Degree Committee's) responsibility to determine whether a minor breach has taken place. This determination must take into account all relevant and surrounding circumstances, namely:

- the nature of the course;
- the relative importance of the concerned assessment within the course;
- the student's level of study, and previous scholarly experience;
- the extent and significance of the misconduct; and
- the student's personal circumstances and any mitigation they present and can evidence.

Where a **minor breach** is found, the Chair shall take one of these two courses of action:

1. Making an **academic mark adjustment** relating to the proportion of work that was affected by academic misconduct, so that the mark awarded reflects the extent and academic merit of the material believed to be the candidate's own work. The academic mark adjustment should not include any disciplinary penalty. The nature of such adjustment may vary by subject, level of study, and mode of assessment, but should always remain in proportion to the academic misconduct within the assessment.
2. Only where possible within the course of study, offering the candidate the **opportunity to resubmit the piece of work with a capped mark, for example, capped at the minimum pass mark**. This option is particularly relevant where the student would otherwise fail the assessment. For research students, this would be implemented in the option to revise and resubmit.

In addition, the Chair shall ensure that the candidate is provided with detailed feedback on the assessment(s), information on the importance of academic integrity and guidance or signposting on how to avoid academic misconduct in the future.

Where a Chair of Examiners is concerned that although the case is 'minor' the two options above do not seem appropriate, please do not hesitate to contact OSCCA for informal guidance.

3. Identifying suspected academic misconduct

The information below primarily relates to identifying plagiarism, a similar process can be conducted for other forms of academic misconduct including collusion and the use of AI and the procedure used is identical. In cases of uncertainty, please contact OSCCA for further informal guidance.

In relation to plagiarism, the University offers access to text-matching software, which can support Departments in identifying text copied from elsewhere. Individual Examiners or supervisors may also identify possible copied text or other forms of misconduct independently, as a result of their subject knowledge. In this way, suspicions of academic misconduct may be generated either directly by examination staff, or through routine evaluation of text-matching reports separate to the formal examination process. However it may be identified, the procedure to be followed is identical.

Examiners have a responsibility to ensure that marks are awarded for assessments with academic integrity. A process for assuring assessments are free from academic misconduct must be in place, although there is no requirement to utilise text-matching software. It may, however, assist in gathering evidence for investigative or disciplinary meetings.

All reports generated by a text-matching software require careful interpretation, preferably by a subject expert, who would be able to triage what the software has highlighted before taking any further action. A report is not to be seen as a measure or detection of academic misconduct; it simply highlights what may be unoriginal text, namely text which appears to match with other text already contained within its database. Therefore, it is the subsequent interpretation of a report which would assist in determining the accuracy, extent, significance and seriousness of the potential misconduct.

For example; a high percentage of text highlighted, providing it has been properly acknowledged, may be an assessment of low original contribution, but would not amount to misconduct. Additionally, it may be that the software highlights subject relevant phrases, random words or other common phrasings which in of themselves do not constitute misconduct.

Staff members can find out more about text-matching software on the University's [Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct website](#).

4. Procedure to be followed for suspected academic misconduct

Step	Action
a)	Determine the extent and significance of any suspected academic misconduct within the assessment. This exercise should be undertaken by an academic, (where relevant, an initial review of a text-matching report may be undertaken by an experienced administrator). Full records of the investigation must be kept and the investigation should not be discussed with other examiners.
b)	<p>Referral and evidence</p> <p>Where there is suspected academic misconduct, the Examiner or Administrator should refer the case, including all investigation materials, to the Chair of Examiners or Chair of Degree Committee. All candidates involved in the case should be referred.</p> <p>The evidence referred should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A copy of the candidate’s submitted assessment; • A copy of any text matching report; • A copy of any source material (where not included in a text matching report or where the source material is not accessible to OSCCA from the report); • The local guidance and information about academic misconduct provided to candidates (course handbook, exam guidance etc)– including any declaration that the candidate may have signed to confirm the work was their own; • A copy of the marking criteria for the assessment.
c)	The Chair will consider all of the information and may choose to hold an investigative meeting with the candidate. The purpose of an investigative meeting is to provide the candidate with an opportunity to respond and answer questions regarding the suspected academic misconduct, as well as provide any mitigation. The meeting does not have a punitive or disciplinary element, its purpose is to gather information.
c)1	<p>Timing</p> <p>The investigative meeting should not interfere with a candidate’s revision or examination performance; avoid organising a meeting just before an assessment deadline or examination. For example, not in an undergraduate student’s examination period or just before a PhD student’s viva.</p> <p>If the investigative meeting cannot take place before publication of the class list, then it may be necessary to suspend classing the candidate until after the investigation and any subsequent Discipline Committee.</p>

