

Allegations of academic misconduct: what you need to know



Academic Skills Quick Guide

If you face an allegation of academic misconduct it is important to get informed, gain clarification, reach out for support, and exercise your rights. The first half of this guide explains what you need to **know** and **do** if you are an SCU coursework student facing an allegation of academic misconduct. The remainder of the guide details the SCU process for managing allegations of academic misconduct about coursework students. Understanding how this process works will help you navigate this situation and exercise your rights.

What you need to know

Don't panic

Having an allegation of academic misconduct made about your assignment or exam can be shocking, and stressful. Remember, just because an allegation has been made does not *necessarily* mean academic misconduct has occurred. The matter needs to be impartially investigated, and you have the right to provide evidence and your side of events during this process. The Student Advocacy Service is available on all campuses, providing a free, impartial and confidential service that can assist you in the first instance, and support you through the process.

SCU prioritises student privacy and procedural fairness

SCU understands the process of being investigated for academic misconduct can be difficult for students, and that student reputations can be easily damaged if strict confidentiality is not maintained. The process for managing cases of suspected academic misconduct is based upon protecting student confidentiality and ensuring procedural fairness.

SCU takes an educative approach to academic misconduct

At SCU the goal is to make sure students understand what academic misconduct is, and have the skills to avoid it. The University understands that none of us are born knowing how to write academically, and that it takes time and support for new students to learn how to follow disciplinary writing conventions. At the same time, new students are expected to pro-actively find and use guidance provided about how to reference, paraphrase, quote and summarise sources correctly, and clearly show where their work ends and others' work begins.

As part of the educative approach taken at SCU it is common for new students with no previous allegations of academic misconduct to be given the penalty of resubmitting the assignment while working with staff from Academic Skills. This penalty is based upon the idea that new students need to be given a chance to learn how to write in their discipline and practise academic integrity. Resubmitting the assignment is viewed as an opportunity for the student to develop a tool box of academic writing skills, and regain their study confidence. Of course, a number of factors are taken into account when penalties are decided including study experience, number of allegations, and seriousness of the academic misconduct.

Remember, an allegation of academic misconduct is not a judgement about your character, or you as a person

When a teacher, marker, or Unit Assessor makes an allegation of academic misconduct they are making a judgement about an **assignment/exam**. They make the allegation because they believe **academic misconduct is evident in the assessment task**. They are **not** making a judgement about the student as a person, nor their values, or conduct.

This means there is no reason to feel embarrassed or awkward if an allegation of academic misconduct is made about your assignment/exam.

While a tutor/marker or UA makes an allegation of academic misconduct they do not carry out the investigation

If your Unit Assessor, tutor or marker suspects academic misconduct has occurred they forward the 'allegation' along with evidence/reasons to your School/College Academic Integrity Officer for investigation. It will be the School/College Academic Integrity Officer who will let you know an allegation has been made, and they will investigate the matter.

Understand your rights

Make sure you **get informed** about the process at SCU for managing allegations of student academic misconduct and **exercise your rights**. As an SCU student you have a range of rights when an allegation of academic misconduct is made. You have rights in relation to **how** the investigation is conducted, as well as any **outcomes** of the investigation. You also have access to appeals processes.

You are entitled to:

- Student Advocacy support and representation
- confidentiality, and timely notification about the investigation into the allegation, and its progress
- contribute evidence to the investigation (e.g. mitigating factors, your version of events and so on)
- bring along a Student Advocate or other support person if you decide to provide evidence in person
- challenge a determination and/or penalty, or how the investigation was conducted if you are unsatisfied.

Check out the relevant SCU policy: [Academic and non-academic rules](#)

Make sure you access support about how to interpret originality reports

Turnitin originality reports are often offered as evidence by tutors/Unit Assessors when referring student work for investigation. Turnitin does not detect plagiarism. It is a text-matching software. It detects levels of matched-text in assignments, and then we, as students and teachers, need to interpret the matched-text to see if sources have been used appropriately or not.

Understanding how to interpret the originality report is essential for all SCU students. Using the originality report at the final editing phase can help students double-check their use of paraphrases, quotes and referencing.

If you are being investigated for suspected academic misconduct and the originality report is being used as evidence, it is very important that you understand how Turnitin works, and how to interpret the originality report.

We often learn more from our 'mistakes' than our 'successes'

If it turns out your assignment or exam does breach academic integrity (even with mitigating circumstances) try to treat the situation as a learning opportunity. Try to treat the situation as a chance to learn **how to write in your discipline** and develop a 'tool box' of writing skills.

What you need to do

Exercise your rights

Don't be afraid of the academic misconduct investigation process. Instead, it can help to be proactive and exercise your rights. You can get in touch with the School Academic Integrity Officer to ask questions or gain clarification about the 'allegation'. It is also a good idea to offer evidence (e.g. mitigating factors such as limited study experience) and participate in the process.

Get in touch early with the SCU Student Advocacy Service for practical advice and support

The [SCU Student Advocacy Service](#) offers a free, confidential service to SCU students. They advocate **for** student rights and needs, and provide practical advice regarding SCU policy and processes.

The service can help you better understand your rights, and if you wish, you can ask them to act as a support person.

