



AVOID CHEATING ON EXAMS

A guide for university students

Aarhus University



AVOID CHEATING AT EXAMS

Cheating at exams is an offence which is taken very seriously by Aarhus University, as it means that exam certificates issued by the university cannot be relied on as an accurate reflection of students' performance.

WHY IS CHEATING AT EXAMS A SERIOUS OFFENCE?

Your exam certificate is a guarantee issued by the university that you possess the competencies and qualifications described in the certificate. The accuracy and credibility of exam certificates is therefore of fundamental importance to the university. If you compromise the accuracy of your exam certificate by cheating, not only does it lose its value - the credibility of all of the university's exam certificates is undermined.

The reputation of your degree programme also suffers if people are unable to count on graduates possessing the qualifications their exam certificates attribute to them.

This is why cheating at exams is one of the most unacceptable offences in the academic world – and consequently an offence with severe consequences.

WHAT CONSTITUTES CHEATING AT EXAMS?

The purpose of an exam is to give the examiner(s) a real opportunity to assess your performance in a particular situation. For this to be possible, the examiner(s) must know exactly what constitutes your individual performance, and the examiner(s) must be able to count on you to do this work within the framework and according to the conditions stipulated for the individual exam.

An exam is thus a test in which you demonstrate your individual qualifications within a particular area in a performance which is delivered within a particular framework and on particular conditions.

If you or others act wrongfully in such a way as to blur, in the eyes of the examiner(s), what constitutes your performance, or if you deliver your performance on conditions other than those assumed by the examiner(s), you are cheating to obtain an incorrect assessment – and this is what we understand by cheating at exams.

So, cheating at exams is wrongful acts on your part or on the part of others which change the framework and the conditions for your performance, or which mean that the performance is not suitable as a basis for assessing your individual qualifications.

SITUATIONS TO AVOID

A number of examples of what constitutes cheating at exams are described below. Please note that these are only examples, and that acts not mentioned here may still constitute cheating.

If in doubt, ask yourself the following two questions:

1. Does this performance reflect my own qualifications?

If, for example, you copy the words of an author who has written something on the topic of your exam paper, the performance will reflect this author's qualifications – not your own. So the mark awarded by the examiner(s) will be a mark for the author and not for you.

2. Am I working within the prescribed framework and the conditions?

If, for example, you use works of reference in an exam where no aids are permitted, the examiner(s) may be led to believe that you possess extraordinary active knowledge – but the mark awarded will be for the works of reference, not you.

AIDING AND ABETTING

Cheating at your own exam is not the only punishable offence. Helping other students cheat at their exams is illegal as well.

If, for example, you write your own paper at a written exam and then pass your paper on to a fellow student in the same room, this constitutes cheating on your part – even if the other student chooses not to take advantage of the opportunity to cheat by using your paper.

PLAGIARISM

Typical plagiarism is when “you imitate or copy texts written by other people without citing the source or indicating that the text is a quotation or a summary rewrite.” (Translated quote from Hanne Leth Andersen and Jens Toftskov: *Eksamen og eksamensformer. Betydning og bedømmelse*. Samfundslitteratur, 2008).

Plagiarism is a complex concept. In the context of an exam, plagiarism is when you insert a text, illustration, structure, idea etc. into your paper as if it were your own work, when in fact it has not.

Using texts and ideas produced or conceived by others does not in itself constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism only arises when the examiner(s) are led to believe that you are the author or originator. So, you must be very careful to indicate – by means of quotation marks, source references and bibliographies – where texts and ideas come from.

It is often easy to find texts on the internet which are relevant to an exam paper. Books, articles and papers by other students can also be relevant. If you observe the rules on how to treat sources, so that the examiner(s) are never in doubt about the origins of the material, then you will not run into problems to do with cheating.

So if you very clearly indicate whenever something is not your own work, it can never constitute cheating, no matter how much you quote or use other people's work in your paper. Whether it's a good idea to take citation to an extreme is a different question. You cannot expect to earn a high mark if you use quotations excessively.

- If you copy – directly or in a slightly reworded version – another person's old paper or a source which you have found on the internet without indicating that this is what you are doing, you are guilty of plagiarism.
- But if you use quotation marks and indicate the source which you have used, this is not cheating. However, the more use you make of old papers, the poorer your own paper may be. Only your own text and your own use of the sources are assessed.
- You are free to use notes which have been put together jointly by your study group. But as the notes are not your own, but authored by the group, you must clearly indicate the source. If you write the group's joint notes into your own paper without indicating that this is what you are doing, you are guilty of plagiarism.
- Be careful when quoting from a textbook used in a course. Even though you may think that the examiner knows the book, you must still use quotation marks and source references. A textbook is a source just like any other.
- There are borderline cases where you may be in doubt about the need to quote sources. In some fields, there may be models which are such banal basic knowledge that you can use them in your paper without further explanation. But if ever you are in doubt, always quote the source.

