



# Academic integrity checklist

Pointers for students about writing a paper, conducting research and working with other students

## Publication details

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## FOREWORD

**You may wonder what academic integrity has to do with you. You're no fraudster, after all! That may be so. But have you thought of everything?**

Have you considered research ethics? How self-critical are you really? How careful were you with your data, and is your referencing really flawless? These are all issues that come under 'academic integrity', and they're important for you to know about. This flyer contains a wealth of small pointers for writing a paper, conducting research and working with others. You'll find advice to help you on your way, and handy hints. Above all, this flyer should make you think twice.

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## WHAT WOULD YOU DO? THREE DILEMMAS

**1.** You've finally finished your paper! All that's left to do is the referencing. The trouble is, you can't quite remember which source material you used. It'll take you ages to go back and find everything! And you're having a busy week, with lots of deadlines, and there's an exam looming. What do you do?

**2.** You've carried out research and it all went well. Unfortunately, the data doesn't support your research question. That's disappointing, because it looks like you've ended up with nothing! If you were to remove one or two respondents/ test subjects/the data that didn't fit, you would end up with a significant result. Can you do that?

**3.** You're required to do research for one of your courses. After a while, you discover that some students have made life easy for themselves: they made up their data, and they're actually getting away with it. You put quite a bit of effort into your research and you got a 6.5. That doesn't seem fair... What do you do?



## WRITING

**Writing with integrity is about striking the balance between what you want to say and what you know. How do you challenge yourself?**

### Structure & research question

When you write a paper, what do you want to show? What's interesting about your research question? And who for?

### Literature search

In science, there are often multiple perspectives of an issue. Have you taken that into account when doing your literature search? How do you know you can trust your sources?

### Writing papers

How do you work with other people's ideas? Does your paper always make it clear whose views are being expressed?

Did you look at your paper critically when it was finished?

How might someone challenge it? Why would they be wrong?



## TIPS

1. Sometimes you're free to choose your own topic, and sometimes not. If you do have that freedom, think about what interests you. If you don't, what might you learn from this paper? There's nothing as demotivating as writing a paper that lacks a 'soul'!
2. Don't just look for material that confirms your hypothesis. Have the courage to think against the grain!
3. Look carefully at your sources. How reliable are they? How do you flag up the difference when using less reliable sources?
4. Make sure your own voice is clearly distinguishable from those of others. Reference them according to the rules of your programme, and keep a record of where you found things.
5. Put your paper away, sleep on it and then take another look. Letting someone else read your work can also give you new insights. Let him or her come up with at least one criticism.

## REFERENCING

Plagiarism is presenting the work of other people as your own. But what does the 'work of other people' really mean? How can you use someone else's work without it seeming like you thought of it yourself?

It's important that your work always makes it clear whose views are being expressed, and where your information has come from. You should do this by using references, and you do it when you:

- quote (literally using someone else's words, including in translation!)
- paraphrase (retelling someone else's ideas, views or theories)
- use other people's figures, illustrations, graphics, or statistics

Are all your sources referenced in your article or paper?

Is it always clear where your information has come from?

Have you correctly referenced your sources?

*Note: In some study programmes, you only refer to secondary sources, but you need to be scrupulous with those too!*

## WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

In *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (2003, p. 183), Barbara Rogoff writes: 'Worldwide, child rearing is more often done by women and girls than by men and boys (Weisner, 1997; Whiting & Edwards, 1988).'

**Student A:** According to Rogoff (2003) child rearing is primarily a job for women and girls.

**Student B:** Worldwide, child rearing is more often done by women and girls than by men and boys (Weisner, 1997; Whiting and Edwards, 1988).

**Student C:** According to Rogoff (2003, p. 183) child rearing is 'more often done by women and girls than by men and boys'.

**Student D:** It's often said that child rearing is primarily a job performed by women.



Answer: Student B is plagiarising. The sentence is literally taken from Rogoff, but without a reference. Student A is paraphrasing, student C is quoting and student D is just providing a general view.

## RESEARCH

### Design

In academic research, different interests are often pitted against each other, including your own, those of participants, patients or test animals, and whoever assigns the research. As a budding academic, you hold a position of responsibility in your own research. To what extent do your interests influence the structure of the research? In the course of conducting research, you may find you need to change the structure. Can you change the rules halfway through the game?

