

(Frequently Asked Questions)
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In an effort to address widespread confusion and concern about these issues, I have collected all information in this one “FAQ” document.

Important: Every student must read this document and sign and submit the last page along with their lab paper for the third mechanics lab (CME) or second E&M lab (EPF).

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Q01: What is this document and why was it written?

Although material on plagiarism and the procedure for using TurnItIn.com is available to Introductory Physics students in several places (the lab manual appendix, either the hard copy or the Canvas document) it has been the experience of several instructors that many students seem worried and confused by the policy and the procedure.

Therefore I have decided to collect all information in one document so that students will have this handy. Please read this document in its entirety and plan to keep it with your other lab materials. Be sure to sign and date the last page and submit this with your first lab paper.

Q02: What is plagiarism and how does it apply in this lab?

Plagiarism is defined as presentation of someone else's work as one's own.

Specifically, for Physics lab papers, plagiarism is defined as copying (by any means: electronic, reading and retyping, taking dictation, etc.) all or parts of a lab paper from another source, including – but not limited to – your lab partner's lab paper (text and/or equations and derivations), the lab paper of any other student in the class, past or present, and any material that is available from any source on the web, without attributing the copied material to the original source.

Q03: Am I allowed to work together with my lab partner on a lab paper?

The answer here is “Yes, but...”

Your signature on the cover page indicates that the paper is your own work. While your lab partner(s) and you will normally have identical data and perhaps very similar or the same analysis of that data, you must write your own paper. We permit (and even encourage) partners to work together to analyze the data; such collaboration needs to be properly acknowledged or referenced. However, you need to write the words to your paper and the equations and derivations of the analysis and error analysis yourself. Making direct or edited copies of your partner's or someone else's text (without attribution) is considered a serious breach of ethics and will be dealt with harshly.

More specifically: You are allowed to talk about any aspect of the lab, data, or analysis with your lab partner. You are allowed to examine and discuss any material that either of you have collected in your notebooks. You are allowed to discuss conclusions and to share general strategies for composing lab papers.

What you are also not allowed to do is write one lab paper together and submit this for the both of you. You must each write your own separate lab paper.

Q04: Am I allowed to copy material from my lab partner's paper?

Basically, no.

You are expressly forbidden from copying any part of any other lab paper – your partner's or anyone else's. This applies to any section and any result.

In particular you must not take a copy of your partner's lab paper which you subsequently edit and submit as your own work. You must not cut and paste sections of your partner's paper into your lab. Essentially you are required to start every lab “from scratch”. You are not allowed to take any other paper and edit/change this and then submit this as your own.

Q05: Am I allowed to use material from my lab partner's lab notebook?

Yes, but....

In principle, you should have already written in your own lab notebook all information you need to generate your paper. If there is an occasion where some data or other critical information is not available to you and it is in your partner's notebook you can use this in your paper as long as you provide an attribution (footnote) that indicates what you did. For example, if you relied on your lab partner to determine the mass of a cart, you might include a footnote that says: "Information on mass of the cart obtained from laboratory notebook of my lab partner, John Doe." When in doubt, attribute.

Q06: Am I allowed to copy material from any other source?

Mostly no.

There are exceptions. If you wish to include a figure from the lab manual or another source, you may do so. If you wish to quote a physical constant or a law of physics you may do so. In these cases you must properly attribute (footnote) the source of the material. You must do this. *Figures or other materials copied from outside sources that are not properly attributed constitute plagiarism.*

Note that you are expressly forbidden from cutting and pasting and substantial portion of text from any outside sources and putting this material in your lab paper. In particular you must not cut and paste sections of your lab manual into your paper. This rule applies whether you use a footnote or not.

You are expressly forbidden from cutting and pasting equations and derivations from other lab reports. You may use correctly attributed equations from the lab manual, but any other equation manipulations and derivations have to be your own.

Q07: Why are we using TurnItIn.com?

During academic year 2003-2004, the laboratory staff detected 42 plagiarized laboratory papers. In an effort to ensure fairness, we have been using MyDropBox.com, SafeAssign, and TurnItIn.com. Canvas works with TurnItIn directly, so you just have to submit your paper on Canvas, and Canvas will use TurnItIn as an outside tool to check your paper for originality.

You agree that by taking this course, all required lab papers or other assignments submitted for credit may be submitted to TurnItIn.com or similar third parties to review and evaluate for originality and intellectual integrity and that if the results of such a review support an allegation of academic dishonesty, the course work in question as well as any supporting materials may be submitted to the Office of Student Conduct for investigation and further action. Understand that all work submitted to TurnItIn.com will be added to its database of papers.

Q08: What is the procedure for submitting papers to TurnItIn.com?

TurnItIn is an integral part of Canvas. You submit your paper to Canvas and your paper gets processed by TurnItIn.

Q09: When are electronic submission due?

Electronic submissions are due by 6 pm, a week after the lab is performed.

Q10: What will happen if I fail to submit my paper to Canvas?

If you fail to submit your document to Canvas, your paper will receive a 10% penalty per day late, up to a week and a zero afterwards.

Q11: What should I do if something goes wrong with my submission?

If you discover after you submit that you submitted to the wrong section or under the wrong student name, contact your TA and tell them which section/student you submitted under.

If you have problems uploading your document, e-mail your TA and attach a copy of your document to the e-mail. Be sure to keep a record of doing this.

Q12: How is a determination of plagiarism made?

TurnItIn.com will assess your work and generate a report with a plagiarism score. The program does not decide if plagiarism has occurred. TAs will review papers from TurnItIn.com and will examine any papers that have an unusually high OR low plagiarism score. Any papers that appear suspicious will be forwarded to the laboratory director. Determination of plagiarism is only made by the director and depends on the details of the paper and not the numerical score papered by TurnItIn.com.

In other words, TurnItIn.com is used to identify possible plagiarism. The determination of plagiarism is made by the director, not the web site. All determinations are subject to appeal.

Students can check their originality score on Canvas, but remember that that is not the score that is relevant. Opening the checked assignment and clicking on the “Text-Only Report” at the bottom will give a breakdown of possible sources. If the top source has a similarity of 10% or higher, the paper will be checked by the lab director. Students can submit a paper multiple times, up until the deadline, so they can submit it early to check the originality score and get peace of mind or make changes and resubmit it.

Q13: What are the penalties for correctly attributed copying?

In general, copying *appropriate* figures from the lab manual or lab website and correctly attributing them is penalty-free. This is a course in Physics laboratory methods, not a course in technical drawing. Citing the manual or a textbook for an equation or physical constant is also penalty-free.

Copying text from an outside source *with a correct citation and reference* is penalized at 50% of the value of the copied text. However, a report that has text 100% copied from another report is worth 0 points, even if the copying is correctly attributed.

Q14: What are the penalties for plagiarism?

University regulations require that the minimum penalty for plagiarism is a zero for that paper and forwarding of the evidence of plagiarism to the Office of Student Conduct. Generally, any student who is twice found with evidence of plagiarism will receive an F for the course and will be scheduled for a disciplinary hearing.

All students must sign and submit this page along with their first report:

I have read the document entitled “Plagiarism and TurnItIn.com FAQ” and I agree to abide by all of the policies and procedures outlined in this document.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____ e-mail address: _____