

# Sources of Evidence for Contract Cheating including unauthorised Generative AI use.

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## Key principles

1. Educate: Ensure all staff, particularly markers and unit/course coordinators, are aware of the signals that can indicate contract cheating and thus may be a cause for suspicion (see following pages).
2. Investigate: One or two signals do not provide enough evidence to substantiate cheating but can provide cause for further investigation.
3. Use policy: Refer suspected cases of contract cheating to an appropriate investigator and decision-maker, as per your institution's relevant policies.
4. Not 'proof', but 'balance of probability': Investigate suspected breaches as a lay proceeding, using the standard from civil law, where the 'balance of probability' is the relevant test to which allegations must be subjected. The balance of probability is based on 'clear and convincing evidence' that it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. This is less demanding than the criminal law test of 'beyond reasonable doubt'.
5. Examine: Look carefully at each aspect of the document and other relevant sources of evidence. Identify every aspect that is cause for concern.
6. Collect evidence: Accumulate a range of evidence that clearly and convincingly establishes the firm belief that the breach in question is not only probable, but highly probable. Three forms of evidence are critical:
  - a. Textual and electronic evidence from the suspected assessment
  - b. Knowledge of the student's academic and linguistic abilities
  - c. The student's previous assessment work

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## Guide to textual signals of potential contract cheating

Textual Signals	Why this may be a clue
Very low text match (0 – 5%)	Scholarly work cites sources, so it is unlikely to have a text-match of 5% or less; the work may have been manipulated to lower the similarity score to avoid checks.
High text match (>30%)	Commercial 'bespoke' assignments can be cut and pasted from sources, despite claims they are 'plagiarism free'.
High text match (other student's work)	Assignments obtained from file-sharing sites or other students are likely to be identified by text-matching software. Contract cheating sites may have sold 'custom' work to multiple students.
Document properties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author</li> <li>• Creation date</li> <li>• Editing time</li> <li>• Version number</li> <li>• Properties blank/ wiped</li> </ul>	The metadata of a Word document may indicate an author name not matching the student, an odd creation date, or very short editing time. If properties are blank they may have been wiped to hide such anomalies. If the student suggests it was written on a friend's computer, or that it is a final 'fresh' version, they should be able to provide drafts and other evidence. The software used to create the document may also be evident – a foreign version of 'Word' software for example, may be a cause for concern.
Not appropriate to discipline area	The writing and content may be at odds with language typical in the assignment/discipline, because sometimes academic cheating service writers provide assignments on multiple academic disciplines and cite irrelevant or peripherally relevant sources from any number of disciplines.
Quality different to or above expectations	A mismatch between the assignment quality (language use, content knowledge, formatting and style) and the student's previous work (e.g. assignments, exams, online and in-class work) may indicate the work is not that of the same author.
Language use and ability	A mismatch between the language use in the assignment and the student's language use (e.g. in class, in interpersonal interactions, online, in previous assignments, exams). In particular, high quality writing from people with low standards of spoken language is a red flag.
Unreadable language, including jargon-filled sentences and misuse of words	Online 'article spinners', translation and/or paraphrasing tools can automatically transform any text into 'original' writing that bypasses text-matching software. This writing sounds excessively verbose/complicated, makes little sense, and misuses terms and everyday words. This process may be used by students or ghost-writers to avoid text-matching detection, but does not demonstrate understanding of the original material.
References in languages that the student does not speak	It is highly unlikely that a student would try to use foreign language references that don't match their own language/s.

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Textual Signals	Why this may be a clue
Reflections are inappropriate	Reflections on classroom experience or practicums are difficult or impossible for writers who did not attend the class or work integrated learning experience. In addition, reflection on the process of completing the assignment may be useful to assess. Because of this, reflections may be inappropriate or generic if not written by the student themselves
Reference list, but: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No in-text citations</li> <li>• Mismatch with in-text citations</li> <li>• Sources inappropriate/ irrelevant</li> <li>• Access dates for internet sources predate enrolment</li> <li>• References are falsified</li> </ul> Does not meet criteria/ requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min/max required references</li> <li>• Required references/ authors</li> <li>• Date range of references</li> <li>• Referencing style</li> <li>• Excludes key content; includes irrelevant content</li> </ul>	<p>Commercial 'bespoke' assignments may be produced quickly by (re)using old information or writing from previous jobs. This maximises profit, but leads to low quality work. Moreover, students taking a transactional approach to learning may only send minimal task information to the cheating service, overlooking important details in the assignment brief. That is why assignments that are only vaguely relevant to the topic, or using references to odd sources are classic signs of contract cheating.</p> <p>Writers may append reference lists without any in-text citations, or in-text citations may not match the reference list. Access dates for internet sources may predate the student's enrolment in the course. Some of the references may be false (non-existent) or falsified (the cited source does not contain the information claimed).</p> <p>Reference may not include theories or literature covered in the unit learning resources, textbook, or lectures that are typically cited by other students for the same assessment.</p> <p>Text-matching software may indicate all references are from the same source. Because most references are cited by others, students' references lists should match to other sources that have used the same citations; however, a 'block' match to one paper may indicate the assignment paraphrases that paper.</p>
Anything else that seems unusual or concerning?	Trust your instincts as an experienced educator. If something seems unusual or 'off', consult a trusted colleague or academic integrity decision-maker.

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## Checklist for Investigating Suspected Contract Cheating

Textual Signals	No Concern	Some Concern	High Concern
Very low text match (0 – 5%)			
High text match (>30%)			
High text match (other student's work)			
Document properties: • Author • Creation date • Editing time • Version number • Properties blank/wiped			
Not appropriate to discipline area			
Quality different to or above expectations			
Language use and ability			
Unreadable language, including jargon-filled sentences and misuse of words			
Reference list, but: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No in-text citations</li> <li>• Mismatch with in-text citations</li> <li>• Sources inappropriate/irrelevant</li> <li>• Access dates for internet sources predate enrolment</li> <li>• References are falsified</li> </ul> Does not meet criteria/requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Min/max required references</li> <li>• Required references/authors</li> <li>• Date range of references</li> <li>• Referencing style</li> <li>• Excludes key content; includes irrelevant content</li> </ul>			
References in languages that the student does not speak			
Reflections are done badly			

Adapted from the TEQSA [Substantiating contract cheating: A guide for Investigators](#) document.