

Misconduct



Being told that your work is under investigation for misconduct can feel overwhelming. It's easy to panic, but the process is not designed to punish students harshly for one mistake.

Instead, the university wants to understand what happened and decide on a fair outcome. This guide will help you prepare a written submission if you've been asked for one.

What is Misconduct?

At university, misconduct is a broad term. It doesn't only mean deliberately cheating or buying an assignment. It refers to situations where your submitted work gives a misleading impression about who created it. Sometimes that is the result of deliberate dishonesty, but often it comes from mistakes, confusion, or lack of care.

Examples include not acknowledging the source of key ideas, copying from another student or the internet, re-using work you submitted in another subject, or having so many referencing errors that it isn't clear what your own contribution is. Misconduct can also mean working too closely with others on a task that was meant to be done independently.

It's important to understand that you don't have to intend to cheat to be found guilty of misconduct. Even if you were unaware at the time, the university may still decide that your work doesn't meet academic standards. That's why giving context about how you completed the task is so important in your response.

Understanding What's Happening

When a staff member suspects misconduct, they must report it to a Senior Officer. The Senior Officer then decides whether to meet with you or ask for a written response. If you have been asked for a written submission, it usually means they think the evidence looks clear and straightforward. For example, they may have a Turnitin report showing that parts of your work closely match other sources.

It's important to remember that this is not about proving you guilty 'beyond reasonable doubt' like in a court case. Instead, the decision is based on what seems most likely given the evidence. If you don't explain what happened, the Senior Officer may assume the worst.

What to Aim for in Your Submission

Your main goal is to give a clear picture of how your work came to look the way it does. This doesn't mean writing excuses or simply denying the problem. It means



showing the process you went through, the challenges you faced, and why any mistakes happened. The Senior Officer can only make a fair decision if you provide enough detail for them to understand your situation.

Try to be genuine and personal in your explanation. A short, polished statement that simply says 'I take integrity seriously' won't help much. Instead, describe in your own words what happened when you were completing the task.

How to Prepare

Before writing anything, read carefully through the evidence the university has sent you. This usually includes the assessment instructions, a Turnitin report or other evidence of similarities, and the official notice of allegation. Pay special attention to the summary of concerns as this is what you need to respond to directly.

Think about your study process for that task. Did you take notes, draft, revise, or use reference material? How did you keep track of your sources? Were you dealing with stress, illness, or personal problems at the time? Explaining these things shows that you did attempt the work independently, even if mistakes were made.

If you realise you misunderstood the task or the expectations for referencing, say so clearly. It is better to explain how the misunderstanding happened than to leave the Senior Officer guessing.

How to Write Your Response

Write in plain language and focus on what happened. It doesn't need to be perfect or formal, it just needs to be honest and detailed.

You should:

- Explain what the task involved and how you went about completing it
- Describe any difficulties (personal, health, or academic) that affected your study
- Acknowledge the problems in your work rather than denying them
- Show how you normally approach your study and why this situation was different
- Explain what you will do in future to prevent the same issue from happening again.

If mental health, stress, or personal circumstances played a role, it is fine to mention this. In fact, it can help show that the problem was situational, not deliberate dishonesty. The key is to make the link clear: describe how these issues affected your judgement, concentration, or organisation, and how that led to mistakes in your work.

Don't simply deny that there is a problem, as the evidence usually shows that something has gone wrong. Don't just write a short statement with no detail. And don't bargain about penalties ('I'll accept a zero grade for the assignment if you don't fail me for the course'). The Senior Officer must make their decision based on the facts you give them, not negotiation.

Possible Outcomes

Senior Officers have a range of penalties available to them, which range through:

- Giving a formal written warning
- Requiring you to resubmit
- Capping marks for or failing an assessment.
- Failing a course (or courses where appropriate), up to
- Suspending a student for a semester.

For a first finding of misconduct, the most common outcome is a fail grade for the assessment task. More serious penalties, such as failing a whole course or suspension, are rare and usually reserved for repeated or deliberate cheating.

The university is mainly concerned with whether your work can be marked fairly as your own. Penalties are treated as confidential and do not appear on your transcript. You also have the right to appeal if you think the decision is unfair.

When to Attend a Hearing Instead

While it can feel intimidating to attend an in-person hearing, when there are complex circumstances it can be better than trying to explain the situation in a letter. A hearing with the Senior Officer allows you to have a conversation in which you can add information as needed.

You have the right to bring a support person to attend the hearing with you. This can be one of our Student Rights Officers, who can also make contributions on your behalf, but hearings are not a court process where lawyers or advocates do all the talking. The senior officer will expect to hear from you and will ask you questions. It is best for you to explain your case with support from us if you get stuck or need help summarising the issues.

Final Advice

The best thing you can do is to be clear, detailed, and genuine. Show that you understand what went wrong, explain the context, and outline how you will avoid the problem in the future. A rough but honest submission is usually more convincing than a perfectly written one that avoids the real issues.

Remember: the purpose of the process is not to label you as a cheat but to deal with problems in your work. By taking responsibility and being open about what happened, you give yourself the best chance of a fair and reasonable outcome.

Further Information

To find out more, or get in touch with the RUSU Student Rights Team at:

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