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Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Role-specific guide to promoting academic integrity, and managing and investigating academic misconduct

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TEQSA

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Role-specific guide to promoting academic integrity, and managing and investigating academic misconduct

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Introduction

This guide is designed to help individuals and institutions understand the common roles and likely responsibilities of staff in relation to academic integrity. There are differing operational models across the sector, with some institutions preferring more or less centralised or decentralised academic integrity responsibilities. However, this resource should assist in identifying the role and associated actions you may undertake throughout the academic misconduct process at your institution. Similarly, terms used across the sector may differ, so you will need to consider which relates most closely to your role or is the equivalent term at your institution.

To protect the value of institutional degrees, courses, and qualifications academic integrity is a collective responsibility. Staff involved in student education at an institution have a responsibility for ensuring that integrity is supported and promoted across a student's learning journey, and in all associated work. Key to increasing academic integrity and reducing misconduct is institutions:

- fostering and supporting a culture of academic integrity
- educating staff and students about integrity
- proactively detecting, reporting and managing misconduct.

A comprehensive institutional strategy demands shared accountability for academic integrity among faculty, students and the institution. To encourage principles and behaviours of integrity among students, the values of academic integrity should guide your approach to initiatives undertaken across your institution, not solely through pedagogical practices and resources, but via communication of anticipated standards. This extends into numerous domains including:

- the necessity for creative and suitable assessment design
- effective student and academic skills support systems
- transparent policies and guidance
- constructive and pertinent assessment feedback
- a culture that encourages academic integrity discourse.

The promotion of a culture of academic integrity coexists with the need to address academic misconduct in a consistent, transparent and equitable approach. To ensure equitable outcomes for those found to have engaged in academic misconduct, institutions must have a fair procedure for examining misconduct, which are underpinned by clear policies and procedures.

Executive and senior leadership roles

One of the first areas of responsibility lies with the Executive and the messaging that comes from the top. Your Executive should allow time and support for people across the institution to cultivate a culture of integrity in addition to carrying out their substantive roles. This may mean allowing extra time for detection when marking or supporting students through meaningful conversations about their work, including any concerns with the authenticity of what was submitted.

A top-down approach is integral to developing an institutional culture that supports academic integrity. Executive and senior leadership roles have responsibility for ensuring institutions meet the requirements of the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) in relation to academic integrity.

By supporting a culture of academic integrity, senior leaders send a positive message that they value integrity and support educators in assisting students to cultivate the values, conduct, perspectives and accountabilities connected to academic and broader forms of integrity.

Student support, systems and policy teams

Those responsible for policy development, process mapping, student communications, systems support (for academic integrity education modules, learning management systems (LMS) and case management of misconduct) and staff training may all have some form of responsibility when it comes to supporting academic integrity. Working together, even in a decentralised model, is important to ensure that those who are meeting students to teach integrity or mark and give feedback on assignments, are giving input to those who are supporting processes 'behind the scenes'.

Those who educate students on academic integrity and academic skills need to regularly update messaging based on the latest threats to integrity. These resources should be designed to strengthen and facilitate students' learning and understanding of academic skills and scholarly practices leading to academic integrity. Whether this student education is provided by a central team or in each Discipline/School/Faculty/College, the messaging should be clear, transparent and easily understood by students who will be coming from a range of disciplinary, cultural and educational backgrounds.

Academic integrity education should encompass training that helps students develop the competencies necessary for academic scholarship, which include investigating, comprehending and expanding upon others' ideas and contributions. It also includes the capacity to clearly and appropriately cite and reference work that does not belong to the student. Students should understand that these components constitute lifelong competencies that enable them to develop professionalism in their capacity to present their own or others' information in academia, professional settings, or other life domains.

Teaching staff

For those teaching students, your role is vital in promoting and maintaining integrity. What you model to students is critical to ensure that the correct values are promoted and students can see that you take integrity seriously, whether that is ensuring you:

- reference all images, diagrams and information sources in your teaching material
- do not 'recycle' old lectures and assignments
- talk about integrity and show that misconduct will be taken seriously.

You have a direct influence over modelling positive integrity behaviours. Take time within the initial teaching sessions of a semester to discuss the importance of academic integrity and where students can obtain further information.

Effective learning materials and assessment design that are current, fit for purpose and related to real-world issues can help to reduce misconduct through positively engaging students in their learning. Providing timely and suitable feedback to students to enable them to build their knowledge and maturity as learners is a crucial part of encouraging them in their learning journey. Timing of assessments is also important. Where possible, coordinate with the instructors for other classes your students are taking so that assignments are not due simultaneously.

Assessment design must account for technologies that students will be expected to use in their profession, as well as how it can be used as a learning tool or a short-cut. This is especially crucial now with generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) being used across the student body. Assessment validity and security need to be taken into consideration in any design process – more information on this topic can be found in TEQSA's Academic Integrity Toolkit.

