

# Tech Snacks: Cheating & Plagiarism

## How to catch it, how to prevent it

According to survey data gathered over a decade by researcher Dr. Donald McCabe, about 68% of college undergraduates and 43% of graduate students admit to cheating on a test or written assignment at some point in their college career.<sup>1</sup> How can we identify cheating, prevent it from happening, and cultivate a culture of academic integrity?

### Plagiarism

**Basic plagiarism** — Using text, information, or ideas without crediting the original source is usually clear-cut. Most students know that copying and pasting un-cited text is a form of cheating, but many students have never been taught that taking information or ideas is also plagiarism.

**How to catch it** — Enabling TurnItIn on all Assignment folders will compare every submitted document to a database of articles, websites, *and* all previous student work submitted to other TurnItIn-enabled folders. Once enabled, you'll see a percentage score next to each student submission. Clicking on the percentage score will open up a new window that shows the source of each potentially plagiarized text. **Important note: Beware of false positives! Properly cited material will still be highlighted, so don't always assume that a high percentage of non-original content means the student is plagiarizing. Be sure to review TurnItIn's report, and contact Jason or Caleb if you're unsure of anything.**

**Recycling (or borrowing) older work** — Students will sometimes reuse previous assignments from other courses, which can be hard to detect since students are simply reusing their own writing. They may also “borrow” a paper from a friend who took the class in an earlier semester, and submit it in whole or in part as their own work. Often the friend won't even realize that they're helping someone cheat.

**How to catch it** — TurnItIn is also effective at identifying recycled work, *if multiple instructors are using it consistently*. If a student submits a paper that has already been submitted to another TurnItIn-enabled course, you'll be able to see the source student, semester, and course.

**Contract plagiarism** — Paying another student (or using a paid paper-writing website) to write a paper is more common than you might realize. Contract papers are often fully original work and may not be caught by TurnItIn.

**How to catch it** — Look for vagueness and linguistic quirks that “don't feel right.” Because the actual writer doesn't have all the context for the assignment, the writing may be extremely vague, the thesis or concepts may seem to go nowhere, and the citations may be odd or generic. Many online contract writers are not from the United States, so idioms may be used incorrectly or sentence structure may seem off. Every writer has their own unique “voice,” so comparing a suspect paper to prior writing samples can be helpful.

### How to prevent plagiarism

- Assign small writing activities early in the semester in order to collect writing samples.
- Scaffold major writing assignments: require topic proposals, annotated bibliographies, outlines, intro paragraphs, and drafts.
- Emphasize “process over product” to reduce student pressure and anxiety.
- Personalize writing prompts, have students write about their own experiences and opinions.
- Assign in-class writing when appropriate, like having students work on an outline or an introduction.
- Consider talking about plagiarism in class at the start of the semester, especially in introductory courses. Connect academic integrity with “real world” examples of professionals and politicians tainted by plagiarism scandals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics. (2017). *International Center for Academic Integrity*. Retrieved from <https://academicintegrity.org/statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> Martin, J. (2014, October 10). Plagiarism Costs Degree for Senator John Walsh. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/11/us/politics/plagiarism-costs-degree-for-senator-john-walsh.html>

## Test cheating

**“Study Guide” Websites** — Any questions created by textbook publishers are inevitably available online (with answer keys) on sites like CourseHero and Quizlet. Try doing a google search for one of your quiz questions, and see what comes up.

**How to catch it** — If the test questions and answers you’re relying on are readily available online, it can be hard to prove that a student was cheating. The best defense is to review your question banks and see if any of them are coming up in online searches. If so, you need to re-write your questions.

**Waiting for answers** — Since most instructors give students a multiple-day window to take quizzes, students will sometimes wait until another student has taken the quiz, and then get the answers from the first student. Students will sometimes coordinate taking turns being the “sacrificial test taker,” and then share the correct answers with a group of students.

**How to catch it** — Again, this can be difficult to catch or prove. Make sure your quiz Submission Views are set up in a way that prevents answer sharing in the first place. Set your quiz Submission Views so that students aren’t shown the answers to questions they got wrong, or shown which answers what they got right.

**Collusion** — Students will sometimes meet and take their quizzes simultaneously, so they can share answers back and forth. Even if students are at different locations, they can use phones or online messaging to work on quizzes or other assignments together.

**How to catch it** — Test collusion can sometimes be detected by looking at quiz event logs in Brightspace and seeing if students are taking their quizzes at the same time. Contact Caleb or Jason if you suspect quiz cheating. We can look at data like IP addresses and login times to determine if students are working in the same location or at the same time.

## How to prevent test cheating

- Use quizzes for formative assessment rather than high-stakes summative assessment.
- When creating multiple-choice questions, check “Randomize answers for each student.”
- When creating a quiz, check “Shuffle questions at the quiz level.”
- Create a larger pool of questions in the Question Library, then pull a random subset of those questions for each quiz attempt, so each student gets a different set of questions.
- If you’re relying on publisher test banks, consider rewriting questions or answers enough that the student can’t simply google the answer key.
- Double-check Submission Views to be sure students aren’t being shown the answers.
- Better yet, write your own questions, and include Written Response questions that students have to answer in their own words.

## Creating a culture of academic integrity in your class

In many cases, students understand that many behaviors count as cheating, but may be more confused on some specifics. Behaviors like work sharing and paraphrasing are considered cheating in college, but may not be considered cheating in high school. Consider taking time at the start of the semester or before major projects — especially in intro-level courses — to **talk about what is and is not acceptable academic behavior**.

Asking students to **take an academic integrity quiz** or sign an integrity pledge at the start of the semester can be surprisingly effective. Behavioral research has shown that having students interact with an integrity pledge before taking a test significantly reduces the incidence of cheating<sup>3</sup>.

Some universities have campus-wide **honor codes** that students are expected to read and agree to during orientation. Northern does not, but individual departments and instructors can create their own. You might even consider working with students at the start of each semester to co-create an honor code, giving them a greater sense of buy-in.

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<sup>3</sup> Shu, L. L., Gino, F., & Bazerman, M. H. (2011). Dishonest Deed, Clear Conscience: When Cheating Leads to Moral Disengagement and Motivated Forgetting. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(3), 330-349.