Science Department Statement on Academic Integrity

Work in the sciences creates certain unique situations regarding academic integrity. Some science classes may require you to write papers or create presentations based on research, and these kinds of activities must follow the same rules and requirements for original work and citation of sources that the History department has outlined for you. This statement will deal with academic integrity situations more unique to science.

No grade is more valuable than your honesty and integrity. No grade is worth betraying the trust of your teacher, subverting your own learning, or gaining an unfair advantage relative to your classmates. So, carefully pay attention to, and abide by, both the letter and the spirit of the rules.

In all cases, the teacher who is giving you the assignment should be consulted for all questions regarding expectations for academic integrity on that assignment. Any ambiguous or unclear situations should immediately be brought to the teacher’s attention.

Overarching Principle 1: Present only your own work

Whether the assignment is homework, laboratory work, or assessments, whether the work done was collaborative group work or individual work, what you turn in must represent your own understanding and your own effort.

Assessments:
Traditional in-class assessments (tests and quizzes) require that all students work individually and not communicate, either directly or obliquely, in order to preserve the goal of individual assessment of understanding. Out-of-class assessments (take-home tests) follow this same requirement. The use of outside sources (internet-based or otherwise) is not allowed, nor is talking with other people. During any assessment, only your teacher may answer questions that you have about that assessment.

Our school schedule often dictates that assessments be given to different sections of the same class on different days. It is never allowed for students to talk about a test with one another (even if you know that student has already completed the assessment) until your teacher explicitly allows you to. This prohibition extends to any mention of the test, even the casual “wow, that was hard/easy.” You teacher will let you know when it is allowable to discuss a particular assessment.

Laboratory-based Group Work:
Whether indoors or outdoors, collaborative group work in the sciences is very common. These situations can create confusion when trying to figure out how present one’s own work. While there may be a collaborative effort to make observations and collect data, the creation of a lab report must be your own work. This includes, but is not limited to, the creation of your own graphical analyses, your own calculations and your own written work. It is never acceptable to copy paragraphs, sentences or phrases from your lab partners. In most instances, it is not acceptable to have one lab partner prepare a graph and then copy that graph to your lab report (always seek direct and clear instructions from your teacher regarding her expectations for any particular assignment).

Laboratory-based Individual Work:
Clearly, if your teacher has assigned you a task individually, it is never appropriate to present as your own the data, data analysis, writing or ideas of another person.
Homework (including take-home tests and quizzes):
Homework assignments may be either collaborative or individual. Before starting a homework assignment, make certain you know whether your teacher expects you to work alone, or whether collaboration may be allowed. Even in cases where collaboration is allowed, direct copying of another’s work is prohibited, for this misrepresents your own understanding.

Overarching Principle 2: Make careful observations and record them honestly

In the sciences, you must make careful observations. These observations may be quantitative, qualitative, indoors, outdoors, of a man-made experiment, or of the natural world. In all cases, it is the student’s obligation to make honest observations. It is a violation of scientific and academic integrity to record observations incorrectly, either to give the impression that work not done was in fact completed or to match recorded data with what you might think ought to be, rather than what you actually saw.

Under no circumstances is it acceptable to “fudge” data to match a theory. Errant data must be explained, and can only be deleted if an observational error is detected. Nor is it acceptable to say, in order to complete an assignment, that you have observed a tree, bird, leaf, flower or other object that you have not.