### Methodology

There are often many limitations to any methodology used. What are they? How have you taken those into account? You can't always conduct research in the way you originally planned. What happens if the data you use isn't the data you had planned to use? And what if you change your research question?



## TIPS

1. Consider the fact that there are other interests at stake besides your own and those of science. For instance, think about the impact on the research subjects, the party commissioning the research, and society as a whole.
2. Make sure you establish an honest research structure, rather than one that is more likely to confirm your hypothesis.
3. It's not such a problem if you have to modify your research structure along the way. But do consider whether the structure still serves your purposes, and always be clear about what you've done and why.
4. It's not necessarily wrong to remove data that doesn't fit (outliers), but do consider the consequences, and report it in your discussion.
5. Sometimes, you may only have access to one kind of data (only students, or a limited portion of an archive, or only healthy patients, etc.). Consider the impact of this on your research and take it into account when drawing your conclusions.

## DATA COLLECTION

### Data collection

Science is about looking for solid, verifiable knowledge. Does your data bring you closer to solving a problem? What do you now know for certain?

Scientists must treat test subjects, patients, respondents and other sources with respect. Have they been well informed about the structure and purpose of your research?

### Data analysis

Sometimes results don't satisfy our stated expectations. When do disappointing results pose a problem?

Results need to be offered objectively and honestly. Have you presented your results as neutrally as possible? Have you exaggerated some results?

### Data reporting

Researchers need to clearly present the steps they've taken in the course of their research. Will readers understand the steps you've taken in your research?



## TIPS

1. Let test subjects, respondents, patients and other sources of data complete an informed consent form, if possible. Tailor it to them. That way, you'll be sure they understand what they're participating in, and you'll have proof.
2. The objective of science is to find out more about the world. You can't make things up, but you also cannot leave things out without a good reason! Be transparent. Your research should be replicable.
3. It's important that you keep track of how you collect and process data from the start. That way, you won't have to go back afterwards and work out exactly what you did. Keep a log book to help you with this.
4. You can use your discussion to point out the limitations of your research. Don't try to cover anything up, but don't undermine your own research either!

*For tips on writing your research report, see the page on writing a paper.*

## GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

### Preparation

It's important to discuss what everyone's expectations are of each other. Have roles been clearly assigned, with everyone stating what they want? Are you satisfied with that?

### Implementation

Roles need to be fairly assigned. How are you contributing to the final product? How are others contributing? Will you honour your commitments?

People tend to always take on the same types of roles. Are you prepared to do something different?

### Communication

Good communication within the group is an important objective of the assignment. How is the communication going? Are you really sure of what's going on?

The collaboration needs to add something to the assignment. Are you just completing your own tasks, or is the group achieving something as a whole?



## TIPS

1. Try to take on a different role from the one you're accustomed to. You might find it more demanding, but that's how you can develop in different areas.

2. Be aware that what you say by email or phone can come across differently than how you intended. Face to face contact is often more effective. Try to meet up at least twice: once to assign roles, and once before the evaluation of the final product. If possible, meet up more often.

3. Try to ensure that your product doesn't become a collection of individual pieces. Instead, it should form a cohesive whole. Make sure there's an overall editor to look at both content and layout.

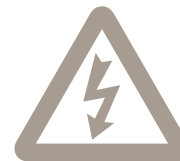
4. Set firm deadlines. Put them in writing. This makes it clear to everyone what they need to do. Enforce these, and don't wait for things to go wrong!

5. Keep communicating with each other, and make sure you're available yourself.

## CASE STUDY: PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICS

One of the most controversial studies in psychology is the research done by Milgram into obedience. In a series of experiments, test subjects were led to believe that they were participating in research into the effects of punishment on learning. On the orders of the experimenter, the test subject played the role of a teacher delivering increasingly powerful electric shocks to a pupil when they gave a wrong answer. The shocks gradually increased from "Slight Shock" (15 Volts) and "Danger: Severe Shock" to "XXX" (450 Volts). A remarkable 65% of the test subjects obeyed the researcher up to the point of what would constitute a fatal shock. In fact, nobody was being given a shock and the pupil was an actor (see Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2010 for an overview).

These studies caused an academic storm on both methodological and moral grounds.