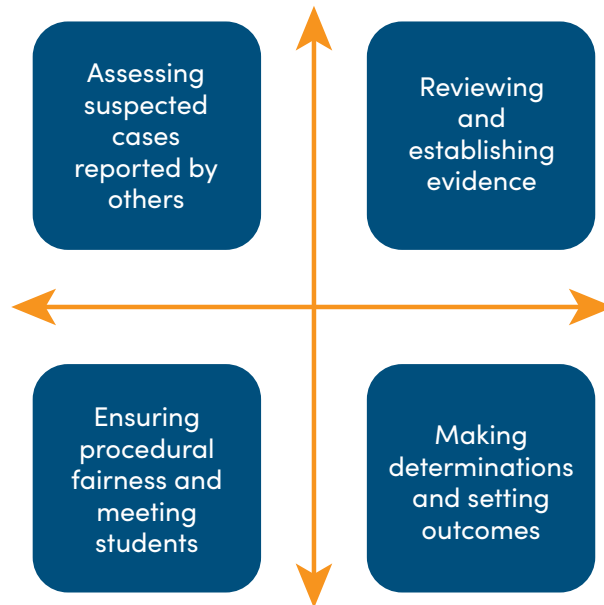
It is crucial that the advancement of academic values and definitions or breaches of integrity are addressed in each year of study, especially at key points in a student's journey, such as peak assessment periods.

Students may feel inundated by information received during the initial phases of their higher education experience and if this material is not revisited, essential information may be overlooked which could result in inadvertent academic misconduct.

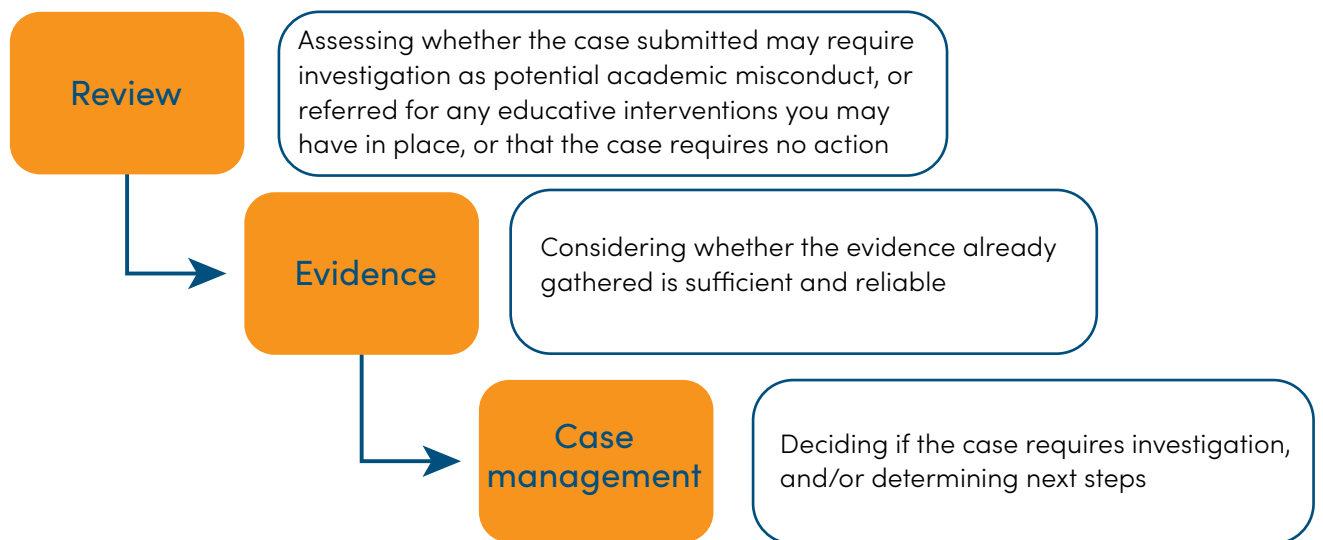
Teachers and front-facing academics need to remind students of the values of integrity and what tools and processes are in place to maintain integrity through the detection of suspected academic misconduct. Students need to be informed that misconduct is something which is detected and actively managed. This demonstrates to students that you take misconduct seriously and that there will be consequences for breaches of integrity. Where suitable or relevant it may be advisable to discuss the actual outcomes that can be applied to students with proven cases of misconduct, this can help create a deterrent effect and elevate the risk for students completing their work in breach of integrity principles.

