



LONDON SOUTH BANK STUDENTS' UNION

ADVICE SERVICE

GUIDE TO ACADEMIC
MISCONDUCT

Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to submit their own work and give credit to other people's ideas where appropriate. This is academic integrity.

Academic Misconduct is, in very simple terms, breaking the University's academic regulations in order to gain additional marks. This can be done in a number of ways – taking notes into an exam, copying other people's work in an assignment or even working with a friend when you should have completed the work alone.

If you have received a letter about an allegation of Academic Misconduct, please seek advice as early as possible. The Students' Union Advice Service is here to help!

How can a Student breach Academic Integrity?

The University strives to maintain academic integrity by making sure that all marks awarded are deserved. Broadly speaking, the University considers that students can obtain undeserved marks in two ways:

Poor academic practice – where a student didn't intend to deceive the University, but they could nonetheless have gained an unfair advantage when they completed their work.

Academic misconduct – where a student has attempted to cheat in an assessment, which has given them an improper advantage over other students. Most commonly this takes the form of plagiarism or breaking exam rules, but it can also include helping another student to gain an advantage or employing someone to complete your work on your behalf (known as contract cheating).

What happens if the University suspect you have breached Academic Integrity?

An Academic Integrity Coordinator (AIC) is present in each academic division/department. They are responsible for all investigations into academic misconduct. It is the AIC and not the tutor or module leader that will deal with any allegations made. If they are involved in delivering the module concerned, the matter will be passed to an AIC from a different area (although preferably still within the same School).

If a breach is suspected, this must be reported to the AIC in writing and with evidence within 5 working days of the issue being detected. This does not mean 5 days from the date you submitted your essay or sat your exam, but 5 days from when the University notices that there may be an issue with your assessment. The AIC will then write to you (usually within 10 working days) to tell you about the allegation and summarise the evidence that has been submitted. You are given the choice of either providing a written response to the allegation within 10 working days of the date of the AIC's letter or requesting a formal Academic Misconduct hearing.

Within 20 working days of the date of the letter, the AIC will prepare a report on the incident taking into account the evidence and your response (if you submitted one). The AIC will discuss this with the Head of Division/Department before reaching one of the following conclusions:

- **No case to answer** – no breach has been found and you have been cleared. Only an anonymous record is kept for the University's statistics, but nothing remains on your file.
- **Poor academic practice** – a suitable reduction of the mark awarded is agreed and you are notified to avoid such an incident reoccurring. They may also suggest some additional study skills support that you may wish to attend.
- **Minor academic misconduct** – a suitable penalty from (i), (ii) or (iii) will be identified and your Course Director/module team will be notified so they can go over suitable academic practice with you for the future. If there is evidence of cheating in an exam, the AIC may impose penalty (i)-(iv).
- **Possible major academic misconduct** – the matter will be referred to the Academic Misconduct Panel, which you will be invited to attend.

The penalty for second or subsequent incidents will normally be more severe than for a first offence.

When Contract Cheating is Suspected

If you submit work that the marker believes is not your original work, but where there is no similarity found to original sources through Turnitin (or similar software), the AIC will conduct an investigation. If they consider there to be a case to answer, they will discuss this with an AIC from another School. If both AIC's agree there is an issue with your work, they will pass all paperwork to the Academic Misconduct team and you will be invited to a Viva Voce Panel. You will receive a letter explaining the cause for concern in your work, and you will be invited to respond within 10 working days.

After this, the Viva Voce Panel meeting will be scheduled. This is an opportunity for you to present evidence in person to establish the authenticity and originality of the work being investigated by explaining how you produced it. You can take a friend or advisor from the Students' Union to support you, although you must speak for yourself.

The Viva Voce Panel will be made up of a Chair, the investigating AIC, a second AIC and a member of academic staff with relevant subject knowledge. A member of the Academic Misconduct team also attends the meeting to keep a record of what happens and advise the Panel if necessary.

The Panel will decide one of the following outcomes:

No case to answer – as above.

Poor academic practice – as above.

Academic misconduct – whether a minor or major incident, the Panel will decide a penalty to impose.

You will be informed of the decision in writing within 10 working days of the Panel meeting.

Academic Misconduct Panel

If as a result of the initial investigation the AIC and Head of Department conclude the incident cannot be regarded as minor or if your request for the matter to be considered by a Panel, they will send all documents to the Academic Misconduct team. After receiving the documents, the University will write to you within 10 working days and will provide a summary of the evidence, the initial report and all relevant correspondence. You will then have the opportunity to add to any statements you have previously made (within 10 working days) and will be invited to attend a meeting of the Academic Misconduct Panel. You can also take a friend or advisor from the Students' Union to support you, although you must speak for yourself.

The Panel is made up of senior academic staff and will consist of a Chair and 2 AIC's from other departments. A member of the Academic Misconduct team also attends the meeting to keep a record of what happens and advise the Panel if necessary. Copies of all documents to be considered will be provided to you at least 5 working days before the Panel meeting.

Once the Panel has discussed the incident, they will decide whether it considers there is:

No case to answer – as above.

Poor academic practice – as above.

Academic misconduct – whether a minor or major incident, the Panel will decide a penalty to impose.

You will be informed of the decision in writing within 10 working days of the Panel meeting.

