

## Computer Science and the Stanford Honor Code

Parts of this handout are based on similar handouts by Eric Roberts and Mehran Sahami. Thanks to Julie Zelenski for her input.

This handout discusses the Stanford Honor Code and how it relates to CS106A. I'm sure that many of you probably don't think this handout will be relevant for you – the overwhelming majority of you are hardworking, honest students who would never think of cheating. That said, **please read this handout before starting the programming assignments in this course**. Over the past few years, we've seen an unfortunate rise in the number of Honor Code cases that have come out of CS106A and the CS department in general. Most of the students we catch cheating aren't bad people. They don't arrive in CS106A intending to get an unfair advantage over other students. Rather, they're good students who panic at the last minute and make bad decisions.

Our policy with regards to the Honor Code is the following:

Unless you indicate otherwise, any work you submit must be

- your own work;
- created without assistance from anyone else (except possibly the course staff); and
- created without consulting any resources other than the required readings, course handouts, and lecture content.

If any of the work you submit, in part or in whole, does not adhere to these criteria, you are required to provide a citation explaining the assistance you received or external resources you consulted.

Learning to program is like learning any skill or craft: you need to try out different techniques and approaches and learn from your successes and failures. Much of the programming savvy you'll develop in this course will come from working through the assignments to try out new tools and techniques. It's important to go through this process on your own as much as possible.

We expect that you will get stuck at some point in the quarter and need help on some of your assignments. This is perfectly normal. When this happens, you're welcome to email your section leader, stop by the LaIR, or visit Keith or Vikas in office hours to get advice.

Our expectation is that unless indicated otherwise, all work you submit will be your own. If you discuss the assignment with another student, look online for inspiration or advice, or otherwise do anything that causes the work you submit to not be completely your own ideas and creations, you need to provide a citation. This can be as simple as a short comment near relevant portions of the code explaining what assistance you received. As long as you properly cite any outside aid you receive, you will not be guilty of plagiarism. We reserve the right to assess a penalty to any code you submit that, in our judgment, is not substantially your own work.

In CS106A, we employ powerful automated plagiarism detection tools that compare assignment submissions with other submissions from the current and previous quarters. These tools are effective at detecting suspiciously similar submissions, which we then examine further. Our tools are good at detecting code that has been copied verbatim or that is substantially derived from other sources, even if that code has been modified before it is submitted.

## The One-Week Rule

It can be overwhelming to be working on an assignment right before it's due while also juggling a full course load. The entire course staff can sympathize. It's unfortunate, therefore, when we see submissions that are clearly copied from other sources, since the consequences can be so dire.

To address this, we're instituting a new policy in CS106A this quarter: **within one week of submitting any assignment, you're permitted to contact Keith, head TA Vikas, or your section leader to add additional citations to your assignment submissions.**

What exactly does this policy mean? We hope it doesn't come to this, but suppose that you're working on an assignment the night before it's due and hit a roadblock. You're completely stuck on some bug and can't make any progress on the assignment. You've been studying for midterms in other classes and haven't slept in a while. In a moment of panic, you ask to see a friend's assignment and copy some of their code line-by-line into your own submission, then submit it.

Now imagine what happens when you wake up the next day. At this point, you'd probably realize that you're in serious trouble: you've just submitted someone else's work as your own, and since you know that we use automated plagiarism detection tools, you know that you're probably going to be caught. In normal circumstances, you'd potentially be referred to the Office of Community Standards and risk failing CS106A and a one-quarter suspension.

The one-week rule gives you an escape hatch. Within one week of submitting the assignment, you can send an email either to your section leader, Vikas, or Keith explaining which parts of the code you copied. With no questions asked, you've ensured that you are no longer in violation of the Honor Code (assuming, of course, that you're honest about which parts of the code you've copied). We can then give you partial credit for your work and can offer some help on the parts that you're struggling with.

So why the one week clock? Our intent with this policy is to make sure that you're accountable for your actions. Everyone makes mistakes, and we want this policy to give you a chance to own up to your errors without getting severely punished for them. However, it's important that you be honest with yourself and admit to any errors you've made around the time that you make them.

## Our Recommendations

- **Ask the course staff for help when you need it.** In CS106A, we try our best to be available to provide help when you need it. We staff the LaIR for at least thirty hours each week. Your section leader should be available to answer questions in person or over email, and Keith and Vikas each have office hours each week. We'd strongly prefer that you ask us for help if you need it, since we can give you targeted answers and try to provide useful advice.
- **Do not look at other students' code or code from online.** Once you have seen code that solves a problem, it can be difficult to think of any other way of solving that problem. We've had many cases where a student looked at code that wasn't their own (usually, for a hint) and ended up turning in code that, intentionally or unintentionally, was essentially identical. Therefore, we recommend that you not look at any code that isn't your own. If you do look at someone else's code, you should cite this in your submission to avoid a potential plagiarism charge.
- **Do not search for hints or advice online.** Although there are many good programming resources online, we strongly advise against searching for help on the programming assignments online. We reuse assignments from quarter to quarter and past students have often put their assignment solutions online. If you search online for advice on the assignments, you may end up a click away from complete working solutions for each of the assignments. As mentioned in the above bullet point, once you've seen this solution, it can be difficult to write your own solution without unintentionally including code similar to the code you consulted. To avoid putting yourself in this situation, we strongly recommend not searching for advice online.