Detailed role descriptions

Your responsibility when managing misconduct and the actions you may take will differ based on your role. Depending on your role and how misconduct is organised at your institution you might be involved in one or several stages of the process. This could include:



Reviewing cases could include:



Your role may include (details on these are provided below):

- detecting possible misconduct
- providing advice to academics in your School/discipline for cases of suspected academic integrity breaches
- investigating cases reported to you by others
- gathering evidence for cases that you or others deem require investigation

- meeting with students and inviting students to respond to evidence sent to them in advance and determining facts of the case
- making determinations on whether misconduct has occurred.

Whatever your role, it is important to ensure that you are aware of your institutional policy on academic integrity and misconduct. Policies should always be followed so that students are afforded due process and transparency in any investigations. This also supports a consistent approach to academic misconduct investigations and student experience in the process as well as procedural fairness.

Marker/tutor

This section applies to anyone who has responsibility for marking student assignments, whether you are a casual academic, teaching assistant or responsible for the unit.

Anyone marking student assignments has a responsibility to look for anomalies or unusual content in student work, which may indicate that some form of academic misconduct has taken place.

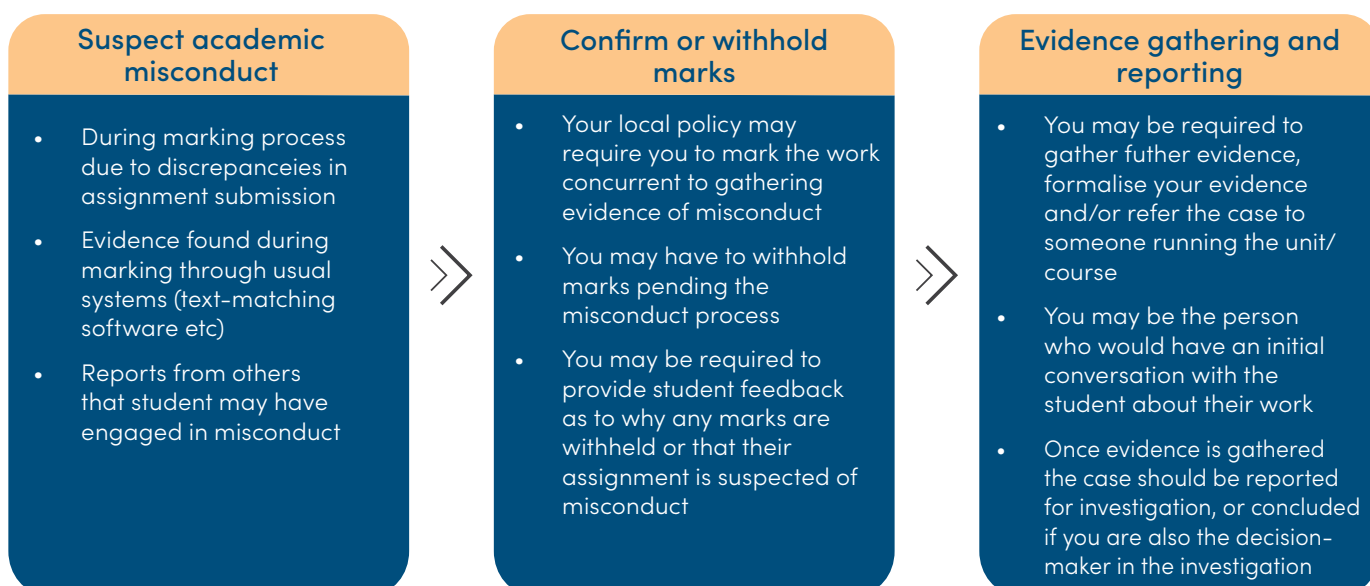
As the first people who view student assignments, you would usually be the initial point of detection. This may be more important for decentralised misconduct models, as there would not be a central team reviewing student assignments.

You may also be required to provide advice to others in your teaching team on potential misconduct that they have detected or advise others on how to have proactive and educative conversations with students about academic integrity and conventions in your discipline/course/unit.

When you identify something of concern it does not mean that the case is proven – just that it requires further action.

Indicators of potential misconduct and types of evidence

Note: For complementary information see *Substantiating contract cheating: A guide for investigators* in TEQSA's Academic Integrity Toolkit).



Types of evidence that may be used include:

- assignments and assignment briefs
- reports from tools/systems designed to detect potential misconduct (including proctoring reports or recordings)
- screenshots, images, videos (usually taken by others)
- data (assignment metadata, LMS login or internet protocol (IP) data, data from assessment or feedback tools). **Note: caution should be exercised when gathering technical data**
- documents demonstrating misconduct in some way
- statements from others about suspected misconduct (tutors, invigilators, other students, external persons)
- information from students (verbal or electronic)
- student email history (if directly relevant to the case, for example showing orders to external assignment providers).

