Further readings and templates

# Chapter 6: General principles of assessment at university

## Why do students commit plagiarism?

There are broadly two answers to this question:

1) A lack of time to complete the work by the course deadline.

2) A misunderstanding of what plagiarism is (i.e. a lack of awareness of how to acknowledge others’ work).

There is a third answer which relates to a basic belief that the student thought they could get away with it, but we shall ignore the deliberate attempts to deceive for the time being. If you have this attitude, then many academics would probably hope that you get what you deserve, but we shall assume that things are less deliberate for now.

### ‘ … I didn’t have enough time’

Please permit me to give a personal example here. The most extreme case of plagiarism and academic misconduct that I have come across was for a student who was dismissed from the university with immediate effect before they had had a chance to complete their degree. She had been looking after two children at home and claimed that she had insufficient time to complete her undergraduate dissertation. As a result, she had asked her friend to write the work for her and she had paid him to do so. He then decided to buy the work from a website, but did so with a stolen credit card (for reasons unknown). This information was then supplied to the university and after a hearing in front of senior university staff, the student was dismissed from the university. The reason that she gave? That she did not have enough time.

There are never any sufficient reasons for committing plagiarism, but ‘not having enough time’ is not regarded by any academics as close to acceptable, principally because it is assumed that every student has the same amount of time as every other student. The student above probably had more domestic commitments than other students, but there are processes operated by every university in the UK which can enable them to give some consideration to students whose work suffers because of particularly difficult illnesses, domestic circumstances or sudden events which impact on someone’s ability to do their academic work. If you are struggling with your time management, then speak to your lecturers and personal tutor as soon as possible: do not try to get away with plagiarism.

### ‘ … I don’t understand what plagiarism is.’

As universities make more and more information available, this is becoming an unacceptable explanation. There is a wealth of resources regarding plagiarism available online and most of it is public.