**Plagiarism and Other Assessment Offences**

QMUL defines plagiarism as “presenting someone else’s work as one’s own *irrespective of intention*. Close paraphrasing; copying from the work of another person, including another student; using the ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement; and repeating work that you have previously submitted – at QMUL or at another institution - without properly referencing yourself (known as ‘self plagiarism’) shall also constitute plagiarism”. Note that you can therefore be guilty of plagiarism even if you do these things by mistake. The purchasing of essays is also a closely related assessment offence.

All coursework is submitted electronically and automatically screened through anti-plagiarism software, Turnitin. Academic staff also have a variety of other means to detect cheating.

Queen Mary takes all assessment offences extremely seriously, with penalties including the award of zero marks for entire modules or entire years of study, suspension or permanent expulsion from the University, and the revocation of your degree if it has already been awarded. Offences will also be recorded in references written for your employers and future places of study. It is therefore crucial that you understand plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Essentially, all the words in your essays must either be:

* Your own;
* A direct quotation from another source, identified using quotation marks (“like this”), followed by a reference identifying the source of the quotation, whether in-text or in a footnote, including page numbers; or
* A paraphrase of a published source, which does not require quotation marks, but must still be referenced. Take care when paraphrasing: chopping and changing a few words and not including a citation is still plagiarism.

Commonly held views that are generally accepted do not always require acknowledgment to particular sources. Particular ideas, arguments or data derived from published sources *do* require citations. In general, it is best to be safe to avoid plagiarism.

Good practices for avoiding plagiarism include:

* Careful note-taking while researching essays. Record your sources when taking notes, so you can accurately cite them if you use their ideas or quote from them.
* Being particularly careful if you are cutting and pasting information between documents, ensuring that references are not lost in the process.
* Ensuring that all works used are referenced appropriately in the text of your work and fully credited in your bibliography. Carefully follow the guidelines on referencing in detailed in this handbook. For more on how to avoid plagiarism, see <http://www.citethemrightonline.com/>.

You should also note that Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) are rarely considered to be a mitigating factor for assessment offences. Students with genuine ECs should always follow the procedure outlined in this handbook; if ECs are recognised, a revised coursework deadline will be agreed with the module convenor. However, whenever coursework is submitted, students are generally assumed to be ‘fit to sit’ their assessment, i.e. their work is assessed as standard against marking criteria and QMUL’s Academic Regulations, including the rules on assessment offences. Overturning this assumption requires extremely compelling evidence to the contrary. In short, the recognition of ECs does not in any way sanction cheating on assessments. Do not consider cheating, no matter how desperate you may feel; the penalties will often be far worse than simply doing your best.

**Assessment Offences Procedures**

Allegations of plagiarism and other assessment offences are dealt with under Queen Mary’s [Academic Regulations](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/student-appeals/assessment-offences/index.html).

In the first instance, allegations are investigated by the module convenor where the alleged offence occurred. You are required to cooperate with this investigation by responding to emails and attending an interview within 5 days.

The next step depends on how much the element of assessment in question contributes to the overall module mark.

Where the assessment contributes ≤30%, it is dealt with by the School’s Assessment Offences Officer (currently Dr Jeffery R. Webber), who reviews the module convenor’s report and makes a decision on the appropriate penalty. Penalties may include:

* For minor, ‘technical’ offences:
  + Reductions in assessment mark in line with the marking criteria for ‘representation of sources’;
  + A requirement to resubmit a corrected version of the assessment, to be remarked.
* For formal assessment offences:
  + Formal reprimand with penalties as for technical offences;
  + A requirement to resubmit a corrected version of the assessment, with the maximum mark capped at the minimum pass mark (40);
  + A mark of zero for the assessment, with no right to resubmit.

Where the assessment contributes ≥31% of the total module mark, *or* where a second/ repeat assessment offence is suspected, the case is passed immediately to the Academic Registrar to be investigated by QMUL’s Assessment Offences Panel. Possible penalties include all those listed above, plus:

* The student receives zero marks for the entire module.
* The student receives zero marks for all the modules on which they are enrolled, with any re-sits capped either at the level previously obtained, or the minimum pass mark (40).
* The student is suspended for an academic year, with 0 marks awarded for all modules taken in the current academic year.
* The student is expelled permanently from QMUL.
* Assessment offences discovered after a degree is awarded may also lead to the revocation of that degree.

