

## The most important “cheat sheet” you’ll ever need: Maintaining academic and research integrity at ASU

As an ASU graduate student, it’s your responsibility to help protect yourself and the ASU community from academic and research integrity violations. But this can be challenging, as standards for what counts as common knowledge, conventions of collaboration and norms for proper crediting of sources can vary from educational system to educational system around the world.

1. Familiarize yourself with the standards for academic and research integrity and research as practiced at ASU, and the policies and definitions that apply to it. Go to [provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/policy](http://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/policy).
2. Take advantage of the many resources available for training on the ins and outs of academic integrity. These include:
  - **The Graduate College Academic Integrity Tutorial**, found under Priority Tasks on your My ASU page. Every grad student is required to take it in their first semester. Beyond that, it contains a variety of reference materials you can return to throughout your graduate career, whenever you need them.
  - **ASU’s Libraries academic integrity pages**, which offer information on formatting, citation, learning and teaching resources.
  - **Your college’s Academic Integrity Officer**, who may also have useful resources specific to your discipline.
3. You’ll want to defend yourself psychologically against the common pitfalls that can lead you into trouble in one or more of the four areas associated with academic integrity violations and research misconduct: cheating, deceit, plagiarism, and improper research practices.

To help you remember them, we’ve adopted the mnemonic of **TRAPS**<sup>1</sup>: Temptation, Rationalization, Ambition, Procrastination, “Stupid Systems” Thinking.

### Here are some ways that you can recognize the TRAPS before you fall into them.

#### Temptation

Really, all academic and research misconduct begins with temptation of one variety or another.

Temptation comes in many forms and may stem from any number of reasons, including poor time management, lack of planning, or fear of embarrassment.

Giving into temptation may sound something like:

“Just this once,” as in “I’m just so busy right now that my only option is to take a short-cut just this once.”

“It’s just a term paper; I’ll save perfection for publication.”

“My peers and advisor will think my research is weak if I admit misalignment between my data and my hypothesis. It’s better if I just remove the counter data.”

“Just this once” is a slippery slope into a habitual way of doing things. You’ll never be less busy than you are the first time around, so cultivate the right habits of practice from the start.

Albert Einstein once said, “Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.” When it comes to academic integrity, no matter is too small.

The fact is, if you’re caught committing research fraud, you’ll have a much harder time showing your face in research circles, not to mention you’ll have little hope of pursuing the career you’ve been building toward.

#### Rationalization

Rationalizations, for example, are just what they sound like: patterns of thought that help us excuse and account for what we know to be questionable behavior.

Academic and research misconduct rationalizations tend to cluster around things like feelings of entitlement; however justified they may seem; or gradually accepting small misbehaviors which can lead to larger infractions down the line.

Here is some self-talk to watch out for:

“I can’t just waste all this work because of a few inconsistencies. I worked really hard to get to this point, and I deserve recognition for my hard work. The results need to be published.”

“It’s better to provide some results than no results. Just because all the data is not accurate doesn’t mean that the overall results are flawed. In the future, I’ll fully explain the findings as new research.”

You might feel that you have a right to special treatment or privileges because you put in so much effort, but these feelings of entitlement can lead to misrepresenting research.

Academic and research misconduct usually starts with a small rationalization and gradually increases with each new temptation. Once you rationalize a small infraction and no one notices the misconduct, it becomes easier to justify future misdeeds.

## Ambition

Ambition can be a driving factor in misconduct because the stakes can often seem to high for failure to be an option:

“I want to be equal to or among the ‘best in the field.’”

“I need this accomplishment to reach my next goal.”

Some ambitions are harder to recognize than others because ambition is not always about excelling or being the best; ambition can also be about wanting to make others proud of you:

“I must prove to those that believe in me that their belief is not misplaced.”

“My family risked a lot to help me get here and I can’t let them down.”

Don’t let the virtue that brought you to where you are lead to your downfall. Keep your ambition within the bounds of academic integrity.

## Procrastination

Procrastination is something that we all suffer from at some point or another in our lives. If there is a task we do not want to face, we often put up roadblocks in the form of other tasks that must be done first.

“I can’t work in a dirty space so even if it means that I don’t have time to track down all my citations, I’m going to clean my office anyways.”

“I know that it’s about prioritizing, and this can wait because I have other priorities right now. If I have to, I’ll get a little extra help to make sure it’s done on time.”

In this latter case the extra help can be too much, if it’s in the form of other people’s work. It can feel good to complete a short-term goal but that can come at the expense of long-term success.

Don’t let fear of imperfection, time-sensitive activities with friends, or living in denial of the negative outcomes (like not graduating on time) be your defining factors.

## “Stupid Systems” Thinking

Finally, “Stupid Systems’ Thinking” might provide a motivation for ignoring or refusing to accept an expected compliance. This happens when the rules established by a discipline or field themselves seem arbitrary or far fetched, producing a desire to rebel against expectations:

“So what if I am relying on data from a previous study? It is my work and I should be able to reuse it as often as I want.”

“It’s not up to me to verify my co-authors’ contributions. If it is inaccurate it doesn’t affect me. I am only responsible for my own findings and what I write about.”

## Academic integrity resources

Avoid these TRAPS and take advantage of ASU’s suite of resources designed to help you maintain academic and research integrity standards.

- The Graduate College Academic Integrity Tutorial, found under Priority Tasks on your My ASU page
- ASU’s Libraries academic integrity webpages [libguides.asu.edu/citing/AcadIntegrity](http://libguides.asu.edu/citing/AcadIntegrity)
- Your college’s Academic Integrity Officer [provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/officers](http://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/officers)
- Office of University Provost for a general stance on academic integrity [provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity](http://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity)
- Student Code of Conduct [eoss.asu.edu/dos/srr/codeofconduct](http://eoss.asu.edu/dos/srr/codeofconduct)
- Honor code [provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/honor-code](http://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/honor-code)
- Student Policy for details about falling out of compliance. [provost.asu.edu/sites/default/files/academic-integrity-policy.pdf](http://provost.asu.edu/sites/default/files/academic-integrity-policy.pdf)
- ASU’s charter [youtu.be/-3Bgu92K9JI](https://youtu.be/-3Bgu92K9JI)
- ASU charter mission and goals [www.asu.edu/about/charter-mission-and-values](http://www.asu.edu/about/charter-mission-and-values)

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Gunsalus, C.K. & Robinson, A.D., Nine Pitfalls of Research Misconduct, *Nature* 557, 297-299 (2018) doi: 10.1038/d41586-018-05145-6.