Indicators of potential academic misconduct:

- Initial indicators may be easier to spot and relate to the quality or the assignment being of a much higher standard than the rest of the cohort or the student's previous work.
- Work may be completely off topic or well outside the assignment brief, which can indicate that it has been outsourced to a person, commercial operator or tool (such as gen AI).
- Materials have been accessed that would not be expected at the level of the work, or are not available under institutional logins (this could be indicative of work being derived from an external person or source who has access to information not available through your institution).
- Work is identical or very similar to another student/s, which may indicate collusion has occurred (although it can also be related to other forms of misconduct such as file-sharing or outsourcing).
- Text-matching software may show that work matches to other sources, indicative of plagiarism, this may relate to text-based assignments, source code or other disciplines where text can be matched through different software programs.
- If your institution has access to AI detection software, this could show that the work might have been produced by gen AI (however, it is important to note that this alone should not be used as the evidence against a student for any unauthorised gen AI usage).
- If your institution has contract cheating/outsourcing detection software, flags might point to the student having potentially obtained one or more assignment from another source (again, it is important to explore these in detail and not make assumptions based on flags from the software alone).
- Prompts left in the body of the text! This sounds obvious, but it does happen and points to students having used gen AI to complete some or all of their work. Depending on what is visible in the assignment you may wish to have a further conversation with the student about their use of gen AI before deciding the extent to which gen AI was used. However, this may be the role of someone else.
- IP data, commonly found within a LMS, can indicate that collusion or outsourcing has occurred in online environments (including all forms of online/remote assessment).

- Incorrect, false or misaligned references (references that don't align with the content included in the body of the assignment). This could be related to fabrication, where the student may have written the assignment but did not use any sources or used them inconsistently, and so copied in references not used in the assignment; or could allude to gen AI having been used to produce either the content and references of the assignment, or create the reference section.
- General suspicions – sometimes a marker has a feeling that something isn't quite right with the work. As the marker, and particularly if you set the assignment and ran the unit, you are best placed to know what to expect from student assignment submissions. This does not mean that you do not trust students to complete the work honestly, but if supports are available either in your course/school/faculty etc. or centrally at your institution you may wish to consider asking them to review the assignment, the assignment's metadata or run it through available software.

Other factors to consider in detecting potential academic misconduct

- Software used to detect potential exam breaches or copy and paste behaviour through online assessment completion, provide reports which alert institutions to various measures that students may have taken that are outside of permitted exam or assessment rules.
- Wearable cheating devices or other forms of unauthorised materials may be detected by invigilators during in-person exams. These reports may be forwarded to markers for their review following the exam.
- Reports may be received from other people with knowledge and/or evidence that a student has potentially breached the expected integrity requirements. This could be from external tutors or those contracted to complete the work for the student. Evidence might include payment receipts or order emails, or screenshots of messages which discuss dishonest completion of the work, including from social media or work-for-hire sites (for example, Airtasker or Fiverr).
- On occasion reports are also received from friends, partners or family members of the student. These should be considered carefully (this is covered further in evidentiary standards below).

For any detection software used it is imperative that a human quality check is undertaken to confirm whether the highlighted percentage of text-matching reflected by the software is an actual match. For example, to clarify if a 20% match that is flagged is referring to a block or blocks of text, or is matching to legitimate references, cover sheets, common generic language or other required text/code that was included as part of the assignment. Additionally, software that indicates change in usage of language from Americanised spelling to Australian/British could just be a result of a student coming from a non-English speaking background and learning different ways to spell words.

Whatever type of indicator or evidence you have seen, your role as marker would usually require that you take action or further steps, by either gathering more evidence yourself or referring the case on through appropriate channels. It is important that any suspicion is followed up and a report made to the relevant person or unit at your institution.

Investigator

This section applies to anyone with responsibility for gathering evidence, reviewing evidence submitted by others or self-detected, investigating potential misconduct, meeting with students, and/or deciding the facts of the case.

As an investigator you play an integral role in ensuring fairness in the process for misconduct investigations. The most crucial element of your role is remaining impartial and gathering evidence to present the facts of the case.

You may be an expert at your institution and investigate all types of misconduct, or only certain types (such as supporting exam integrity). TEQSA has a range of resources which you can use to guide you with a thorough but fair investigation, in addition to the information provided below. These include:

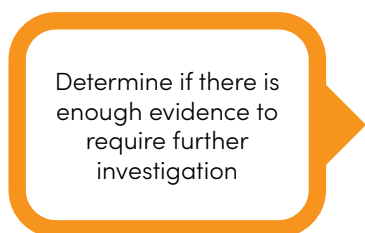
- [Student academic misconduct resources](#)
- [Substantiating contract cheating: A guide for investigators](#)
- [TEQSA Masterclass: contract cheating detection and deterrence](#)

Each of these resources has been developed to provide guidance based on the respective author's experience identifying and investigating academic integrity misconduct. Some variations in approach may be evident, and we encourage you to use judgement to consider the most appropriate actions for your institution.

