Cheating and plagiarism

Fortunately, Åbo Akademi University has, for a long time, had few detected cases of plagiarism in written works. However, as the availability of electronic material has increased, the number of plagiarism cases has also grown within the academic world.

Different manifestations of fraud

The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics is an expert body nominated by the Ministry of Education. The Board was founded in 1991 to address ethical questions relating to scientific research and to advance research ethics.

The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics has defined and categorised different types of misconduct and fraud in science. Åbo Akademi University complies with the guidelines of the delegation, also for undergraduate studies at the university.

According to the board there are four categories of different manifestations of fraud:
- Fabrication is to present fabricated data to the research community. Fabricated data have not been obtained in the manner or by the methods described in the report. Presenting fabricated results in a research report is also fabrication.
- Misrepresentation (falsification) means intentionally altering or presenting original findings in a way which distorts the result. Misrepresentation means scientifically unjustified alteration or selection of results. It is also misrepresentation to omit results or data pertinent to conclusions.
- Plagiarism is to present someone else’s research plan, manuscript, article or text, or parts thereof, as one’s own.
- Misappropriation means that a researcher illicitly presents or uses in his/her own name an original research idea, plan or finding disclosed to him/her in confidence.


Defining Plagiarism

Cheating is an offence against scientific integrity. At the same time, plagiarism threatens the quality of teaching and research. A detected case of plagiarism not only harms the reputation of the author but also that of the university. Plagiarism as a form of cheating is an activity which unfairly compromises relationships between the students.

Plagiarism is not necessarily the result of cheating, however; it can also be the consequence of, for example, ignorance of the correct use of sources in an assignment – in that case it is not referred to as plagiarism but as incautious use.

In the Procedures for Handling Cases of Plagiarism at Åbo Akademi University a distinction is made between the incautious use of material and actual plagiarism. Depending on the category the case belongs to, the action taken varies.

Incautious use of material:
Incautious use of material refers to a situation where a student unintentionally presents material produced by another person as his/her own work. The criteria for incautious use of material is met in cases of misunderstanding the nature of the work task, negligence or
perceptible inexperience in the correct use of quotations and/or other referencing techniques by the student.

**Plagiarism:**
Plagiarism refers to a situation where a student intentionally presents material produced by another person as his/her own work. The criteria for plagiarism is met in cases where a student knows or should know that the reproduced material has been created by another person, or where the student has neglected to follow the teacher’s instructions for avoiding incautious use of material.

*In other words, an act of plagiarism refers to a case where you copy the works or texts of others from books, articles, the internet or other sources with the intention of presenting them as your own* – this is cheating and can result in failing the course (and even in being dismissed from Åbo Akademi).

In essays and written assignments, sources are often used as a basis for creating new knowledge. When referring to or quoting a source, this must be appropriately marked, that is, a reference should be given according to the recommendations of the subject in question.

**In order to avoid careless use, you should:**

- Always give the source, regardless of whether you refer to somebody else’s text, that is, summarize in your own words what somebody else has written, or whether you quote the text directly.

- When quoting somebody, remember to write this as a direct quote; that is, apart from giving the reference, you must place the quote within citation marks or mark the quote in some other way. It is also considered plagiarism if you only give the source, but do not mark the text as a direct quote. You also have to quote your source correctly, that is, word by word – if you leave out or add words you must mark this with square brackets.

- Do not keep your source text open in front of you when you rewrite the text; it will make it easier for you to actually use your own words (That is, it is important that you **rewrite to a sufficient extent** in order for the text not be considered as somebody else’s).

- If you make a **direct translation** of somebody else’s text, you must give the source and also note that you have made a direct translation. (A direct translation remains the intellectual property of the original author.)

- If you **create links** to the material of others on the web, you must say where the link leads to.

- When reading material for an essay or for a thesis, remember to constantly write notes as to where you take the information from that you might be going to use in your essay or thesis.

The following link will take you to a site where you can find concrete examples of different forms of plagiarism (Dr C. Barnbaum, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Valdosta State University): [www.valdosta.edu/~Ecbarbau/personal/teaching_MISC/plagiarism.htm](http://www.valdosta.edu/~Ecbarbau/personal/teaching_MISC/plagiarism.htm).
Making references

In avoiding plagiarism or careless use, the most important thing is to know how to mark quotes and make references. There are many different systems for quoting and making references – follow the instructions given by your own subject! The thing that all subjects emphasize is consistency in the way in which you make your references and bibliography; that is, use the same system throughout your work.

Consequences of cheating – Åbo Akademi’s instructions for handling cheating and plagiarism

Cheating has serious consequences. The Åbo Akademi University Examination and Assessment Instructions provides the framework for handling cases of detected cheating and plagiarism at Åbo Akademi (www.abo.fi/student/en/reglerguider)

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Cheating refers to the use by students of prohibited methods or aids in order to complete examinations or other written assignments. Such behaviour or other courses of events in the examination room which lead to the examinees not being able to complete their assignments in a sufficiently calm atmosphere constitute disturbance of an examination.

If an examinee during an examination is found guilty of obvious cheating, the invigilator should ask the examinee to discontinue the examination and leave the room immediately. If cheating is detected during or after the examination, or in a submitted written assignment, the examiner should discontinue assessing the work. The examinee is reported for investigation by the department. […]

A student who is guilty of an offence which violates the rules of the University is subject to a disciplinary punishment, which, depending on the gravity of the offence, takes the form of a reprimand or exclusion from the University for a certain period of time, at most one year. Decisions on disciplinary action are taken by the Rector of the University in the case of a reprimand, while decisions on exclusion for a certain period of time are taken by the University Board. Before a decision is taken in a disciplinary matter, the student concerned should be demonstrably informed of the offence he or she is charged with, and also given an opportunity to be heard concerning the matter.

In June 2008, the Åbo Akademi Senate approved of Procedures for handling cases of plagiarism in undergraduate studies (www.abo.fi/student/en/reglerguider)

Software for plagiarism detection

On 17.9.2009 the AA Senate decided that all theses should be checked for plagiarism with the help of a software for detecting plagiarism. Åbo Akademi acquired the software Urkund for detecting plagiarism.

The software Urkund can be used for all types of teaching at Åbo Akademi and it is available on the web. It is used according to a simple principle. Students submit their written work to the system by e-mail. The essay is analysed and various algorithms are used to compare it with other documents from three different sources:

- Electronic literature (Urkund can access electronic publishers, e-books and e-journals)
- Websites (Urkund checks so-called paper mills, that is, websites where essays can be bought)
- The Urkund document database (all submitted and analysed essays are saved in the database).
Each word and sentence in an essay is not analysed; only strings of 5–10 words are subjected to comparison. The analysis is published on a website that the teacher can access. If copies of pieces of text have been detected, the teacher will make a more detailed comparison of the submitted text and the match found by the system. All copies reported need not be plagiarism, but may be part of a correctly made quotation. In other words, the software never makes a decision as to whether a student is accused of plagiarism, as a teacher will always go through the analysis which has been generated by the software.

The Urkund website provides more information on how the software works: www.urkund.com.

Links:

