HSC Assessments and Submitted Works

Best Practice Strategies for Preventing and Dealing with Malpractice

Advice for Teachers

This pamphlet will help teachers to advise and supervise students during the HSC assessment program. It contains advice on establishing sound processes for monitoring students’ work, including measures to prevent cheating, or malpractice. It also provides strategies for dealing with cases of suspected cheating.

This advice covers all assessment tasks, exams, projects, practical works, independent research projects and performances.

What is assessment?

Assessment is the process of gathering information and making judgements about student achievement for a variety of purposes. For the HSC, this includes monitoring student progress, furthering student learning, and reporting student achievements in relation to the standards established for each course and contributing to the calculation of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

What is cheating in HSC assessment?

Cheating, or malpractice, is dishonest behaviour by a student that gives them an unfair advantage over others. It includes:

• copying, buying, stealing or borrowing part or all of someone else’s work and presenting it as their own
• using material directly from books, journals, CDs or the internet without acknowledging the source
• submitting work that contains a large and unacknowledged contribution from another person such as a parent, tutor, coach or author
• paying someone to write or prepare material that is associated with a task, such as process diaries, logs or journals.

The above are examples of plagiarism.

Each school’s assessment policy must contain a section that addresses cheating and its consequences.

Schools must act on any form of malpractice that is brought to their attention.
Why does honesty matter in the HSC?

The Higher School Certificate is a well-respected and widely recognised educational credential. Cheating undermines the integrity of the qualification.

For many NSW students, the HSC provides a gateway to tertiary studies. This is a pivotal point for many students. Sometimes, due to the pressure students place upon themselves to succeed, some may feel tempted to engage in activities they would not normally consider, such as cheating.

Deliberate acts of cheating can occur if a student feels that their own efforts may be inadequate, or if they feel unable to cope with the consequences of poor performance. Students may cheat unintentionally if they are poorly prepared or don’t know how to acknowledge the contribution made by others to their work.

Cheating in the HSC is a serious offence. It distorts legitimate measures of a student’s achievements. While cheating advantages the individual, it disadvantages other students. In the case of school-based assessment, cheating may affect the order in which students are ranked and distort the moderation process applied to internal assessment marks.

Prevention of cheating

Prevention of malpractice is always preferable to dealing with its consequences. There are a number of actions schools can take to help students avoid cheating.

• Ensure that all students understand malpractice and its consequences. All students entered in one or more Preliminary or HSC course must have completed the HSC: All My Own Work program on the Board’s website, or its equivalent. This program helps students follow good principles and practices in assessments and exams. School Principals have been advised of special arrangements related to this program for students undertaking only Life Skills courses.

• Ensure that students have read and understood the Board’s Rules and Procedures for Higher School Certificate Candidates booklet. ‘Honesty in Assessment – the Standard’ on page 7 of the booklet is also shown here on page 4.

• Students must sign a declaration saying that they have read the Rules and Procedures booklet. This is an opportunity for schools to reinforce key messages about malpractice.

• In the school’s assessment policy, include a section on what malpractice is, and what action the school will take if any form of malpractice occurs.

• Ensure each student’s assessment task workload is manageable.

• Design tasks that minimise opportunities for malpractice and include a level of supervision.

• Help students with learning how to document and record legitimate assistance. This includes correct referencing, correct acknowledgement of sources and assistance with projects and practical works in accordance with the Board’s documentation for the subject.

• Teachers need to understand the kind of feedback they can legitimately give for school assessment work, and during the development of projects and practical works, so that they can confidently help students without inadvertently contributing to malpractice.

• Ensure an atmosphere of cooperative learning among students. This maximises the achievement of everyone in the group and inhibits an unhealthy level of competition that may provoke a student to gain unfair advantages.

How can you help students to prepare for assessment tasks?

Teachers should encourage students to:

• be aware of due dates, keep an up-to-date diary of all their assessments, activities and commitments, and allocate their time effectively

• start tasks early so that they can seek clarification if needed

• break tasks into a series of smaller steps and set deadlines for the completion of each step

• save all drafts and support materials. Note sources as they are used so the bibliography does not become a major task at the end

• frequently save and back up all computer work. Technology failure is generally not an acceptable excuse for submitting work late.
What strategies can prevent malpractice in work outside class?

Strategies to prevent malpractice in work completed outside class time are most effective when a consistent approach is applied across the whole school.

Ensuring students are adequately briefed and feel prepared for the challenges presented by an assessment task should reduce the risk of cheating and malpractice.

- If possible, allocate class time to planning and drafting an initial response to the task.
- Require students to prepare annotated references, maintain a process diary/journal, present work either orally or in writing at key stages of the development process and/or submit original drafts with the final copy.
- Consider multiple submission dates to monitor a student’s progress.
- Require students to develop an action plan with a specific time frame to be signed off as each task is completed. They may need to keep logbooks, journals or reflection statements throughout the development of their projects or practical works. They may be asked to present for a viva voce or to deliver a brief presentation on their progress, which could include submitting their logbooks and discussing the entries.
- Students must understand that components of their projects or practical works that have been written, created or developed by others must be acknowledged in accordance with the Board’s documentation for that subject.
- When preparing a brief for any assessment task being undertaken by parallel classes, teachers must develop a shared understanding of the nature and extent of the support they are prepared to provide. At the outset, clearly advise students of the degree of teacher involvement in the development, rehearsal or execution of a work.
- Subjects with a submitted project or practical work, such as Design and Technology, Music 2 and English Extension 2 have special requirements. For example, you and the Principal must state whether you believe the work is authentically the student’s.

Strategies for dealing with malpractice

The school’s assessment policy should state how the school will act if it becomes aware of any form of malpractice in HSC assessments.

It is strongly recommended that schools establish an Assessment Review Panel as part of their assessment procedures. A suggested composition of this panel would be the Deputy Principal, the Assessment Coordinator and a Head Teacher not from the faculty in which the issue has arisen.

The panel should review each case of malpractice on its merits, considering all the issues, in order to arrive at a fair conclusion and make recommendations to the Principal.

In cases where malpractice is suspected or has been proven the following procedures should be applied.

- Procedural fairness should be accorded to the student at all times.
- All claims must be substantiated.
- Teachers must not make any accusations until the facts have been established.
- The source(s) of the information should be investigated thoroughly.
- Evidence should be preserved in its original state.
- Confidentiality must be maintained at all times by all parties.
- Parents must be informed if the student is under 18.
- Notes should be taken during any interviews to be kept as a part of the official record of the case.
- A parent or other appropriate support person should be present whenever a student is being interviewed.
- The student should have the opportunity to present any mitigating circumstances. These should be taken into consideration when penalties are being determined.
- The student should be advised of the panel’s findings and the basis for the school’s decision.
- The student should be informed of their right of appeal.

The panel should notify the Principal of any procedures that need to be revised or improved.
Consequences of malpractice

The Board of Studies treats cheating very seriously. It investigates allegations of cheating and penalises students caught cheating in HSC written examinations and in projects or practical works.

Detected malpractice will limit a student’s marks and jeopardise their HSC. One or more of the following will apply:

- reduced marks for all or part of the examination
- zero marks for part or all of the examination
- an interview with a ‘malpractice’ panel at the Board of Studies
- loss of one or more courses towards the HSC award
- damage to the student’s ability to apply for entry to TAFE or university courses or scholarships.

Honesty in HSC Assessment – the Standard

This standard sets out the Board of Studies NSW requirements concerning students submitting their own work in HSC assessment. Candidates for the Higher School Certificate, as well as their teachers and others who may guide them, are required to comply with the standard.

The honesty of students in completing assessment tasks, examinations and submitted works, and of teachers and others in guiding students, underpins the integrity of the Higher School Certificate. Throughout the assessment process, the highest level of honesty is required.

Each student’s mark will be determined by the quality of the work produced by the student only. To demonstrate honesty, any component of a student’s work that has been written, created or developed by others must be acknowledged in accordance with the Board’s subject-specific documentation. Use or inclusion of material from other sources such as books, journals and electronic sources, including the internet, must be acknowledged. General teaching and learning do not require formal acknowledgement.

Dishonest behaviour carried out for the purpose of gaining unfair advantage in the assessment process constitutes malpractice, or cheating. Malpractice in any form, including plagiarism, is unacceptable. The Board of Studies NSW treats allegations of malpractice very seriously and detected malpractice will limit a student’s marks and jeopardise their HSC. Should malpractice be suspected, students will be required to demonstrate that all unacknowledged work is entirely their own. Serious and deliberate acts of malpractice amount to corrupt conduct and, where appropriate, the Board of Studies NSW will report matters to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Student rights and responsibilities regarding assessment

In HSC assessment, students have the following rights:

- to be informed of the assessment policies of the school and Board of Studies
- to receive clear guidelines relating to the requirements of each assessment task
- to be told in advance of the due date for each assessment task
- to receive feedback that assists them to review their work
- to query the mark for an individual task at the time it is returned to them
- to request a review of the calculation of the final assessment mark if they believe their final assessment rank is incorrect.

Students have the following responsibilities:

- to become familiar with and follow the school’s assessment policies and the rules in the Rules and Procedures for Higher School Certificate Candidates booklet.
- to complete all set tasks on time, or talk to their teachers about what to do if they can’t meet a deadline
- not to engage in behaviour which could be considered malpractice, or cheating, including plagiarism, and ensure that all assessment work is their own or acknowledge the contribution of others
- to follow up any concerns with tasks at the time they are marked and returned.