c)2	<p>Attendees at the investigation meeting</p> <p>The Chair of the Examiners/Degree Committee, or designated deputy will chair the investigative meeting, and will invite the following persons to attend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Examiner(s) responsible for marking the work; • the candidate (or all relevant candidates in the case of suspected collusion, though they will be invited into the meeting individually) and any representative the candidate may wish to attend; • the candidate’s Tutor, Director of Studies or other individual whom the student would like to be present as a supporter; • a note taker; • (optional) a member of OSCCA, to provide procedural advice only. <p>The group should include people of more than one gender. If necessary, an additional Tutor or member of the relevant Faculty should be invited.</p> <p>In cases of collusion, Tutors or representatives of all the candidates involved should be invited to the meeting one at a time but all candidates should be available for the duration of the meeting.</p>
c)3	<p>Informing the candidate of the meeting</p> <p>The Chair of Examiners should invite the candidate (or candidates, in the case of suspected collusion) to the meeting and copy in their Senior Tutor. The communication should include the following (a template is available from OSCCA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outline of the Procedure being followed by the Chair, which includes holding the meeting, the purpose of the meeting, who will be present and the potential outcomes, including disciplinary action; • A summary of the concern(s) identified by the Chair; • copies of the evidence outlined in step b; • Information about the candidate’s attendance and who can attend to support them; • The candidate may choose to be accompanied by a legal representative in addition to a supporter; however, because the meeting is not disciplinary in nature and the Chair cannot impose any disciplinary penalties (albeit that there may be a referral to the disciplinary procedure), legal representation for the student is not normally deemed necessary; • The opportunity for the candidate during the meeting to provide an oral account of what has happened and to provide written documentation if they wish. Any information that is provided by them, may be used to inform or support future disciplinary action; • A note taker will be present and the candidate will have an opportunity after the meeting to comment on the notes of the meeting.

c)4	<p>During the meeting</p> <p>A template of an investigative meeting is available from OSCCA.</p> <p>During the meeting, the Chair should ensure that the following takes place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone in attendance should introduce themselves; • The Chair should explain the purpose of the meeting; • The Chair should explain the possible outcomes of the meeting and explain that the investigative meeting itself is non-disciplinary in nature, but that any information provided during or as a result of the meeting may be used to inform or support future disciplinary action, including the formal record of the meeting; • The Chair should outline the allegation, including any additional further details of the suspected academic misconduct; • The Chair should provide an opportunity for the candidate to give an oral account of their behaviour and any reasons for the behaviour e.g. any mitigation; • The Chair should provide an opportunity for discussions or queries between the Examiners and Candidate; • At the end of the meeting, the Chair should explain the next steps (that the Candidate will receive a letter with the outcome of the investigation, and timing of such) and the candidate should be given a final opportunity to provide any further statement.
c)5	<p>Record of the meeting</p> <p>A detailed, formal record of the meeting should be taken, and attendees given 7 days to review and comment on the formal record. Any changes agreed by the Chair may be made to the formal record, otherwise comments will be appended to the formal record. This record will be required where a referral to OSCCA is made.</p>
d)	<p>Possible outcomes</p> <p>Following consideration of all of the evidence (including the investigation meeting, if one has taken place), the Chair will determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case is dismissed, with no action; • There is a minor breach of academic misconduct. The Chair should choose either to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make an academic mark adjustment, reflecting the candidate’s own work only; ○ Only where possible within the course of study, offer the opportunity to re-submit the assessment with a maximum achievable mark of a pass mark (see above ‘What action can a department take’); • The case should be referred to OSCCA for consideration under the disciplinary regulations.

