

Academic Dishonesty in Courses

Homework / Project-report / Submissions

IIT-Delhi wishes to maintain global academic standards in its own education system. Therefore it does not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty. Almost all violations of academic honesty in course submissions (homework assignments, project reports) are instances of plagiarism, which is what this document is about. The guidelines for research papers (as term paper or for publication) are far more stringent and the authors have to be far more careful.

Plagiarism is the offence of taking undue credit for someone else's work.

When you submit an assignment, the instructor basically wants to evaluate/grade you on what **you did**. And unless you explicitly indicate that some part is not done by you, it is implicitly assumed that the entire assignment was done by you. Academic dishonesty is displayed when some part(s) of your assignment are **someone else's writing/idea/art** (for example, obtained from a friend, a solution manual, a website), but you claim it as your own by not explicitly making it clear that these parts are someone else's.

What leads to plagiarism?

Copying (verbatim or with modification) in any form - from phrases to paragraphs, from code fragments to entire programs, from the idea behind a proof to an actual written form - may lead to plagiarism. It is also plagiarism if you submit **any modification of an existing solution** - you are basically copying the solution idea/solution structure and claiming credit for the solution. Here "modification" **does not** refer to only textual modification; the originality of the submission should be substantially different. A non-exhaustive list of specific instances is given below.

- If a question requires descriptive answers to some existing idea covered in instructional material (lecture, textbook), then it is plagiarism to use someone else's words.
- For mathematical/analytical questions, it is plagiarism to write someone else's steps/calculation.
- If a question requires you to come up with a new idea (e.g., prove something, or write something not already present in lecture notes or book), then it is plagiarism to even use someone else's idea.
- For programs, it is plagiarism to use (even a small portion of) someone else's code.

Example 1: Copying solution to a homework problem from the internet. *You are claiming that solution to be your own, which is plagiarism.*

Example 2: Copying an answer from a friend. *You are claiming your friend's answer to be yours, which is plagiarism.*

Example 3: Using the solution idea of a friend. *You are claiming your friend's idea as your own, which is plagiarism.*

Example 4: Copying only one paragraph from someone's solution but the rest is original. *You are claiming the "entire solution" to be your own, which is plagiarism. It is actually quite dumb to write five pages yourself and then copy a paragraph, thereby reducing the value of your work, and risking punishment.*

How to avoid plagiarism

You may borrow, not copy.

If, for whatever reason, you have to use some existing work, you cannot copy - you can only borrow (when you borrow, you do not claim ownership of the borrowed item). Therefore, it is **your** responsibility to **explicitly indicate which parts are borrowed**.

You are allowed to borrow definitions, formulae, figures, one sentence, small parts of code etc. by (1) clearly specifying what is borrowed AND (2) from where it is borrowed (you need to **do both**).

(1) For borrowed text, you can either put it inside quotation mark or paraphrase/summarise it by writing in your own words with occasional quoted text. For code, figures, mathematical steps, and other content, document in the appropriate manner which part is borrowed.

(2) To attribute the borrowed part to its source, you need to cite it by using references or footnotes or other appropriate means.

Example: *"Atomic actions are defined as"* [name of book/paper/website]

Example: *"Atomic actions are defined as"*¹ and a footnote¹ name of website

Example: // code taken from <http://<website>> def function(...) { ... }

Example: *We would like to have atomic actions because it provides "top-level independent actions"* [source]...

Example: * *This figure is taken from <book>*.

Example of a proper answer:

In functional programming languages, functions are first-class members, which means, functions are treated equally as any other value (aka. first-class objects). Functions are part of most programming languages, but they may be used merely as a second-class language construct, and may not be assigned to variables, passed as parameters or even changed on the fly. Functional programming is part of the genre declarative programming which "expresses what the program should accomplish" in contrast to imperative programming which prescribes "how to do it in terms of sequences of actions to be taken" [Wikipedia: Imperative Programming].

Policy for Plagiarism in Assignments

For cheating in assignments, the institute policy is given below – an instructor may refine it, in which case he/she will publish his/her policy on the course website.

- **First instance of cheating** – one letter grade reduction
- **Second instance of cheating** – F in the course.

The instructor will decide this punishment and will explain the punishment to the student, who can present his/her case to the instructor. If the student feels that he/she has been punished unfairly, he/she can appeal the decision to the Disciplinary Action Committee (DAC), which may, if found that the student's case is frivolous, increase the punishment, including, but not limited to, issuance of academic warning. An instructor may also directly refer the case to the DAC.

Summary

- Using ideas/facts/knowledge/terms which is common knowledge, taught in the course, or given in the textbook is allowed without any restriction.
- Anything from instructional material like **lecture notes, course text-books and reference books** (those explicitly mentioned by the instructor) can be written in your own words without citation.
- You can discuss with your instructor and course TA without attribution. Usually, most instructors allow discussion with classmates (along with attribution of collaborators) - but it may change from course to course. You may not discuss with **anyone else**.
- **Small amount of material** may be verbatim copied (only one or two sentences, definitely not a paragraph) when done with proper style (quotation/paraphrasing) and attribution.
- An **idea** taken from other sources may be used if it is written **in your own words** and is accompanied with **attribution**.
- **No other existing material** is allowed for assignments and projects.
- Any violation may lead to strict punishment as decided by the course instructor or DAC.

Individual instructors may have a different set of restrictions. Please review the course policy carefully.

Easy Rule of Thumb:

Most of the times, students are led to academic dishonesty simply because their solution ended up unnecessarily containing a significant amount of non-original work. An easy way to avoid this is to ensure that the sources are not in front of you – if it was a book, do not have it open in front of you, if it was a website, then do not have it on screen. Do not memorise what you have read - unlike practices in school, we do not encourage memorisation by heart. And this is what is needed from you in all your homework – explain whatever you want in your own words based on your own understanding.

If you are discussing a homework assignment with others (make sure the instructor has allowed it in that particular course), you can avoid dishonesty by (1) if you have seen your friend's homework, ensure that it is not open in front of you when you do your own (2) mentioning your collaborators in your submission.