

Student Guide

How to avoid academic misconduct in Final Online Assessment (FOA)



What is Final Online Assessment (FOA)?

A Final Online Assessment (FOA) is a time limited individual assessment that is scheduled during the Exam and Assessment diet. Unlike a final examination, FOAs are not invigilated, and you can complete the assessment in a location of your choice, nevertheless, it is essential that you practice proper academic and professional conduct, and act with integrity and honesty. This means that you must complete the assessment yourself, using your own words and without contracting third party assistance, or colluding with anyone else, or misuse of generative artificial intelligence tools during the assessment period.

All the assessments for Online students will be in the format of Final Online Assessment (FOA) and some on-campus students will also have FOAs. The duration of the assessments will be published on the Assessment Timetable. To learn more about how to access the FOA on the University's Virtual Learning Environment and how to upload your assessment response refer to HWU's Technical Guide. For Heriot-Watt Online students, you can [access](#) the same information through the EBS Student Portal and Programme Hubs.

Academic Integrity Matters

At Heriot-Watt University (HWU) we adopt the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI) definition of Academic Integrity: 'a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage'. Failure to act with integrity demonstrates a lack of these fundamental qualities, qualities that we value highly at HWU, as do your future employers. So, it is vital that you and your peers uphold these values and avoid all types of academic misconduct. HWU academic integrity [website](#) provides more details to learn about [why academic integrity matters](#).

How to avoid Academic Misconduct

The University defines [academic misconduct](#) as any action or attempted action that may result in a student or group of students obtaining an unfair academic advantage in formal University assessment, or any activity likely to undermine the integrity essential to scholarship and research. You can learn more about academic misconduct and definitions of types of academic misconduct from this [website](#). The present guide is prepared to help students taking FOAs, with some guidance to avoid academic misconduct.

1. Understand what Academic Misconduct is

- 1.1. Read the University [Policy](#) on Student Academic Misconduct. Ensure that you understand different types of [academic misconduct](#) such as: Plagiarism, Self-Plagiarism, Collusion and Contract Cheating, they all apply equally to FOAs as they do to other types of assessed coursework. It is your responsibility to access, read, and understand this policy – ignorance is not an acceptable excuse.

2. Help us to protect the value of your degree

- 2.1. If you have been approached by someone about, or you know of someone engaged in, an act of potential academic misconduct, please contact in confidence the University Student Conduct Office (conduct@hw.ac.uk) or the Student Advice Hub (advice.hub@hw.ac.uk).

3. Prepare for the Assessment

- 3.1. Regardless of the type of assessment, you will need to prepare and plan in advance. A FOA is not an exception, and although it is open book, it is time limited, and therefore you will also need to prepare in advance. Good preparation leading to sound knowledge and understanding will give you the confidence to write in your own words and avoid the pressures that so often lead to academic misconduct.
- 3.2. [Skills Hub](#) organises [Time Management Skill](#) workshops that will help you manage your time more efficient during semester and also with your assessment preparations. They can be accessed via [Programme Hubs](#) too for HWU Online students.
- 3.3. Although you will have access to your notes, books, and the internet during a FOA, it is still essential to revise the course content, and bookmark resources in your notes. The Skills Hub provide more advice on preparing for an open-book assessment.