In all cases:

* Provisional marks of assessments under investigation will not be released until the process is concluded.
* The Assessment Offences Officer will communicate the outcome of the process to you, via the Undergraduate Administrator. If you do not understand or disagree with the outcome, you should request to meet the Assessment Offences Officer to have it explained to you, though the decision will not be changed. You will also have 14 days to lodge a formal appeal against the decision to the Academic Registrar. The only legitimate grounds for appeal are the misapplication of procedures and any external circumstances relevant to the decision not known at the time for good reason (see ‘Appeal Regulations’ in Section 2 of QMUL’s Academic Regulations). Appeals will be heard by QMUL’s Appeals Panel, whose decisions are final and can only be appealed to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).
* When the process is concluded, the result is communicated to your module convenor to apply the penalty. It is also communicated to the convenors of all your other modules, who will closely scrutinise work you have submitted there for possible plagiarism.
* All assessment offences are recorded in a database to which academic staff will refer when writing references for employment and/or admission to postgraduate programmes of study.

## Assessment Offences: Plagiarism and Other Offences

**1. Plagiarism**

* 1. **What is Plagiarism?**

QMUL defines plagiarism as “presenting someone else’s work as one’s own *irrespective of intention*. Close paraphrasing; copying from the work of another person, including another student; using the ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement; and repeating work that you have previously submitted – at QMUL or at another institution - without properly referencing yourself (known as ‘self plagiarism’) shall also constitute plagiarism” ([Academic Regulations](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/student-appeals/assessment-offences/index.html) §2.105, emphasis added).

Plagiarism could therefore include (but is not limited to) any of the following:

* Accidentally neglecting to include a reference when you have used the ideas or information of another person.
* Forgetting that you have copied and pasted, or paraphrased, a segment of text written by another person into your work, and including it without attribution.
* Deliberately lifting ideas, quotations or data from texts written by others and passing them off as your own work, e.g. by rearranging or changing some words.
* Copying text from work you have already submitted for assessment, without citing the original text.

**1.2 Examples of Plagiarism**

Some concrete examples can help you understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. Consider the following passage from E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 228:

In effect, the world situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s, when the international system and its component units entered another period of lengthy political and economic crisis.

Compare the following hypothetical extracts from student essays:

(a) In effect, the world situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s, when the international system and its component units entered another period of lengthy political and economic crisis.

(b) International relations became reasonably calm soon after 1945 and stayed like that until the 1970s when world politics again entered another period of prolonged political and economic crisis.

(c) In effect, the world situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s, when the international system and its component units entered another period of lengthy political and economic crisis (Hobsbawm, 1994: 228).

*All three examples*, despite their differences, *are instances of plagiarism*. Example (a) directly lifts the text but does not acknowledge its source. Example (b) lifts the idea, tinkers with the text, but again fails to acknowledge its source. In example (c), although the student has *tried* to acknowledge their source, they have failed to identify the text as a direct quotation using quotation marks (“like this”). They have therefore still committed a technical offence.

Now consider these examples:

(d) During the post-war years world politics was essentially quite stable before entering a period of crisis in the 1970s (Hobsbawm, 1994: 228).

(e) In *The* *Age of Extremes*, Hobsbawm (1994: 228) argues that “[i]n effect, the world situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s, when the international system and its component units entered another period of lengthy political and economic crisis.”

(f) There is much debate about the character of world politics after the war and, in particular, the degree to which it was dominated by prolonged periods of crisis. In spite of the conflicts associated with decolonisation, relations between the superpowers were arguably quite stable.

None of these examples are instances of plagiarism. Why? Example (d) sees a significant rewording of the original text, yet rightly includes the required reference to Hobsbawm as the source of the idea. Example (e) uses the original text, but rightly identifies it as a quotation, attributing the source. Example (f) is a statement, entirely in the student’s own words, that might be influenced by Hobsbawm, but also many other authors making similar arguments. It does not require a direct citation, but we might expect the author to elaborate this argument, which might in time require Hobsbawm to be cited.

**1.3 How to Avoid Plagiarism**

Most cases of plagiarism are accidental, due to poor scholarly practices – though, as noted in 1.1, intention is irrelevant and an offence can still be committed unintentionally. Therefore, the best approach is a preventive one, with good note-taking eliminating a lot of accidental plagiarism.

When Note-Taking

When taking notes during your research for assessments, rather than copying and pasting chunks of text, reflect on what you read, write summaries of arguments in your own words, and your thoughts on their merits. This takes longer, but you will have engaged with texts more deeply (enabling you to write more intelligently), and avoided the risk of unattributed pasting of text. Only copy whole chunks of text if you think a direct quotation will be particularly useful or powerful in your essay.

Whether you are writing down your own thoughts, or paraphrasing (using your own words) or quoting directly, always ensure that these different sources are clearly identified, with the sources and page numbers where appropriate. You should aim to produce notes which, if you returned to them many weeks later when your mind has moved onto other things, would still clearly tell you which words/ideas are yours; which are someone else’s; which words are paraphrases and which are quotations; and where each set of ideas/ words came from.   
  