GROUP WORK AND EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

Students are often encouraged to work in groups in many learning contexts. Therefore, it's important to understand that the exam situation, which requires an individual performance, is something different.

It is important that you write your own assignment that can form the basis for an individual assessment. If you allow someone else to write some or all of your exam, the performance which is being assessed is not yours. This is cheating at an exam.

If you and a group of fellow examinees discuss a take-home exam, it's important that you do the work called for in the exam yourself. Otherwise, you are guilty of cheating, because your examiner has no way of knowing what constitutes work.

- If you and a fellow student sit down together to do a take-home assignment - so that you write part of the assignment and your fellow student writes another part - you are guilty of cheating.
- Sitting separately, but exchanging texts for mutual inspiration or direct insertion into your papers, also constitutes cheating.
- If you submit a group paper for an exam which requires that you clearly indicate who has written what, submitted someone else's work as your own constitutes cheating.

ILLEGAL CONTACT

In connection with on-site written exams, any contact with other students sitting the exam or persons outside the exam room is regarded as cheating, regardless of whether you are communicating about the exam paper or not.

- Sending or receiving an email on your PC or laptop at an on-site written exam you are in contact with others— and this constitutes cheating, regardless of the contents of the email.

PROHIBITED AIDS

If you write a paper on conditions other than those permitted, the basis on which you are assessed will be wrong – the examiner(s) will, of course, assume that you have complied with the rules. If, for example, restrictions apply to the aids permitted – either no aids are allowed or only certain ones may be used – you are guilty of cheating if you do not observe these restrictions.

- If no aids are permitted, bringing a book of formulas or a dictionary with you constitutes cheating. This is cheating at an exam.
- It is also cheating if you prepare cheat sheets at home in advance for use at an on-site written exam where no aids are permitted.
- If only calculators of a certain type are permitted, bringing a more sophisticated calculator with you constitutes cheating.

REUSE OF YOUR OWN PREVIOUS PAPERS

If you reuse texts etc. produced or used by you at another exam, you must clearly state your source, exactly as described in the section on plagiarism. Not doing so is cheating.

Reusing text cannot be considered plagiarism, as the material is your own. But as you have used the material in an earlier exam, it should not be included again in the assessment of your performance this time. So, you are free to use it in your paper, but it must be clear to the examiner(s) that the material comes from an external source.

- You are free to use parts of your own old papers, provided that you state the source. Your use of your own material will be assessed in the same way as your uses of sources in general.

FALSIFYING DATA

If, as part of a paper, you are asked to gather empirical data, ‘inventing’ data is tantamount to falsification, which is classified as cheating. By falsifying data, you are not complying with the conditions for the exam as the gathering of data constitutes part of the assignment, and you are also falsifying the results.

- If you need 40 responses for a statistical survey, and you only manage to find 30 respondents, then the thing to do is not to compose the remaining responses yourself. This is cheating at an exam.
- Or if four of the responses do not support your hypothesis, hiding them is complete-

ly unacceptable. That too would constitute cheating.

FAILURE TO MEET DEADLINES

You must comply with the deadline stipulated for the exam. Time is a factor in the assessment of exam performance, so if you continuing to work on your paper after the end of the exam period, the basis for assessment will be wrong. That is why failure to meet deadlines is a form of cheating.

- So if, at an on-site written exam, you continue to work on your paper for fifteen minutes after the official of the exam, you are cheating.
- If you somehow manage, after having submitted your paper, to make changes or additions to it, this constitutes cheating. For the sole reason that you have exceeded the time allotted for the exam. The fact that help from external parties may also be involved is another matter.

ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXAM QUESTION

If you become acquainted with the exam question in advance and still sit the exam, you are guilty of cheating. In this situation, you have more time to do the exam than assumed in the exam conditions. Furthermore in the period leading up to the official start of the exam, you are working under conditions other than those stipulated.

- If you receive information about the exam question in advance through an error, you may not participate in the exam. This would constitute cheating, no matter whose fault it is. If the fault lies with the university, you will be offered a new chance to sit the exam.

INCORRECT ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

For some courses, attendance is compulsory. This means that attendance is regarded as part of the exam. Providing incorrect information about attendance therefore constitutes cheating.

- If you indicate on the class roster that you were present when you were not, you are cheating at an exam. This is also true if you get someone else to put down your name.
- If you put another student down on the class roster as present when this is not the case, you are aiding and abetting cheating at an exam.

WHEN IN DOUBT, **ASK!**

The examples described here are typical examples of cheating at exams. But naturally, situations will arise which are not described here.

Therefore, if you have the slightest doubt about the rules on cheating at exams, ask in advance. Ask your instructor, your supervisor or your examiner.