4. Avoid Plagiarism

- 4.1. During most open-book assessments, you are allowed to consult any books or articles, any notes you've made on the course, as well as the internet. However, you must not copy the words of others from any of these sources. Use your own words.
- 4.2. If you feel it is useful to quote the words from a book, article, or relevant website, or other sources, then you **must** cite the original author, provide the correct reference in the reference list and use proper in-text citation style such as [Harvard](#) or [IEEE](#), and use speech marks, following the required referencing style. This applies equally to essay-based *and* numeracy-based assessments. If in doubt about referencing, then you should go to the '[Skills Hub](#)' and view the resources on citation and referencing or attend one of their workshops to learn more.
- 4.3. If you are completing an essay-type assessment, you must reference material as you would for any coursework and assessment. This extends to also include images and photos, for such cases reverse image and video searches to locate any data which has not been referenced correctly can be used. You must cite (provide reference for) any materials you use, such as lecture notes, tutorial notes, supporting materials on VLE or Student Portals, textbooks, websites, journal, or conference articles whether shared as part of the course materials or you find on university or other databases. If in doubt about referencing, you can find [avoiding plagiarism guide](#) and our Skills Hub for referencing page useful.
- 4.4. [Guidance on plagiarism](#), and information about how the University responds to evidence of plagiarism, [Information about how the University responds to evidence of academic misconduct](#), and the [University's Student Academic Misconduct Policy](#) are all available on the University website and all can be accessed through the hyperlinks provided in this paragraph.
- 4.5. Do not pass off Generative Artificial Intelligence-generated content (such as ChatGPT, OpenArt, etc.) as your own. If you do use any generative artificial intelligence content creation tool to develop your assessment, you should first seek advice from your course team and lecturer whether this is acceptable and allowed in your assessment or not and to ensure that you identify which parts of the assessment were created in this way, if allowed. Acknowledging your sources is a key aspect of good academic practice and protecting academic integrity. You can find guidance on how to cite and reference generative artificial intelligence tools [here](#).
- 4.6. During your assessment it is important that you use software and applications which do not compromise the integrity of your submission. It is strongly advised that you only use University supported software. If you are unsure, you should seek guidance from your course team. The specific assessment instruction provided to you by your course team should also highlight more details, when relevant.
- 4.7. The University's supported software for similarity checking is [Turnitin](#), third-party unauthorised sites can be misleading, insecure, and in extreme cases lead to extortion. You are encouraged to engage with our existing support and guidance developed by the [Information Services \(IS\) Skills Hub](#) team to develop [your academic writing knowledge and skills](#), and to contact your Course Leader for guidance.
- 4.8. You have access to the full office365 suite, which includes Editor in MS Word, this is not dissimilar to the spelling, grammar and tone functionality offered by online tools. The MS office 365 suite of tools is free to HWU students and readily available.

5. Avoid unintentional Plagiarism

- 5.1. As mentioned above, during some assessments, you are allowed to consult your own notes and, any of the course materials, such as lecture slides, images, drawings, and recordings. If you are not diligent then this can result in plagiarism. For example, if the course notes you have prepared include sentences extracted from the work of others, e.g., books, journal articles, websites, and you have then forgotten that your notes are not entirely written in your own words, then you may end up reproducing the words of others in your submission without proper acknowledgement. Even if this is unintentional, this is classified as plagiarism and a breach of academic integrity. It is important to consider when taking inspiration from a source to ensure this is presented in your own words as if you are explaining it to someone else. Avoid taking direct copies with little or no change to the original.

6. Avoid Self-Plagiarism

- 6.1. Do not submit or use any previous work within a new assessment which you have previously submitted at HWU, any other institution, or for postgraduate students in your previous institution. This includes, an entire assignment, copying or paraphrasing content, or recycling data, style, concepts, drawings, designs, building plans or research. Whether intentional or not this is considered self-plagiarism. Note, this is particularly important if you are repeating/reattending a course. Always follow your course team instructions and consult with them.
- 6.2. For students in the School of Textiles and Design (SoTD) particularly: you may wish to develop upon concepts and designs from previous projects, or develop a longer running project, however this must be carefully communicated with staff and referenced correctly and complimented with new data.

7. Avoid Collusion

- 7.1. Do not share or discuss your questions or answers with anyone else (including on social media and on messaging services) even if others promise not to copy your work. You should ensure that the assessment instructions are adhered to. Even if you have done all the work on your own, if you share all or part of it with others, it will be treated as collusion.

