Plagiarism in Assessments

Guidance for Teachers/Assessors

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Plagiarism in Assessments | *Guidance for Teachers/Assessors*

1 This guidance note is written for the staff of assessment centres who have responsibility for supervising and/or marking candidates' non-examination assessments or portfolio work. Further guidance regarding malpractice and how it is treated by Awarding Bodies can be found on the JCQ website (**www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice**). Information specifically regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools can be found in the JCQ *AI Use in Assessments – Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications* guidance (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/artificial-intelligence/**).

2 Plagiarism calls into question the integrity of examinations and assessments, especially those assessment components such as non-examination assessments where plagiarism can occur most easily. If non-examination assessments are to remain as a viable assessment method, it is the duty of all who are preparing and assessing candidates for assessments as well as those who have an interest in the setting, marking and administration of assessments, to do whatever they can to address plagiarism.

Defining plagiarism

3 Before considering what steps can be taken to counter this practice, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what plagiarism is.

4 There are several definitions of plagiarism, but they all have in common the idea of taking someone else's intellectual effort and presenting it as one's own. The JCQ *Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures* and Procedures define plagiarism as: "*unacknowledged copying from, or reproduction of, third party sources or incomplete referencing (including the internet and AI tools);*"

> "*unacknowledged copying from or reproduction of published sources or incomplete referencing;*"

5 Plagiarism refers to a student copying work and submitting it as their own. This can involve published resources (whether in print or on the internet), AI-generated content, essays, or pieces of work previously submitted for assessments by others or manufactured artefacts. Copying can involve memorisation and reproduction of text.
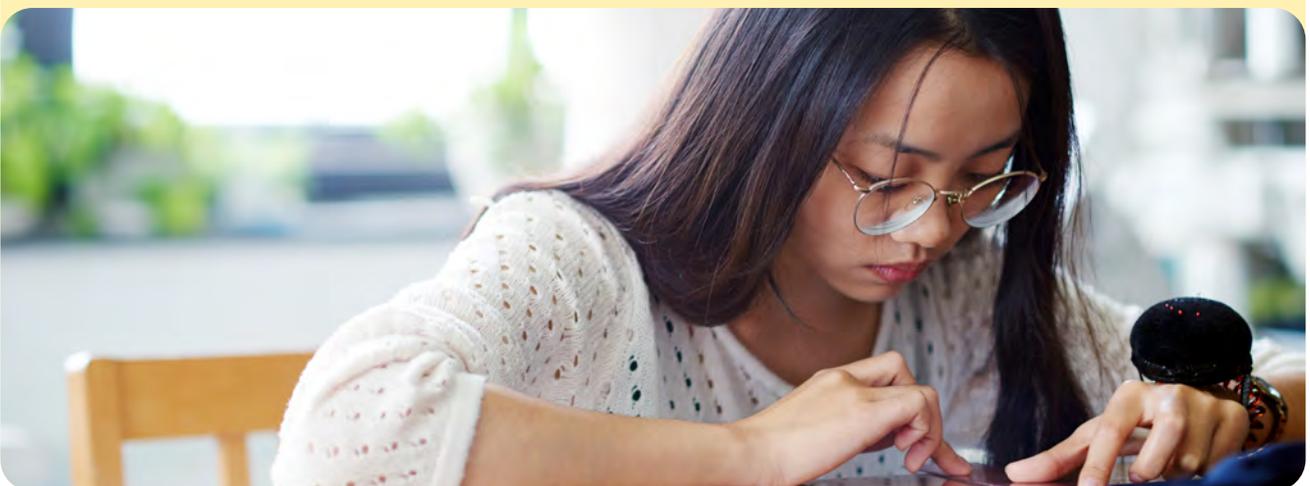
6 A strict interpretation of the above definition would include the original ideas as well as the actual words or artefacts produced by another. Assessors should reflect the incidence of any paraphrasing in the way they apply the markscheme/assessment criteria. Students who have not independently met the marking criteria must not be rewarded in the marking.

Plagiarism also incorporates the direct and unacknowledged translation of foreign language texts into English.

7 It should be noted that plagiarism does not include collusion; that is, working collaboratively with other candidates; neither does it include copying from another candidate in the same examination session. Both of these are defined as different forms of malpractice.

Preventing plagiarism

8 If you are a teacher or assessor entering candidates for a qualification with a non-examination assessment (NEA) component, you must authenticate the work which is submitted for assessment. You must confirm that the work produced is solely that of the candidate concerned. **You must not accept work which is not the candidate's own.** Where you have doubts about the authenticity of student work submitted for assessment you must investigate and take appropriate action.