e)	<p>Decision to the candidate</p> <p>Following the Chair’s determination and within 7 days of any investigative meeting taking place, the Chair should provide the following information (a letter template is available from OSCCA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm the circumstances that led to the investigation; • Outline the investigation that has taken place; • Attach a copy of any material that the candidate has not been provided with (this will not apply if there has been an investigative meeting as all material will have been shared with the student); • Confirm the Chair’s decision and the next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No action: the examination process will proceed as normal; ○ Minor breach: the action that will take place, as determined by the Chair and in line with ‘What action can a department take’ (see above); ○ Referral to OSCCA: that the candidate will be contacted by OSCCA within two weeks of all necessary information being sent to OSCCA by the Chair, to confirm the next steps of the disciplinary process.
f)	<p>Decision to OSCCA</p> <p>Where the decision is a referral to OSCCA, the following documentation must be sent to OSCCA within 7 days of the investigative meeting, at the same time the decision is communicated to the student (OSCCA cannot take any action until all relevant documentation has been received):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully completed and detailed Concern Form (completed by the decision-maker, for example the Chair of Examiners), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of any analysis undertaken; • A description of the case so far (how was it identified, what measures have been taken, what decisions were made); • The rationale for referral and views of the decision maker on the case, specifically confirming why this is a matter of academic misconduct as defined within the Rules of Behaviour and why a minor sanction is not appropriate; 2. A separate statement from an academic (either the Chair of Examiners, an Examiner, or other academic best placed to provide academic opinion). This statement must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the assessment and what was required of the candidate; • A description of the summative assessment for this academic course and the relevance of this assessment within the year or overall course; • A summary of the concern (plagiarism/self plagiarism/collusion etc.); • Analysis of any Turnitin report, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the accuracy of the similarity score and any further detail about the alleged sources, which you have checked; ○ any unavoidable matching text within the Turnitin report (e.g. common technical phrases or appropriately cited text); • Academic opinion on the extent and significance of any material you believe to be stemming from academic misconduct, including the importance of it in relation to the assessment; • Details of any marking conducted (was this completed before or after knowledge of suspected academic misconduct?); • Anything else which is relevant from an academic or Departmental perspective.

	<p>3. The material gathered during the course of the initial investigation by the Department/Faculty; namely copies of the original assessment (in addition to the Turnitin report), letters sent to the student, copies of sources identified (if plagiarism), record of meetings, relevant correspondence, any evidence presented by the candidate(s), course handbook etc.</p> <p>4. Copies of the material (or reference to webpages) all candidates on the course were given about good academic practice and academic misconduct, including details of any inputs, inductions and meetings (general and specifically with the candidate) throughout the academic year</p>
g)	<p>The Chair will communicate the outcome to the candidate, examiners and OSCCA within 7 days of the decision being made. Where a case is referred to OSCCA, all of the evidence (detailed above) should be provided to OSCCA in addition to a copy of the student's examination results and classing criteria within the 7 day period.</p>

5. What should be reported to the final Examiners' Meeting?

The outcome of any actions taken with regard to minor breaches, including a summary of any investigative meetings, should be reported back to the final Examiners' Meeting, or the Degree Committee, as appropriate, before classing or determination of award takes place.

The candidate's marks should be reported in the usual way, alongside the Chair's decision letter if a minor breach has been determined by the Chair. Where classing or award is managed blind, this may require redacting identifying information from the minutes so as to refer to the candidate via blind grade number. The candidate must be classed on the basis of the classification scheme, and marks awarded subject to any action agreed by the Chair and Examiners. Further marks should not be deducted.

Where a case is referred to OSCCA for consideration under the disciplinary regulations, classing should normally be suspended. Advice should be taken regarding whether the student can progress with the course while awaiting the outcome of any disciplinary referral.

6. Annual reporting on suspected cases of academic misconduct

As above, while minor breaches of academic misconduct may be managed by the Department directly, it is in the University's interests to maintain a central record of the number and types of suspected academic misconduct cases, and actions taken in response. This will enable us to carry out vital quality monitoring of our processes and student support.

To this end, Departments will be asked in each year to provide information about:

- The number of suspected cases of academic misconduct that were investigated during the year, confirming whether these were found as part of a routine text-matching check, or by assessors/examiners during the marking process;
- The outcome of the investigation, e.g., case dismissed, a minor breach (and if so, what action was taken), or referral to OSCCA;
- Comments or feedback in relation to departmental practice, additional training or student support, or the investigative process.

This information will be compiled by OSCCA and form part of its annual report to the General Board's Education Committee.

7. Contact OSCCA for further support

The Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) provides procedural advice to all students involved in this process. An investigation does not require the involvement of OSCCA unless it is being referred to OSCCA. However, OSCCA can provide the following support to staff:

- Initial action to take following suspected academic misconduct, including templates;
- The investigation meeting and relevant templates;
- To attend any investigative meetings to provide procedural advice;
- To provide informal advice on the potential outcomes of an investigation;
- To receive any referrals to the Student Discipline Procedure where, following investigation by the Chair of Examiners/Degree Committee, academic misconduct is still suspected and has not been determined as 'minor'.

To receive any support or advice, contact OSCCA at OSCCA@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Document control box

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