## QUESTIONS

Most of the focus was on the welfare of the test subjects. Is the knowledge that you're prepared to torture someone, possibly to death, enriching ("self-awareness") or potentially traumatic? (see Pigden & Gillet, 1996) There are some doubts as to whether the participants really believed that what they were doing was real. There's also the question of whether you can research obedience in a laboratory if you know that people are more obedient in that setting than they would be elsewhere. Finally: was this really about *obedience* or something else? However, the value of the experiment lies in showing how a particular context or situation can alter behaviour. And don't forget the significance of Milgram in the development of ethical guidelines! (see Parker, 2000)

### References:

- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D. & Akert, R. M. (2010). *Social Psychology* (7e ed.). New Jersey, NJ: Pearson.
- Parker, I. (2000). *Obedience*. *Granta*, 71, 99 – 126.
- Pigden, C. R. & Gillet, G. R. (1996). *Milgram, method, and morality*. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 13, 233 – 250.

## CASE STUDY: HISTORY AND ETHICS

Historians like to distance themselves from explicit ethical judgements. That distance becomes impossible to maintain when describing and interpreting traumatic memories of major historical injustices, such as genocide. A well-known example of this is the case of the British historian David Irving, who in the 1980s played down the scale and significance of the Holocaust. The historian Deborah Lipstadt accused him of, among other things, Holocaust denial and flawed methodology. Irving sued her for libel. The judge called in professional historians to testify on the matter. Irving lost because, according to the judge, he had failed to adhere to academic conventions of source criticism, argumentation and the furnishing of proof. People have mixed feelings about this verdict. On the one hand, it's awkward for the justice system to determine how historians do their work. On the other hand, the study of history does seem to have methodology at its core, and this is perceived as being valid.



## QUESTIONS

This case study shows how tricky it can be to work with what's known as 'repression archives'. Many regimes have documented their wrongdoings, but we have to question their motives for doing so, and how complete and reliable this data is. This becomes very relevant when such information is re-used for the purposes of extracting historical apologies, or in the work of truth and reconciliation commissions. It's clear that there is room for abuse, which can arise from a deliberate lack of integrity or unintentional negligence. Both of these can be classified as 'irresponsible history'. The solution lies in methodological scrupulousness: the traceability of material, access to all sources, right of inspection, the possibility of repudiation and the ability to assess a line of reasoning.

### References:

- Evans, R. (2001). *Lying about Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial*. New York: Basic Books.
- De Baets, A. (2008). *Use and misuse of history*. Amsterdam: Boom.

## CASE STUDY: BREASTFEEDING, RESEARCH AND ETHICS

Breastfeeding is better than bottle feeding, because the natural option is better than the artificial. Isn't it? Information websites emphasise that breastfed babies have stronger immunity against infections, and grow better. Some experts even claim there are benefits for intelligence and preventing obesity. But scientific studies offer little or no support for the proposition that breastfeeding is better. Many studies have found no link, and if a positive impact is measurable, it's impossible to say if it's due to breastfeeding or because the parents treat their babies differently in other ways. There seems to be no practical solution to this methodological problem in breastfeeding research. Against this background, the dogmatic assertiveness of information websites is remarkable. The benefits are presented as scientifically indisputable, with the notion that bottle feeding might be just as good these days being dismissed as a 'myth'.



## QUESTIONS

Why are the benefits of breastfeeding promoted with such certainty? The fact of something being 'natural' can surely not be enough of a reason. Is it because the proponents want to play it safe? But if so, why can't they offer more measured advice?

The World Health Organization points to an important issue: in developing countries, formula isn't always available, and the water used to make the baby milk is often contaminated, which can lead to serious infections. But is that a reason to recommend breastfeeding to the whole world?

There was a time when the availability of quality formula was seen as progress in women's liberation. Today, 'good mothers' are expected to breastfeed. Should information providers take account of these types of effects in the advice they give?

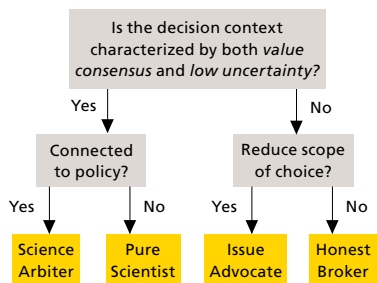
### Reference:

- Wolf, J.B. (2010). *Is breast best? Taking on the breastfeeding experts and the new high stakes of motherhood*. New York, NYU Press.