You must not accept work which is not the candidate's own.

9 In order to prevent plagiarism you:

a) must ensure that each candidate is issued with an individual copy of the appropriate JCQ Information for Candidates (**www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/information-for-candidates-documents**)

b) must ensure that each candidate understands the contents of the notice; particularly the meaning of plagiarism and what sanctions may be applied;

c) should reinforce to a candidate the significance of their signature on the form which states they have understood and followed the requirements for the subject;

d) could require candidates to sign a declaration that they have understood what plagiarism is, and that it is forbidden, in the learning agreement that is signed at enrolment in some centres;

e) should make clear what is and what is not acceptable in respect of plagiarism and the use of sources, including the use of websites. It is unacceptable to simply state Google, just as it would be unacceptable to state Library rather than the title of the book, name of the author, the chapter and page reference. Candidates must provide details of any web pages from which they are quoting or paraphrasing. Some suggestions on acceptable forms of referencing can be found at the end of this guide.

f) should teach the conventions of using footnotes and bibliographies to acknowledge sources. There is no one standard way of acknowledging sources but the use of inverted commas, indented quotations, acknowledgement of the author, line/page number, title of source, indicate that the candidate is using a source. Teachers and candidates should be aware that when acknowledging sources clarity ensures that there is no suspicion of plagiarism;

g) must teach candidates about the risks of using AI, how to acknowledge its use and what constitutes malpractice (see further guidance in the JCQ *AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications*);
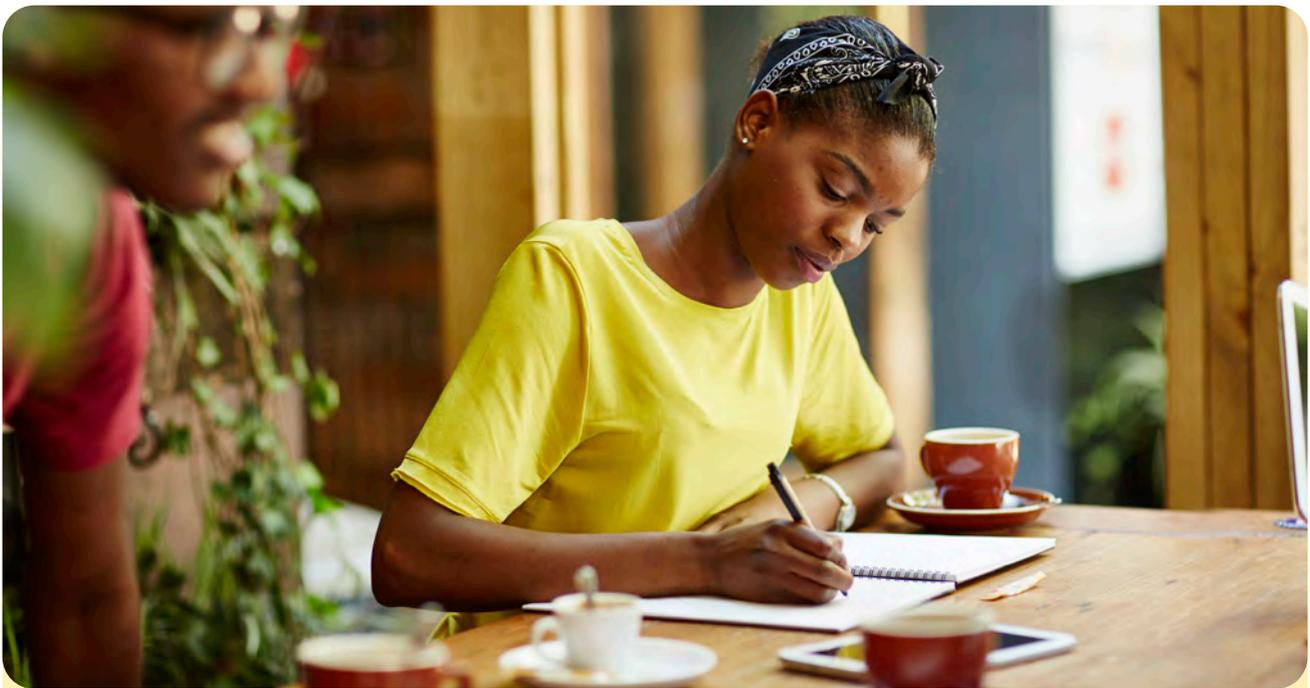
h) should teach the use of quotation marks when sources are quoted directly (a suggested guideline for the need to put items in quotation marks would be the use of more than six words in unchanged form);

