

# I've been invited to a study group to work on a class assignment, but it is not a group assignment. If I get the other students to help me with my work, will it be collusion? Help!

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*Collaborating with others can be a great way to learn, and will help to prepare you for the workplace by building your negotiation and communication skills. However, there are also times when collaboration is not appropriate, and could result in poor academic practices or even academic misconduct. Use these tips to help you distinguish collaboration from collusion.*

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## Picture the following situation:

Someone in tutorials just emailed to say there's a group of students meeting in the library this afternoon to work on the questions for the next individual assignment task, and you're invited. There are some super smart people in the group and you would really like to go, as you think reading the others' answers and maybe copying down a few phrases or a couple of paragraphs could help you to get a better mark.

### Should you go?

No! Your intention seems to be to take other people's ideas and use them as your own. Copying ideas, phrases, or paragraphs from other students without acknowledgement is not permitted.

You may think you will get a better mark if you copy from others, but you would either have to reference the student whose ideas you used or you would risk academic misconduct: lecturers are good at telling when unauthorised collaboration has taken place.

Talking, debating, and discussing broad ideas is encouraged at the University, and some lecturers actively encourage students to give each other feedback on their work before submitting. However, there are times when it is not appropriate to work with others or use others to help you with your work.

**If ever in doubt:** work alone, or check with your lecturer.

The line between collaboration and collusion can sometimes be confusing, so let's look at this issue in more detail.

## What is collaboration?

Collaboration in the context of university studies means working with others, or receiving assistance from someone (such as another student, friend, or parent), in order to complete an assessment task or learning activity. Collaboration can be done in person, or via electronic media—such as LMS, email, or instant messaging, or through social media, such as Facebook.

Collaboration can include activities such as:

- Brainstorming with others how to approach an individual or group assignment
- Posting on an LMS discussion board in response to a question from another student

- Giving feedback on another student's assignment
- Working together on a lab experiment
- Checking others' answers to a problem sheet
- Working together on an individual or group presentation

Working with others is a valuable skill that will stand you in good stead in your life and career beyond university studies. Teamwork skills are essential in the workplace, and employers and business leaders regularly mention teamwork and interpersonal communication skills as among the most desirable attributes of future employees. Working with others can also be a great way to learn. Whether the context is a group engineering project or a literary reading club, working alongside others can help you to do more and achieve a deeper level of understanding than you might have otherwise done.

However, there are times when it is crucial to work alone, and most especially in the context of individual assignments. There are times when not working alone can stray into academic misconduct. Whether collaboration is permitted or not can depend on the nature of the assignment, and the nature of the help you get or give to others. That's why you should always check with your tutor or lecturer if you are unsure.

## What is collusion?

Collusion is the presentation by a student of an assignment as his or her own which is in fact the result in whole or in part of unauthorised collaboration with another person or persons. Collusion involves the cooperation of two or more students in plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. Both the student presenting the assignment and the student(s) willingly supplying unauthorised material (colluders) are considered participants in the act of academic misconduct.

Collusion and plagiarism can occur in the following situations:

- A student copies (or allows to be copied) from other members of a group while working in the group
- Students in different tutorials decide to work together on an individual assignment, and then both students submit the same assignment for marking
- A student asks another student to write part or whole of an assignment on his or her behalf
- In a group work context, a student copies the original work, in whole or in part, of an individual who is not a member of the group, with or without the knowledge of other members of the group, and contributes the plagiarised work to a group assignment
- In a group work context, a student discusses with other members of a group how to approach a common assessment item that requires individual submissions and relies on the same or very similar approach in the submitted assessment, without any acknowledgement of collaboration with colleagues and without the permission of the assessor

To avoid collusion, always remember to acknowledge and reference your sources honestly. This holds for both copying and paraphrasing of others' work. The principle is that whenever submitted material is not your own original work this must be acknowledged. To present material without acknowledgment is in effect to claim that it represents your own work and ideas. Presenting material from other sources without full acknowledgement (plagiarism) is penalised heavily.

The University expects that when a student turns in work for assessment that it is the independent work of that student, it is written by that student, and they have written it in their own words. In most cases, copied assignments will be given a zero grade for the piece of work for both parties: if A copies B's assignment, both A and B will get zero.

For more information, see: [Academic honesty and plagiarism: Advice to students](#)

# What are my other options?

Your fellow students may or may not be aware of the university rules regarding collusion and academic misconduct. Consider raising these issues with them, and with your lecturer or tutor. If working together is not appropriate, you could suggest these alternatives:

- Catch up to discuss tutorial questions or other non-assessed tasks in the subject. Meeting to discuss the subject content, outside of the assessment tasks, is generally encouraged and is a good way to learn
- Get together to discuss the assignment once it is handed back
- Suggest to your lecturer or tutor that there is a post-hand back discussion of the assignment in class

## How assignments help you to learn

- Assignments are a great way to learn and develop your own thinking processes. It's in an assignment that you can demonstrate the depth of your understanding
- Assignments are also a way for you to find out if your understanding of a topic is on track, or if you need to study it more
- In a perfect world we would all just learn the content of a subject without any assessment, but in the real world it is often the assessment tasks that motivate us to learn and to apply what we have learnt
- If you don't complete an individual assignment by yourself then you are wasting a big opportunity to test your ideas and receive honest feedback on your understanding and skills

Just remember that if you do individual assignment work yourself and learn from the things you get right and wrong, then you will be a smarter cookie in the long run. We all get things wrong sometimes, and that is fine. Have some confidence in your own abilities: give yourself the chance to develop your own ways of thinking, by working independently when it's required. Critical thinking, independence of mind, and having the courage of your convictions is what potential employers are going to be looking for in the future, and these skills will also be good for your future assignments. Focusing on improving your own learning is a much better option than using other people's thoughts and ideas and trying to pass them off as your own.

## If you are experiencing difficulties with study

If you find that you are really struggling with an assignment or with your study workload, it's important that you don't try to rely on the help of fellow students to help you prepare and submit work for assessment. If you are having problems with an assignment, or if a subject just seems too hard, contact your tutor, lecturer, [Student Centre](#), or an [Academic Skills adviser](#) straight away. You can also [contact Counselling](#) for confidential advice. You may be able to get an extension for an assignment if you are not coping, but you have to request this before the deadline. Help is available—you just need to ask for it.

## Further reading / resources

[Unauthorised collaboration](#)

[All My Own Work: Working with others](#)