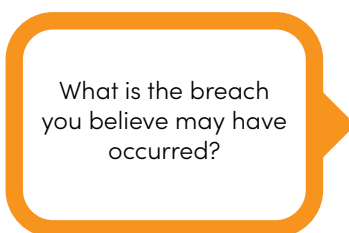
Carrying out the investigation

There are various steps that should be taken at the start of an investigation. Often, you will have received a report of suspected academic misconduct from someone else (unless those initially raising suspicions are also responsible for carrying out the full investigation at your institution).

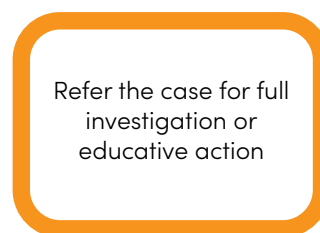
Step 1 – initial review



Step 2 – misconduct?



Step 3 – next actions



Step 1 – Initial review: You may have enough evidence to decide whether or not there is potential misconduct from the initial report or your initial detection, however, you may also require more information to decide whether the case warrants a full investigation. In institutions that have centralised teams for managing misconduct, this may mean broadening your search for evidence to include units/subjects beyond the one where concerns were first raised.

Step 2 – Threshold decisions: You will need to assess whether the actions of a student demonstrated by the evidence gathered **could** have breached your institution's policies. A close review of your academic integrity policy or Student Code of Conduct is required to identify relevant clauses that relate to the student's actions, as you understand them.

Step 3 – Determining next stage actions: Depending on the processes at your institution, the student may be referred for an educative intervention, if the case is deemed minor or not misconduct but demonstrates a lack of skills. As educational institutions, it is always

recommended that educative options are available, along with punitive responses when they are needed.. If the case appears to be clear misconduct, you would then proceed to carrying out the full investigation.

Often cases can be handled by means other than a full misconduct investigation. This may mean taking steps to initially review or provide educative diversions for students, saving significant staff time and other resources to complete full investigations for cases that do not require it.

If you proceed to carrying out the investigation, you will need to take into consideration types of evidence (see section above), standards of evidence (see section below) and having conversations/communications with students (see below).

Investigators must uphold and meet set standards in relation to procedural fairness and avoiding bias.

Standards of evidence, privacy and confidentiality

Evidentiary standards are important. Evidence should be relevant to the case in question and be able to support the suspicion of academic misconduct. Evidence should be clear enough to allow students to respond and, where necessary, be accompanied by an explanation of what it demonstrates or presents to the student.

Evidence can include information reported or received from other people, but it must:

- protect confidentiality of the reporter or other party where required
- be deidentified or redacted, where relevant, for privacy and confidentiality.

Ambiguous evidence should not be included in any investigation without sufficient qualification. Evidence not specifically related to the case under investigation should not be provided to the student or the decision-maker.

Analysis and evaluation of evidence

When considering the evidence, or additional information that you have gathered, think about the:

- patterns, inconsistencies, or discrepancies in either the evidence or student assignments
- credibility and source reliability
- evidence's context, intent and impact
- student's response to the evidence presented to them.

As mentioned above, it is possible that the initial evidence is indicative of a broader misconduct issue that could extend beyond the assignment/s under consideration. This may necessitate obtaining other student assignments or data and reviewing these for issues or discrepancies across the student's learning journey. Inconsistencies in language quality, student ability, styles and other significant changes in assignment appearance (such as extent of references/citations used and depth of knowledge), may indicate that outsourcing has occurred, whether to a third-party (contract cheating) or to a genAI tool. Similarly, concerning IP address data in one unit may be present in other units the student has taken.

The sources of evidence may also need to be considered in case they are malicious or falsified. While not all evidence gathered in the course of the investigation may be necessary for the hearing or decision, it may help you as an investigator understand the context of the assignment or misconduct investigation.

Initial communication with students

Many institutions have provisions in place for an initial meeting with a student relating to the suspected misconduct before it reaches the decision-maker. This may be the responsibility of the tutor/marker, or it may be the role of the investigator. If you are meeting with students to talk through the evidence, you may also want to consider discussing the content of their assignment – how they put it together, and what knowledge they have of the content. This can sometimes support or call into question the misconduct suspicion and is a useful way of having a more informal conversation with a student to understand their assignment submission. It is important to let the student know that you are not the decision-maker and you are simply seeking insight into how they produced their assignment.

Defer or consult with others

Sometimes it may be necessary for an investigator to get insight from other parties, for example to explain the context of unfamiliar evidence, or seek legal counsel for complex cases that may involve external parties. If you are new to investigation, always seek input from other experts in your institution, including the policy team to ensure that you are interpreting and applying the academic integrity/misconduct policy appropriately.