i) should set reasonable deadlines for submission of work and provide reminders;

j) where appropriate, should give time for sufficient work to be done in class under direct supervision to allow the teacher to authenticate each candidate's whole work with confidence;

k) should examine intermediate stages in the production of work in order to ensure that the work is underway in a planned and timely manner;

l) should introduce classroom activities that use the level of knowledge/ understanding achieved during the coursework thereby making the teacher confident that the candidate understands the material;

m) could ask candidates to make a short verbal presentation to the rest of the group on their work;

n) should explain the importance of the candidate producing work which is their own and stress to them and to their parents/carers the sanctions for malpractice;

o) must take care to ensure that work undertaken in previous years' examinations by other candidates is not submitted as their own by candidates for the current examination. The safe keeping of such earlier work is of great importance, and its issue to candidates for reference purposes should be carefully monitored;

p) must not accept, without further investigation, work which you suspect has been plagiarised; to do so encourages the spread of this practice.

Dealing with plagiarism

10 There are three steps in the process for dealing with plagiarism:

- keeping watch
- confirmation
- reporting

11 There are a number of clues that point to the possibility of plagiarism, and you should remain alert to the possibility of spotting these.

Keeping watch on content

12 You should check a candidate's work for acknowledgement of sources as the work is being completed.

13 Varying quality of content is one of the most obvious pointers. Well-written passages containing detailed analyses of relevant facts alternating with poorly constructed and irrelevant linking passages ought to give rise to suspicion.

- *keeping watch*
- *confirmation*
- *reporting*

14 Another practice is for candidates to write the introduction and conclusion to an assignment to make it fit the question, and then fill in the middle with work which has been lifted from elsewhere.

15 If the work is not focused on the topic, but presents a well-argued account of a related matter, this could be a sign that it has been used elsewhere. The same applies if parts of the work do not fit well together in developing the response to the assignment.

16 Particular care should be taken when candidates submit work without completing intermediate stages. When candidates submit completed work without intermediate stages this can be an indication that the work is not the candidate's own.

17 Dated expressions, and references to past events as being current can also be indications of work which has been copied from out-of-date sources.

Keeping watch on vocabulary, spelling and punctuation

18 The use of a mixture of English and American vocabulary or spellings can be a sign that the work is not original.

19 If the piece contains specialised terminology, jargon, obscure or advanced words, the teacher should ask if this is typical of this level of candidate and reasonable, or if it is because the candidate did not write the passage.

20 Is the style of punctuation regular and consistent?

Keeping watch on style and tone

21 Look for differences in the style or the tone of writing. If a candidate uses material from textbooks alongside items from popular websites the change of tone between the two should be marked.

22 Look at level of sophistication of the sentence structure. Is this the sort of language that can be expected from the candidate? Is the use of language consistent, or does it vary? Does a change in style reflect a change in authorship at these points?

Keeping watch on presentation

23 Look at the presentation of the piece. If it is typed, are the size and style of font uniform? What about the use of headers and sub-headers? Are the margins consistent throughout? Does the text employ references and if so is the style of referencing consistent? Are there any references, for example, to figures, tables or footnotes, which don't make sense (because they have not been copied)?

24 Lack of references in a long, well-written section could indicate that it had been copied from a website such as Wikipedia or similar general knowledge source.

25 Look out for quotations that run on beyond the part which has been acknowledged.

Confirmation

26 If you suspect that an assignment has been plagiarised, the next step is to try to locate the source.

27 The easiest method is to type a four to six word phrase from the text (preferably one with an unusual phrase in it) directly into a search engine such as Google and perform an "exact phrase search". If the article was copied from the free, visible web there is a good chance this approach will find it, particularly if a few search engines are tried.

28 Another method is to look through the websites that candidates use, as these are common sources for essays and assignments. Assessors should familiarise themselves with the websites that offer essay distribution or writing services. A list of these is given at the end of this article, but as new sites frequently open this list does not claim to be comprehensive or up-to-date. Use a search engine to find other similar sites. Once on the site a quick search may be all that is needed to locate the source of a suspect piece.

Try to locate the source. Familiarise yourself with the websites that offer essay distribution or writing services.