8. Avoid Contract Cheating

- 8.1. Do not be tempted to 'Google' or search for a question or answer online. If you access an online service (e.g., an 'essay mill') to upload a question OR to look at an answer, you run the risk of being detected and therefore suspected of contract cheating or plagiarism, even if you do not copy the answer into your submission. Do not seek assistance from anyone else to complete any part of your assessment. Whether you pay someone or not, if you submit the work of a third party as your own then this is contract cheating.
- 8.2. Do not use websites that can lead to contract cheating such as Chegg, CourseHero, etc. Whilst these sites may advertise themselves as study aids or similar, any site which offers help with writing some or all your assessment or requiring you to upload material produced by Heriot-Watt University staff such as exam papers, lecture notes, PowerPoint slides, must be avoided. If you need further support, you should engage with your personal tutor and course team members.

9. Image, drawing, design, and film citation

- 9.1. Just as with other types of resources, when using other people's images, drawings, or digital media such as films, you must reference them correctly to evidence the original source and author of the data and avoid claiming this as your own work.

10. Unable to write the assessment? Apply for Mitigating Circumstances

- 10.1. If you experience difficulties, through no fault of your own, that impact on your ability to sit the assessment, you should refer to the [Mitigating Circumstances \(MC\) Guide](#), and submit an application backed up with appropriate evidence. Never resort to cheating – this will be investigated and could result in an Invalid Grade (IG) on your degree transcript. The MC process enables you to let the University know that you were dealing with an unexpected adverse situation, and that you wish this to be considered in the marking of your assessment. It is important to read the MC Guide

and submit your application and evidence, as soon as possible. You can also visit the [Advice Hub web page](#) to access guidance and support to complete your form. You can contact the advice hub via [email](#) or speak to an advisor in person. You can find full details of the mitigating circumstances that HWU rejects/accepts in this [Mitigation Circumstances Guide](#) and instructions on how to apply for MCs on the [Mitigating Circumstances webpage](#).

11. Consequences of Academic Misconduct

- 11.1. Please be aware that the University uses sophisticated detection processes, including, but not limited to, [Turnitin similarity detection software](#), website searches and agreements with online services to provide us with upload and download data should our assessment questions or similar appear on their websites. University staff use many resources to check that your submissions do not draw from the work of others in an inappropriate way. If staff suspect that you have colluded with other students, or you have copied from another's work, or you have asked or paid for a third party to help you complete the coursework, or any other breach of academic integrity, then this will be investigated, and all suspected cases will be taken forward as a potential disciplinary matter through the University's [Student Academic Misconduct Policy](#).
- 11.2. Recent academic misconduct cases have led to assessment results being voided, i.e., a mark of zero is awarded and Invalid Grade (IG) recorded on your transcript (this stays on your HWU record) and expulsion from the University without the opportunity for an award (for the most severe cases). The University's response to evidence of plagiarism can be found on the [Plagiarism webpage](#).

Important Notes

- You may be asked to participate in a live call or in-person meeting to answer questions on your submitted script at some time after the assessment but before the date scheduled for release of results.
- If staff have reason to think that you have collaborated with other students, this will be investigated, and if proven will be treated as academic misconduct.
- The University's standard procedures for dealing with academic misconduct will apply in the case of this assessment.
- By submitting your answers, you confirm and declare the followings:
 - You declare that the work I have submitted for my Final Online Assessment (FOA) is entirely my own. I have NOT taken the ideas, writings, or inventions of another person and used these as if they were my own. My submission is expressed in my own words. Any uses made within this work of the ideas, writings, or inventions of others, or of any existing sources of information (books, journals, websites, generative artificial intelligence etc.) are properly acknowledged and listed in the references section.
 - You confirm that I have read, understood, and followed the University's Regulations on plagiarism as published on the [University's website](#), and that I am aware of the penalties that I will face should I not adhere to the University Regulations.
 - You confirm that I have read, understood, and avoided the different types of plagiarism explained in the University guidance on [Academic Integrity and Plagiarism](#).
 - You confirm that I am aware that I may be asked to participate in a live call or in-person meeting to answer questions on your submitted script at some time after the assessment but before the date scheduled for release of results.