Investigation report

Depending on your institution's processes, once you have concluded your investigation, you may be the person responsible for summarising the case and providing a report to the decision-makers and the student in advance of any hearing or decision. If an investigation report/case summary is required, it is important that it is written in a neutral manner, presenting the evidence and facts of the case and not giving any opinion as to whether misconduct may or may not have occurred – that is the role of the decision-maker. Investigations are typically based on several pieces of corroborating evidence. It is advisable to list the evidence and describe them so that everyone reviewing the report is clear on why they are included and what they demonstrate. If the student has submitted any mitigating circumstances that relate to the case, this may either be included in the investigation report or not shown to decision-makers until after the determination has been made (depending on your institution's policy).

Decision-maker

This section applies to anyone with the responsibility to determine the facts of the case and make determinations as to whether misconduct has occurred and what outcome should be applied (if the case is proven).

In different institutions decision-makers may be a formal committee or an individual delegated with decision-making authority. It is important to act only in accordance with your institution's delegation of authority policy.

Your responsibility

Your responsibility is to ensure procedural fairness and make fair decisions free of bias.

Burden of proof

Burden of proof is **on the balance of probabilities, and not beyond a reasonable doubt.**

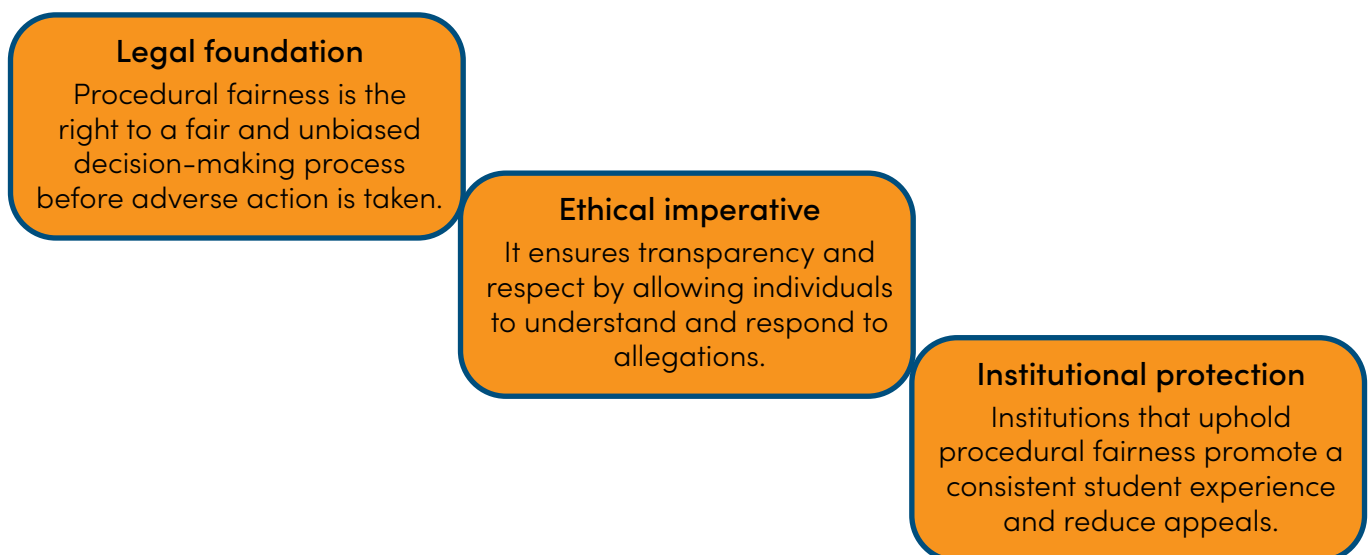
If you have reasonable cause, based in evidence, to form the view that the student did not complete the work themselves and the student is unable to answer questions relating to the content of their assignment and how it was produced, that is enough cause to make a finding of academic misconduct. Institutions do not have to meet criminal burdens of proof. However, if you are not sure whether the action was intentional or unintentional, it may alter the outcome to one that is more educative. It is important to note that the more serious the potential outcome, the stronger the evidence is required to support the finding/s.

Procedural fairness

Institutions should have a consistent approach towards evidence-gathering and investigations that support the principles of natural justice and employ procedural fairness. The below information presents the methods required to carry out investigations in a fair and just manner, in accordance with the Threshold Standards. Your institutional policies should also reflect procedural fairness.

Procedural fairness is an essential element of any investigation and decision-making process. Procedural fairness means that students are afforded transparency in the process of any investigations and decision-making that will consider whether or not they have engaged in misconduct. The approach given in their case will follow the same processes that other students would experience and receive. Students will be presented with the same evidence as decision-makers to allow them the fair chance to respond.