29 If it does not come up through these searches, the piece may have been taken from the "invisible web", that is, from articles which are not separately indexed to a search engine, although the site itself is. Sites run by newspapers, magazines, online encyclopaedias, subject specific sites, and those sites providing help with essays tend to fall into this category, and would have to be searched individually, but again the use of a few well-chosen words in a "find" tool could produce results.

30 Computer programmes to detect plagiarism have been available commercially for some time. There are two basic types. The first type requires software to be installed on the user's machine. This compares a candidate's essay to a defined bank of essays such as an institution's own record of previous candidates' work. The second and more sophisticated approach compares a submitted essay to the whole of the internet. One such tool is *Turnitin* which is web-based and thus requires no installation. The manufacturers claim that all work submitted to their website:

You can use computer programmes to detect plagiarism.

"is checked against three databases of content:

- *Both a current and extensively archived copy of the publicly accessible Internet (more than 4.5 billion pages updated at a rate of 40 million pages per day);*

- *Millions of published works, including the ProQuest commercial database, ABI/Inform, Periodical Abstracts, Business Dateline, and tens of thousands of electronic books including the Gutenburg Collection of Literary Classics;*

- *Millions of student papers already submitted to Turnitinuk"* [**www.turnitinuk.com**]

A report is then produced which identifies any text that is found to be unoriginal and links it to its original source.

31 In addition to the ability to locate original sources, the use of computer-based detection systems is a powerful deterrent to those who otherwise might be tempted to commit plagiarism.

32 There are also computer detection tools to identify potential AI misuse. AI chatbots, as large language models, produce content by 'guessing' the most likely next word in a sequence. This means that AI-generated content uses the most common combinations of words, unlike humans who use a variety of words in their normal writing. Several programs and services use this difference to statistically analyse written content and determine the likelihood that it was produced by AI:

- OpenAI Classifier (**https://openai.com/blog/new-ai-classifier-for-indicating-aiwritten-text/**)

- GPTZero (**https://gptzero.me/**)

- The Giant Language Model Test Room (GLTR) (**http://gltr.io/dist/**)

- Turnitin Originality (**https://www.turnitin.com/products/originality**)

More information regarding AI use and misuse can be found in the JCQ *AI Use in Assessments guidance* (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/artificial-intelligence/**)

33 If plagiarism is suspected, conducting an oral assessment of the candidate may help a teacher to assess whether the work is that of the candidate.

The use of computer-based detection systems is a powerful deterrent to those who otherwise might be tempted to commit plagiarism.

34 If an investigation is inconclusive the work in question could be removed and replaced by alternative work whose authenticity is not in doubt. Alternatively the candidate could be given another piece of work to complete under controlled conditions in the centre which must be completed by the awarding body's deadline.

Reporting

35 If your suspicions are confirmed and the candidate has not signed the declaration of authentication, your centre need not report the malpractice to the appropriate Awarding Body. Centres can resolve the matter themselves prior to the signing of the declarations. Teachers must not accept work which is not the candidate's own. Ultimately the Head of Centre has the responsibility for ensuring that candidates do not submit plagiarised work.

36 If plagiarism is detected by the centre and the declaration of authentication has been signed, the case must be reported to the Awarding Body. The procedure is detailed in JCQ *Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures* (**www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/**).

37 If plagiarism is suspected by an awarding body's moderator or examiner, or if it has been reported by a student or member of the public, full details of the allegation will usually be relayed to the centre. The relevant awarding body will liaise with the Head of Centre regarding the next steps of the investigation and how appropriate evidence will be obtained.

38 The awarding body will then consider the case and, if necessary, impose a sanction in line with the sanctions given in the JCQ *Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures* (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/**). The sanctions applied to a student committing plagiarism and making a false declaration of authenticity range from a warning regarding future conduct to disqualification and the student being barred from entering for one or more examinations for a set period of time.

39 Awarding bodies will also take action, which can include the imposition of sanctions, where centre staff are knowingly accepting, or failing to check, inauthentic work for qualification assessments.

Guidance on referencing

a) Useful guidance on referencing can be found in the following JCQ documents:

- JCQ *Instructions for conducting coursework* (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/coursework/**)

- JCQ *Instructions for conducting non-examination assessments* (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/non-examination-assessments/**)

- JCQ *AI Use in Assessments guidance* (**https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/artificial-intelligence/**)

b) A reference in the text, or as a footnote, should show at least the name of the author, the year of publication and the page number: For example: (De La Bedoyere, 2021, p. 89.)

c) Candidates must also include a bibliography at the end of their work, which lists details of publications that have been used to research their project. For example:

De La Bedoyere, G. (2021) Gladius, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

d) For material taken from web pages, the reference must show the precise web page, not the search engine used to locate it. This can be copied from the address line. For example: (**https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zwmpfg8/articles/z2sm6sg**).

e) For individual works found on the internet, the reference should show the details as in (b), above, plus the URL and the date accessed. For example: Regulski, I (2023). Page turners: literature in ancient.