If you think you could benefit from talking to someone from the Student Advocacy Service, don't put off making contact. Ideally, **get in touch the day you receive your Notification Letter**.

You have 10 working days from the date the Notification Letter was sent to submit a written response

You have **10 working days** from the date the Notification Letter was sent (not the date you read it) to submit a written response and participate in the investigation process. Getting in touch with the School Academic Integrity Officer to ask questions and gain clarification is a good first step. You might elect to come along to a hearing to give evidence and your side of events. You can bring a Student Advocate or other support person with you to this hearing.

You have 20 working days from the date the Determination Letter was sent to have access to internal and external appeal processes.

If you are unsatisfied with how the investigation was conducted, or with the determination or penalty, you can access an internal Appeals process. The appeal needs to be lodged within **20 working days** from the date the Determination Letter was sent (not the date you read it). Appeals need to be sent to the Head of School/College, who then undertakes an impartial investigation.

If you are unsatisfied with the outcome of the internal Appeals process managed by the Head of School, you have the right to access external appeals processes via relevant State and Commonwealth Ombudsman's Offices.

Book an individual consultation with Academic Skills to develop academic writing skills and re-gain study confidence

If the Determination Letter encourages you consult with Academic Skills staff, do be pro-active and book an individual consultation. Contact [Academic Skills](#) to find information about how to book a consultation.

SCU processes for managing academic misconduct allegations about coursework assessment tasks

STEP 1: For coursework students (e.g. non-research candidates) the process starts when their marker, tutor, or Unit Assessor suspects academic misconduct has occurred and makes an 'allegation'.

To ensure procedural fairness and student privacy, teachers, markers, and Unit Assessor **do not** investigate the matter. Instead, they refer the 'allegation' to the School/College Academic Integrity Officer. Each School and College has their own Academic Integrity Officer who investigates allegations of student academic misconduct.

STEP 2: Having received an 'allegation', the School/College Academic Integrity Officer decides, based upon the evidence provided, whether to dismiss the allegation or investigate. If they decide to investigate the student is sent a Notification Letter via their SCU student email.

The Notification Letter includes the following information:

- details of the allegation as known at that point
- the place and date of the proposed hearing
- that the student may submit a written response within 10 working days of the date the notification was sent
- that the student may communicate with the School AIO to ask questions or respond to the allegation
- that the student may bring along a Student Advocate or other support person to the hearing.

STEP 3: During the investigative process the student has the right to participate and present evidence. They might present mitigating factors (e.g. their lack of study experience, a lack of clarity/guidance about how to write in their discipline), and their perspective by attending a hearing with a Student Advocate or other support person, and/or providing a written response. During this time the student can also contact the School/College Academic Integrity Officer to ask questions and gain clarification. It is a really good idea to participate in the investigation process and exercise your educational rights.

The School/College Academic Integrity Officer understands that waiting to hear the outcome of the investigation can be stressful for students. They work with support staff to reduce the stress of uncertainty and complete investigations in a timely way while still ensuring procedural fairness.

STEP 4: At the conclusion of the investigation, based on evidence gathered, the School/College Academic Integrity Officer decides whether to dismiss or uphold the allegation of academic misconduct, and any penalties.

The School/College Academic Integrity Officer sends the student a Determination Letter to their SCU student email account.

The Determination Letter includes the following information:

- whether the allegation of academic misconduct was dismissed or upheld
- if any penalties are to be imposed
- the nature of any penalty to be imposed
- that the student has the right of appeal within **20 working days** of the Determination Letter being sent.

It is really important to closely read the Determination Letter so that you understand the situation and your rights. Also, sometimes the penalty involves resubmitting the assignment with the support of an Academic Skills staff member. Organising this support and getting work resubmitted by the new due date is important.

STEP 5: The student has **20 working days** from the date the Determination Letter was sent to lodge an appeal. There are several grounds for appeal including:

- the determination was unreasonable, or can't be supported by evidence provided
- that specific evidence needs to be considered as relevant
- that specific evidence that needs to be considered as relevant was not
- that policy (academic and non-academic misconduct rule) was wrongly interpreted and a miscarriage of justice occurred
- failure to observe procedural fairness
- an inappropriate or excessive penalty was imposed given the circumstances.

STEP 6: The Appeals process is managed by the Head of School (e.g. not the School/College Academic Integrity Officer who initially investigated the allegation of academic misconduct). The process of determining the appeal must start within **10 working days** of the appeal being lodged, and should be finalised quickly.

The Head of School can either confirm or dismiss the allegation of academic misconduct, and confirm, decrease, or increase the penalty.

Once a determination on an appeal is made the Head of School has up to 10 working days to notify the student. The notice will indicate:

- details of the determination on the appeal
- that determination is final and there are no further internal appeal processes within SCU that the student can pursue
- if the student is unsatisfied with result of conduct or outcome of the Appeals process they have the right to access external appeal processes.

STEP 7: If the student has already engaged with the SCU internal Appeals process and is unsatisfied with the process or outcome the student does have the right to appeal via the relevant State or Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office.

Remember, if you face an allegation of academic misconduct it is important to get informed, gain clarification, reach out for support early, and exercise your rights.