Procedural fairness covers the following elements:



Investigations and decision-making must follow your institutional policies and procedures. The guidance outlined here aims to provide overall advice to promote fair treatment for students facing misconduct concerns. Consistent procedures should be maintained so that investigation standards remain as uniform as possible, response timeframes are equitable and reasonable, and appeal processes are clearly communicated to students in accessible formats and simple language. Decision-makers must review evidence objectively, without prejudice, weighing both the seriousness of the misconduct and any extenuating factors when reaching their conclusions and determining appropriate sanctions for substantiated cases of academic misconduct.

Evidence standards (detailed in the Investigators section) must be transparent and communicated to students in a manner that allows them to give an effective response, ensuring procedural fairness. Students are entitled to respond to any suspicions put to them about their work and potential misconduct and therefore **must** receive access to all materials that you as an investigator or decision-maker will consider when making your determination on their case. Decision-makers must remain neutral throughout the process, with any conflicts of interest disclosed immediately and an alternate decision-maker found.

The below provides a summary to help you ensure procedural fairness.

-  **Consistency**
 - Using templates, having set standards in meetings, following policy
-  **Notice period**
 - Giving appropriate notice period to allow students to prepare and get a support person
-  **Sufficient detail**
 - Allowing natural justice through provision of evidence, clear allegations with detail, and fair right to respond in writing or at a meeting
-  **Student rights**
 - Explaining student rights and give students information on support services available to them
-  **Fair review**
 - Considering facts of the individual case to apply suitable outcome that is in line with prior cases and being free from bias and conflict of interest

Meeting with students

Depending on the structure of your institution you may be the only person to meet with the student, there may be a preliminary conversation with the student undertaken by an investigator (see the Investigator Section), or you may be part of a panel of decision-makers who consider whether misconduct has occurred. In cases where you are the only decision-maker, it is imperative that you have no conflict of interest or, where there is a conflict, an alternate decision-maker is appointed.

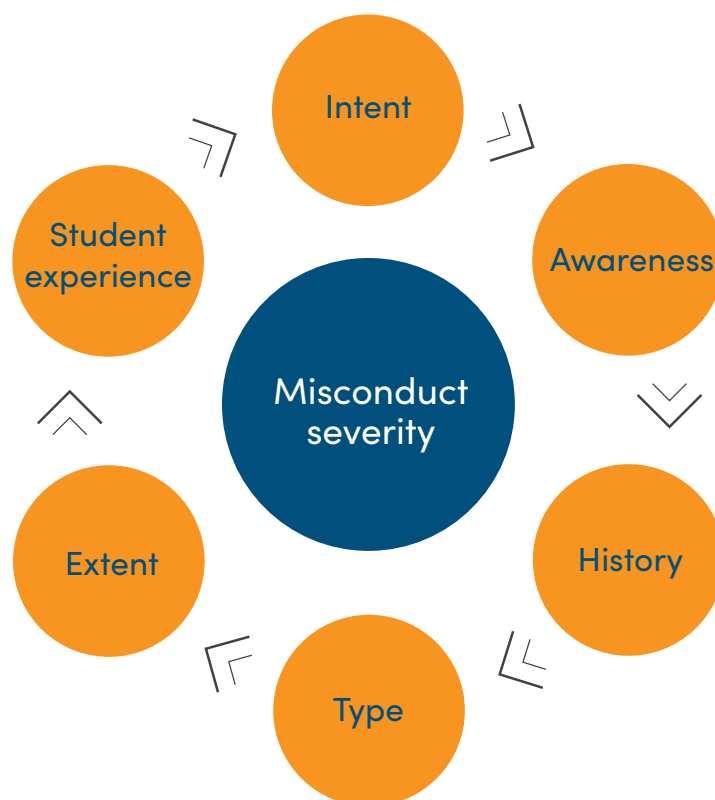
Letters or emails inviting students to meetings to discuss misconduct should be written in plain, non-legalistic language. When receiving a meeting invitation, students should have access to your institution's support services, this may include welfare as well as advocacy support, and be given adequate notice of the meeting. All students should be invited to attend the meeting with a support person, however, depending on your local policy, this person's role may differ (for example, they may be able to speak during the meeting and present information on behalf of the student, or they may be there for support only; the student may be permitted to bring a legal representative or a direct family member, or not). Students should be provided with your local policy or policies that apply to the process (with specific clauses highlighted, if necessary) as well as all evidence that is being considered against their assignment. If students have access requirements, these should be met in advance of the meeting.

The meeting (which may be called a hearing, inquiry, committee etc.) should commence by introducing those present and ensuring that the student understands the meeting's purpose. Whatever structure is followed next, the decision-makers need to establish the facts and evidence that have been presented to them and the student. This may involve asking the student questions about the production of their work and discussing any specific evidence that might require an explanation. It is important that students feel safe in this meeting as this promotes a less stressful student experience and can encourage honesty in responses and open dialogue. If students become distressed during a meeting, provided your local policy allows it, you can adjourn the meeting and/or refer the student to your welfare support services. It is also advisable to know how to contact your local security team should the student become agitated or threatening in any way.