Available: **https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/page-turners-literature-ancient-egypt** [26 April 2023].

Bibliography, resources and recommended browsing

J Barrie Thompson and Simon Stobart: *University Research, Plagiarism and the Internet: Problems and Possible Solutions*; Published in the proceedings of the Sixth International Conference ETHICOMP 2002; Lisbon: ISBN 972–839, pp607–710.

Oxford University Department of Education: *Guide to Referencing and Citations*.
Accessed: **https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/cd464c28-e981-4dcc-af89-945b50a3ef48/Referencing%20and%20plagiarism/SHU_Guide_to_referencing%20NEW%20TO%20USE.pdf** [7 August 2017].

Other useful sites are:

https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism

http://virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm

http://www.plagiarism.org

http://www.turnitinuk.com
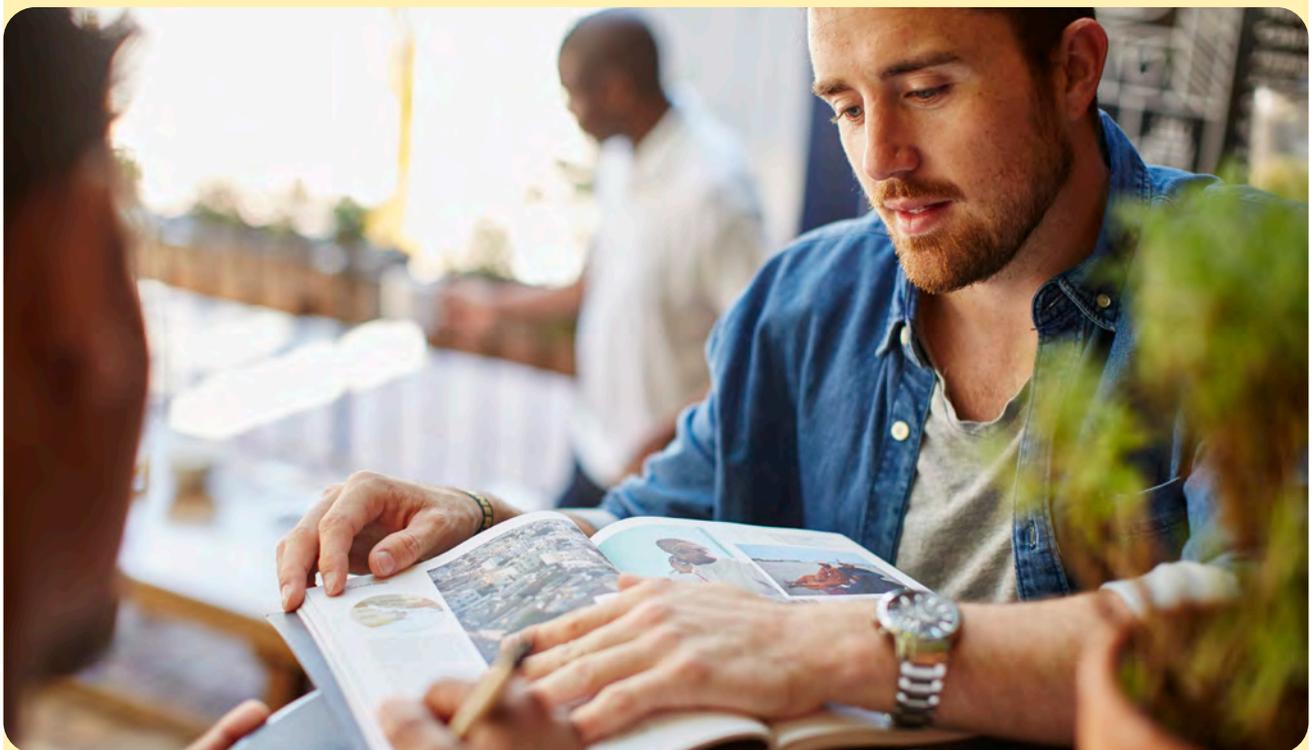
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