## CASE STUDY: ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND ETHICS

Scientific environmental research often aims to support environmental policy. Such research is partially initiated by the government: for example, the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency publishes regular reports on the state of the natural and built environment. Scientists also call for policy to focus on specific issues. One example is the decline of cockles in the Wadden Sea in the 1990s, mainly because of cockle fisheries, which had a negative impact on wading birds. In a representative democracy, it's up to elected politicians and citizens to put issues on the agenda, to weigh them up and to prioritise them. But they're not all-knowing. Warnings from scientists have often prevented problems in the past, but the question is how far scientists should go in influencing policy.

### Criteria for determining the roles of science in policy and politics



## QUESTIONS

If information relevant to policy-making is kept hidden, apparently to protect people's own research (think of the Climategate affair), it's clear that boundaries are being crossed. In the case of the cockle fisheries, this is less clear cut. Is it up to scientists to determine that wading birds are more important than the livelihoods of cockle fishers? Pielke's 'decision tree' on the previous page at least provides guidance to scientists in determining their position in policy. The role of an academic or scientist is particularly interesting in situations where multiple interests are at stake, and uncertainty reigns. Do you keep every option open and provide policy-makers and stakeholders with all the information, or do you consciously decide to draw attention to a specific problem or solution?

### References:

- Pielke RA (2007), *The honest broker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swart, J.A.A. and J. van Andel (2008), *Rethinking the interface between ecology and society. The case of the cockle controversy in the Dutch Wadden Sea*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 45 (1) 82-90.

## WORKING UNDER PRESSURE

Every student feels under pressure at times. A little pressure can be healthy, but it's important not to panic. How might you handle pressure to make yourself feel alert and focused?

### Time pressure

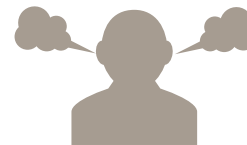
Being organised is an important way of achieving objectives. Do you have a to-do list? Do you know how much you can handle in a day, and do you have a sense of what you can finish today? (Tip: The UU offers training in this.)

### Know yourself

Do you know your limits? Do you make commitments you can't stick to? Do you have trouble planning ahead?

### Balance

As a student, you want to get the best out of yourself and your studies. But you do have a social life too. How do you strike a balance between your ambitions and social commitments?



## WHAT WOULD YOU DO? THREE DILEMMAS

1. You have the option of doing a bonus assignment for a course, which will earn you an extra point. It's a challenging assignment and you could get a lot out of it. But you've already put lots of time and energy into the course. You're not sure if those extra hours will really be worth it.

2. Your paper is due in two days. You've been working on it for weeks, but you haven't made much progress. You're starting to feel like you've had enough, and it's a struggle forcing yourself to do something for this course. A friend calls and asks you out. You're not really going to make any more progress tonight, and tomorrow's another day, right?

3. It's now Monday afternoon. On Thursday, you have a re-sit which you still need to study for, Wednesday you have to hand in a paper which you still need to spend half a day on, and tomorrow you have a lecture and an appointment. You're not sure if you're going to manage it all. What do you do?



HERE ARE THE SIX MOST  
IMPORTANT THEMES  
FROM THIS FLYER:

**RELIABILITY:** is a two-sided coin. In academia, you need to be able to trust each other, and others need to be able to trust you. The pursuit of truth is the priority.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** you must approach academic sources, respondents, test subjects and other stakeholders with care and dedication.

**IMPARTIALITY:** means being as neutral as possible. You should weigh up different interests and take an independent position between two or more parties.

**SCRUPULOUSNESS:** you should be precise and nuanced in how you generate and disseminate knowledge.

**COLLABORATION:** you need to take responsibility, show respect for each other, and support the team spirit.

**AMBITION:** Set your own objectives. You chose this programme for a reason.

If you steal from  
one person, it's  
called 'plagiarism';  
if you steal from  
many it's called  
'research'

*(anonymous)*

Any academic study puts you in a tricky position: you want to know something that's still unknown, you want to discover something, or at least research it; and to do that you need to collect data, share ideas, work with others, write pieces... and all while maintaining a certain integrity.

Academic ethics are about self-reflection and criticism, openness and scrupulousness, but also about understanding yourself and having respect for others and your environment.

**For more information on academic integrity and ethical codes,** read the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, published by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VNSU), which can be found in the 'academic integrity' section on the UU website.