If all goes well the meeting will allow you, as the decision-maker/s, to explore the facts of the case and get substantial responses from the student to assist you. If a student does not attend the meeting, this should not be taken as an assumption of guilt. The evidence must still be considered without bias. If your local policy allows students to submit a statement in lieu of attending a meeting, this should be taken as their full statement, and if anything requires clarification you may wish to adjourn your decision (additionally, this clarification may have already been obtained by the investigator, depending on your institutional structure and process).

Consider the individual case and student

Each case is individual, with a range of factors which might impact your misconduct determination and whether it is minor or more serious – if you have levels associated with misconduct definitions at your institution. The following factors should be taken into consideration when making your findings and setting your outcomes:



Intent

This relates to whether or not it appears that the misconduct was deliberate. The student may have admitted, for example, to having used gen AI to produce their work, or you have direct evidence showing that they outsourced their work to a third-party and engaged in contract cheating. However, in other cases intent may be more complex and related to unintentional misconduct, such as misunderstanding assignment instructions relating to individual submission of work following group work; or misunderstanding citation and paraphrasing conventions and unintentionally plagiarising some of their own work. Intent could guide outcomes that are available to you as it may be more relevant to offer students an educative outcome, rather than a more punitive one.

Student history

History of any previous misconduct should only be known after a finding of misconduct has been made, to avoid bias being introduced to the decision-making process. If a student is known to have previously engaged in misconduct, it is usual that a more serious outcome be applied, as long as there is evidence that the student was given adequate explanation or education on how to work with integrity.

Student experience

A student's experience can impact how they approach their work and their understanding of integrity expectations. A third-year domestic student is likely to have a very different understanding of expected conventions than a first semester/trimester international student who has not studied in Australia before. The decision-maker may wish to take this into consideration when determining any outcome, however, this would not impact the determination as to whether misconduct occurred or not.

Extent

How much of an assignment has been completed through inauthentic or dishonest means will impact the potential outcome that could be applied to the student. It is important to note that where learning has not been demonstrated through the work, penalty outcomes should reflect this. For example, if the work relates to plagiarism in 25% of a Master's thesis, this would comprise a major proportion of the work; if the entire assignment which is a capstone/hurdle assessment for the unit was completed by a third-party this would constitute contract cheating for 100% of the work; or, if there were elements of poor paraphrasing or citations in some sections but the majority of the work is the student's own, this would likely have a lower severity than other types of misconduct. Depending on your local policy, the latter example may just involve marking down those sections of inadequately cited text and offering the student further education on academic skills, whereas the first two may involve failing the student in the assignment or unit and requiring a resubmission.

Type

Misconduct type is also important to consider, as this can relate to intent as well. Plagiarism and collusion may be deliberate or unintentional, yet contract cheating or unauthorised wearable technologies in exams cannot be unintentional. Therefore, the type of misconduct may automatically, according to your policy, carry a different severity level and outcome.

Awareness

Finally, awareness of academic conventions and requirements may influence what outcome is applied to the student. For example, if an assignment permits students to work in groups but then requires individual reports for assessment, this would need to be clearly explained and unambiguous or it may result in unintentional collusion. It is important to understand the context of a given assignment or unit/subject. Students who have not been given training or guidance on paraphrasing, how to cite others or present references in their work, and who have submitted an early level-one assessment, may not have developed these skills, and may be unaware that their approach was incorrect. To understand students' awareness it is often important to review the context and timing of assessment and assignment instructions and conditions.

Making your determination

Depending on the terminology in place at your institution, you will need to make a decision as to whether academic misconduct is found proven or substantiated or not, and if so, then apply an appropriate outcome.

In setting outcomes, you should take all the factors described above into account and refer to any precedent or policy guidance for how to apply outcomes. Some institutions may have a matrix to guide them on the outcome, this should be used with consideration of any mitigating factors presented by the student. It is important to remember that whether misconduct occurred is distinct from why it occurred.

When giving outcomes, whether verbally and in writing or only in writing, students must be given information on the appeal process. It is also highly recommended that details of student support services are included.

Avoiding unconscious bias

Unconscious bias can come into play for any stage of the investigation but may be particularly active during the decision-making process. Be aware of what factors influence unconscious bias, which relate to someone's protected attributes (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability) and ensure this is not influencing your decision-making process. Are you applying inequitable assumptions of what may have happened in the case because of a student's background? Would you make that decision or apply that outcome irrespective of a student's level of attainment, for example? When making your decision, although you need to take into consideration the range of factors presented above, it is important that you are not applying an unconscious, or indeed, conscious bias when making your determination. Most institutions will have an equity team, reach out to them for more information on unconscious bias or what training might be available to you and others involved in investigations or decision-making.

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