What are the penalties?

Minor Academic Misconduct	Cheating in an Examination	(i)	A formal written warning kept on your academic record	At the discretion of the Award & Progression Board
		(ii)	Reducing the mark awarded for that assignment or exam (but not lower than the pass mark)	
		(iii)	Failure in that assignment or exam with an opportunity for referral or reassessment through an oral viva	
		(iv)	Failure in the module involved with the possibility of repeating the module for a capped mark	
		(v)	Failure in the module involved with the possibility of repeating the module for a capped mark in the next academic year	
		(vi)	Failure in all modules in the current semester or year, with the possibility of repeating the modules for a capped mark	
		(vii)	Failure in all modules in the current semester or year, and forwarding the case to the Dean of your School for consideration of withdrawal of studies	

Students who have already received penalties (iii) to (vii) for academic misconduct will not have the automatic right to a referral in the same academic year or the opportunity to repeat assessments uncapped in subsequent academic years.

Request for Review

If you are unhappy with the decision of the AIC, the Viva Voce Panel or the Academic Misconduct Panel, you have 10 working days from the date of the decision to request a review. This request should be submitted to academicintegrityreview@lsbu.ac.uk under the heading 'Academic Misconduct Review Request' and you should include your full name and student number in the subject line of the email. This request will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

The grounds to request a formal review are:

- There was a **procedural irregularity** at the formal stage (for example, the University failed to follow the procedure, clear reasons were not provided for the decision or there is evidence of bias);
- The outcome was **not reasonable** in all circumstances;
- There is **new material evidence** that you were unable, for good reasons, to provide earlier in the process.

These are quite restricted grounds, which means you have to be very clear and provide evidence to show how your request falls within one or more of these grounds. The University consider a decision to be reasonable if all factors have been considered in a balanced way. You cannot simply say you disagree with it, you must explain why it is unreasonable.

A nominated reviewer (who has had no previous involvement with your case) will write to you within 5 working days to tell you if your request for review is eligible to be considered. If it is not, you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter. If it is, it will be referred to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience. They will review all information collated for the original decision along with any new evidence presented, after which they will take one of the following decisions:

- Reject the review and uphold the outcome from the formal stage;
- Uphold the review and overturn the previous decision.

The decision made at review stage is final. You should receive the decision in writing and with reasons, usually within 28 days of your request for review being accepted. If the decision is in your favour, the University will not send you any further communication unless you specifically request a Completion of Procedures letter. If the decision is not favourable to you, you will receive a Completion of Procedures letter automatically within 28 days of the decision letter being issued.

If you remain unhappy with the outcome, you are entitled to take your matter to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for their consideration. You must do this within 12 months of the date of your Completion of Procedures letter.

FAQs

I've received an email about academic misconduct, what happens if I don't respond to it?

If you don't either provide your explanation or request to take the matter to a Panel, the AIC will complete their investigation without your input. This means they will base their decision on the evidence that they have received and will not be able to take your perspective into account. The more you work with the AIC and participate in the process, the more you can potentially influence the outcome.

I've submitted my work and scored less than 25% similarity on Turnitin, is this low enough not to trigger an academic misconduct investigation?

Unfortunately there is no rule about what is an acceptable similarity percentage. What is acceptable can depend on a number of factors, including what course you are studying and what type of assignment it is. In some cases 10% similarity would trigger an investigation; in others 40% would be fine. It also depends on how many sources have been identified – if you have 20% similarity to one source this would be viewed differently to 1% similarity to 20 sources. If you have any concerns, the best people to discuss this with are your module leaders and tutors for guidance specific to your course and assignments.

I'm in the process of submitting an extenuating circumstances claim but I won't know if it's been supported by my deadline, should I hand in my unfinished assignment?

When you submit work to the University, you have to confirm that the work is entirely your own. If you submit an unfinished piece of work, you may not have fully referenced your sources or put everything into your own words. In this case, you may risk an academic misconduct investigation if the University have reason to think the work is not your own. Unfortunately, even if your extenuating circumstances are supported, this will not prevent an academic misconduct investigation taking place and it does not override any penalty imposed (although it should be taken into account during the investigation itself).

I know someone on my course in the year above me. I've asked for their help because I'm confused about an assignment, this is allowed isn't it?

Strictly speaking, no. It is a breach of academic integrity to share your work with another student or to have access to another student's work if it is an individual assignment (group project work is viewed differently). This is seen as trying to gain an improper advantage over others, and so is a form of academic misconduct. Both you and the student in the year above you could face an investigation if any similarities between your works is identified. If you are confused about an assignment, the best person to speak to is your tutor or module leader for clarity and feedback.

Where can I go for help and support to improve my assignment writing skills?

The University Skills for Learning team offer a variety of workshops, drop-ins and 1-2-1 sessions and assignment surgeries designed for all levels of study. The sessions are intended to help you develop your academic writing and encourage you to think critically.

They are also useful if you want to work on your grammar, referencing or presentation skills. Support is available to all enrolled students at both the Southwark and Havering campuses, and can be particularly useful to students where English is not their first language. You can contact the Skills for Learning team by calling 020 7815 6454, by email to s4l@lsbu.ac.uk or by visiting the Student Life Centre.