

It should not be necessary to include a section on plagiarism. But it seems that every year the biology and chemistry faculty catch some students attempting to cut corners...and in some cases those students claim not to have known that their actions were wrong.

North Central's plagiarism policy is spelled out in detail in the writing handbook given to each student. It also appears in the student handbook and in the catalog in a more abbreviated form. One key point of that policy is that **students are responsible for understanding the policy and can be penalized even if they do not know the policy and even if the violation was unintentional.**

Just like cheating on a boyfriend/girlfriend, academic dishonesty violates the relationship of trust between you and your instructor—one that will be difficult if not impossible to rebuild. We realize that most cheaters don't intend to be cheaters. Most are decent, normal students that (1) get themselves into a bad situation—way behind on assignments, for example—and start feeling desperate, and (2) don't fully comprehend the consequences of their actions. But we have a responsibility to ensure that students who get a biology or biochemistry degree from North Central have genuinely met the qualifications for that degree. So, we must take all forms of plagiarism very, very seriously and respond appropriately.

If you feel desperate, *please talk to us!* Talk to your instructor, your advisor, someone in student services...but please don't resort to plagiarism in any form. If you do and you are caught, you will not get off with a warning. The minimum penalty that would be imposed in most cases would be a zero on the exam or assignment in question. If the plagiarism is serious, you could fail the course even if it is your first offense. Any plagiarism incident, no matter how minor, will be reported to the Dean of Faculty and will become a part of your permanent academic record. If you already have one offense on your record, even a small infraction could result in being dismissed from the college, either for a specified time or permanently.

If someone plagiarizes and is not caught, it not only cheapens his/her education, but also yours. If you suspect another student of cheating, please do not hesitate to inform your instructor. Protecting a fellow student does not help you or him/her in any way.

Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- *Use of source material in a term paper or lab report without giving proper credit to the author.*  
This includes materials taken from published sources, the Internet or even other students, and it is plagiarism even if you did not intend to pass off others' work as your own.
- *Use of another student's laboratory data without the specific approval of your instructor.*  
If, for example, you are ill and miss a lab, your instructor might suggest that you analyze another group's data. But for you to obtain someone else's data behind your instructor's back and include it in a lab write-up as if it were yours would be a serious case of academic dishonesty.
- *Any alteration of data or reporting of data you did not actually obtain yourself.*  
This is a major violation of scientific ethics—the kind that can get someone fired, in the world of academic or corporate science. Never try to compensate for missing a lab or for data that you don't think came out “right” by “fudging” the data!
- *Taking answers from another student's exam or quiz, with or without his/her knowledge, or allowing someone to take answers from your exam.*
- *Receiving or giving any inappropriate or unauthorized information about the contents of an exam.*  
For example, if you take an exam early for some reason and then share information with others, both parties are guilty of plagiarism. If a faculty member chooses not to return old exams, then giving or receiving information about past years' questions would also be dishonest.
- *Discussing a take-home exam whose instructions prohibit collaboration*

- *Collaborating on the writing of a lab report which is intended to be an individual effort.*

It is perfectly acceptable for lab partners to work together in understanding and analyzing data and discussing conclusions. It is not acceptable, however, for two lab partners to turn in lab reports that are identical or nearly identical. Work together on understanding the material, but do your own writing and make your own figures.

- *Basing a lab report on what your lab partner (or another student) has already written, even if you change some words.*
- *Turning in a lab report in an attempt to obtain credit for a lab which you did not actually attend*  
Any lab absence must always be resolved with your instructor in advance.
- *Citing a source that you did not actually obtain and read.*

In researching a term paper, it is not sufficient to read an online abstract of an article. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to read a review article and cite in your paper one of the articles cited in the review's bibliography—you would either have to cite the review or obtain and read the original article.

- *Using graphs or tables constructed by another student in a lab report.*

Unless you have explicit permission to do otherwise, each lab partner should use the raw data to construct his or her own graphs. Borrowing a computer file and modifying a graph to look like your own is insufficient. In some cases, an instructor may specifically allow lab partners to collaborate and turn in a single set of graphs.

Often, you will need to review and summarize information that you read in a journal article or textbook when preparing a report for your biology or chemistry classes. Be careful not to lift sentences (or parts of sentences) from the journal article and directly use them in your paper. **Changing a word or two or reorganizing a sentence is not a sufficient change.** You need to *read and understand* the contents of the journal article and then present it in *your own words*. (The *North Central College Guide to Writing, Documentation and Information Resources* has more on this topic.) Consider the following example:

original research article:

Deletion of any one or all three of the CAC genes is not lethal, indicating that there must be other activities in *S. cerevisiae* capable of chromatin assembly.

term paper #1:

Loss of any one or all three of the CAC genes is not lethal, showing that there must be other activities in *S. cerevisiae* capable of chromatin assembly.

term paper #2:

We know that there must be other activities in *S. cerevisiae* capable of chromatin assembly, because deletion of any one or all three of the CAC genes is not lethal.

term paper #3:

Losing the function of CAC1, CAC2 and/or CAC3 still leaves a viable yeast cell. Thus, we can conclude that there must be at least one other mechanism to assemble chromatin.

The author of term paper #1 is guilty of plagiarism! He did not gain an understanding of the material and then describe what he knows in his own words: he used the original authors' thoughts and just changed two words to synonyms. Even a re-organization, such as term paper #2, is still plagiarism. This author modified the language, but the core idea was simply stolen intact. Term paper #3 makes an appropriate use of the source material; its author thought about the idea being communicated and explained it in words that are truly her own. If you aren't clear on what the paper is saying, ask your instructor to help you get the understanding you need.