

Submitting an assignment for one course and then resubmitting it for a different assignment in another course without advance permission from the instructor can be considered academic misconduct. There are a number of reasons for this including:

1. Duplication of Effort- This implies that a student is not putting in the effort to complete the requirements of each course. It also implies that a student is producing more work than they actually have, which is misleading. The University of Michigan expects students to engage with the material in each of their courses and demonstrate their understanding of it in unique and distinct ways.
2. Unfair Advantage- submitting duplicate work provides a student an unfair advantage over their peers who have worked hard to complete the same assignment. Academic fairness requires all students to have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
3. Instructor Expectations- Each course is designed differently, with specific learning objectives and different means of assessment. Reusing the same material may not meet those expectations exactly which could impact not only your grade, but your overall learning as well.

Please note: If you are planning on using material from a previous course as part of an assignment, communicating with your instructor(s) ahead of time to get permission is the appropriate way to avoid any issues of academic dishonesty.

Consider the following example presented to the Office of Student Academic Affairs:

Example #1

A student submits a rough draft to their English workshop group entitled “Transit Transcendence or How We Learned to Love the Bus.” This paper focuses on how public transportation can be improved and he hopes it will fulfill the requirements of their second essay prompt, which requires students to propose a solution with sources.

According to the prompt, the assignment is meant to be an argumentative essay focused on addressing a general audience with the intent to inform and persuade them. But, the student’s essay reads more like a research paper and does not address a general audience or feature a clear problem and solution format as had been outlined in class. The paper also included several sources, several more than were required. As a result, it was fairly obvious to the instructor that the assignment did not meet expectations of the assignment.

In a follow-up meeting with the student, the instructor asked him to explain more about the origins of the draft. The student indicated he had an interest in public transportation in general after having taken a previous course which discussed the topic more broadly. He further indicated that he had crafted his essay based on the content he had learned it and was able to demonstrate a solid grasp of the material.

Towards the end of their discussion the instructor asked two questions. First, if the work was the student's? He indicated that it was. And second, if the student had used the work in the other course? The student stated that he had not. So the instructor asked for permission to contact the other course instructor and the student agreed.

In their conversation with the other instructor, the English instructor learned that the essay was nearly identical to one that had been submitted in the other course. This explained why the paper's structure did not align with the prompt or what had been discussed in class. As a result, they submitted the information to the Office of Student Academic Affairs and reported what they believed to be suspected self-plagiarism.

What could the student have done differently?

1. Communicate! If the student had previously submitted a similar assignment and intended to use work from another course, he could have spoken with the instructor about his interest in using it. The instructor could have provided guidance on how to do so, and potentially given him permission to use some of the previous work if it made sense to do so.
2. Understand the Assignment Requirements: based on the draft written by the student, he did not have a clear understanding of the goals of the assignment (i.e. that it was a persuasive argument written to a general audience). As a result, his initial draft did not meet the criteria for the assignment. If he was unclear, asking questions about what the assignment required either during class or office hours would have been beneficial.
3. Adapted Content: Even if the student had prior knowledge of the topic, he could have adapted the material to show a more nuanced understanding as it related to the assignment requirements. This would allow him to further expand his knowledge of the material and demonstrate it in a more creative way.