For example, you could open your notes with the full citation of the work you are reading, using the style guide for your assessment . When summarising the author’s ideas, you could write in standard text, closing each section with page numbers in brackets. When quoting, you could ensure you use quotation marks, and/or use a different colour, followed by the page number. And if you want to comment on an argument with your own thoughts, you could put these in square brackets, and/or in a different colour.  
  
When Essay-Writing

Plan your argument beforehand, and construct your essay from that plan. Try to avoid simply cutting and pasting parts of your notes – and even more so, from cutting and pasting from original sources. This approach risks making your essay a very choppy series of unrelated chunks of information, rather than a sustained argument based on your own response to the question. If your essay merely mirrors the structure of a source – whether academic books, lecture notes, or your own notes or previous work – this is extremely unlikely to be the more effective way of responding to an essay question. Consequently, you will likely get a poor mark. Moreover, this approach heightens the risk of accidentally pasting someone else’s ideas or words and failing to cite them properly, resulting in plagiarism.

Ensure that, whenever you rely on the ideas, information or words from an original source, you cite this source. Refer to the style guide (referencing section) of this handbook and carefully follow the style guide there. Providing references is essential to avoid plagiarism. It is not a sign of intellectual weakness: it shows you have read and understood the relevant academic literature, and used a range of sources to support your own argument. This is a crucial element of the criteria against which your work is assessed.

Ensure that your bibliography also contains all of the sources cited in the essay. The bibliography should also contain those sources that you have read in preparing the coursework even if you have not cited them in your text. Again, consult the style guide for guidance on the correct formatting of a bibliography and follow it carefully.

If you want to cite a source that you have not personally read, but which is cited in a source that you have read, you must make this clear by citing the source you have read, rather than the source you have not.

For example, the following quotation from p.104 of K.N. Waltz’s book, *Theory of International Politics*, is found on p.76 of Jackson and Sørensen’s textbook, *Introduction to International Relations*: ‘with only two great powers, both can be expected to act to maintain the system.’ Since you have not read Waltz’s book, it would be fraudulent to reference it as if you had. You should therefore quote it as a citation in the textbook, as follows:

(Waltz, 1979: 204, quoted in Jackson and Sørensen, 2013: 76).

For more advice on proper referencing and the avoidance of plagiarism, see <http://www.citethemrightonline.com/>. You can also visit <https://www.umuc.edu/writingcenter/plagiarism/index.cfm>. Students unfamiliar with academic essay writing may wish to enroll on the module [“Structuring Arguments and Avoiding Plagiarism”](http://language-centre.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/insessional-english-programme), with the Language Centre. Students found guilty of an assessment offence should definitely enrol to avoid a repeat offence, with the more serious penalties involved.

1. **Other Assessment Offences**

Plagiarism is not the only assessment offence, merely the most common one. Others include:

1. Offences in an invigilated examination;
2. Fraudulent reporting of source material;
3. Fraudulent reporting of experimental results, research or other investigative work;
4. Collusion in the preparation or production of submitted work;
5. Use or attempted use of ghost-writing services (‘essay mills’);
6. Submission of work, or sections of work, for assessment in more than one module or assignment;
7. Impersonation of other student to sit an assessment, or the commissioning of an impersonator ([Academic Regulations](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/student-appeals/assessment-offences/index.html), §2.104).

The offences most applicable to undergraduate students are as follows. All of them are subject to the same process and serious penalties identified above, i.e. up to and including the failure of entire modules, whole years of study, and suspension or expulsion from QMUL.

**2.1 Offences in an Invigilated Examination**

This includes access to exam papers before the exam; forging exam timetables; removing exam materials from the hall; disturbing exams; failing to cooperate with invigilators; possessing unauthorised materials, whether in hard copy (including writing on your body) or via electronic devices, telephones, third parties, etc; communicating with other candidates; attempting to copy from others.

**2.2 Collusion in the Preparation or Production of Submitted Work**

Where assessments require you to work in groups, e.g. for a group presentation or written assignment, this cooperation is obviously legitimate. In all other cases, it is not. Students are allowed and encouraged to discuss their ideas with each other. But they must prepare their own coursework in isolation. Planning essays together, or copying essays from previous students, for example, are prohibited. Allowing another student access to your work to facilitate their cheating is also an assessment offence.

**2.3 Use or Attempted Use of Ghost-Writing Services**

Although very few QMUL students ever resort to them, an increasing number of websites now offer essays for sale, even offering to write essays to your specifications. They often issue disclaimers that their essays are meant as study aids, not for cheating. But students who either crib from purchased essays or submit them as their own work are nonetheless committing a serious assessment offence. It is far easier for academics to detect than students imagine, and the offence is so clearly deliberate and egregious that the harshest penalties are typically applied. A final-year student who used a ghost writer in 2014/15 was expelled from QMUL and failed her entire degree. Never even consider doing this, no matter how desperate you may be!