

TA Training Session

Some thoughts on academic Integrity

Michael Langer

Sept. 5, 2019

What we are going to discuss today...

1. Examples on what is considered acceptable versus unacceptable collaboration in CS
2. How can we (TA's) reduce plagiarism in our courses ?

BTW, everything I am going to say today is some else's idea.

Typical Plagiarism Policy Statement

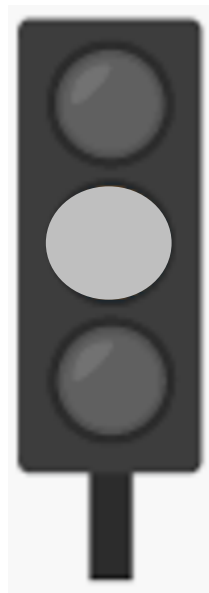
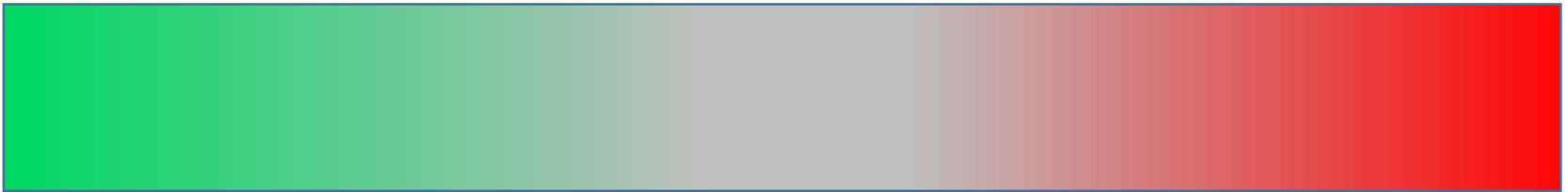
- Work submitted for this course must represent *your own efforts*. Assignments must be done *individually*.
- *Discussion is encouraged* ... but written notes or cell phone pictures are not allowed.

Is that clear ?

Scenarios

Acceptable

Unacceptable





The student does the assignment entirely on their own.

But this is not what we necessarily want. Learning to work with other people is very important.

Student A copies their assignment from Student B.

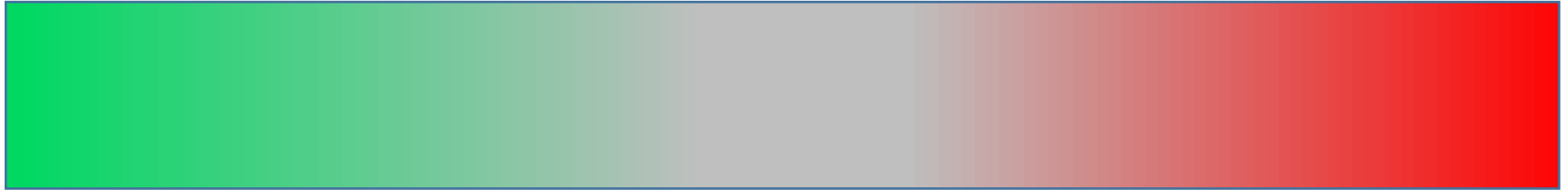
These are cases that are easiest to detect. These are the ones that instructors report. So if you notice it, then tell your instructor.



Scenarios

Acceptable

Unacceptable



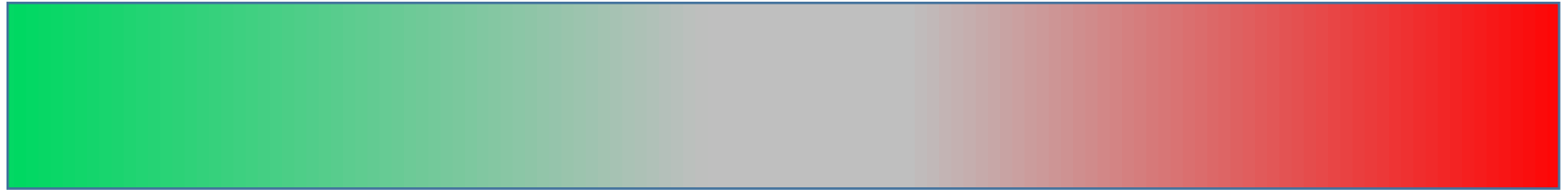
Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having difficulties with certain parts.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

What is acceptable ?

Scenario 1

Acceptable

Unacceptable



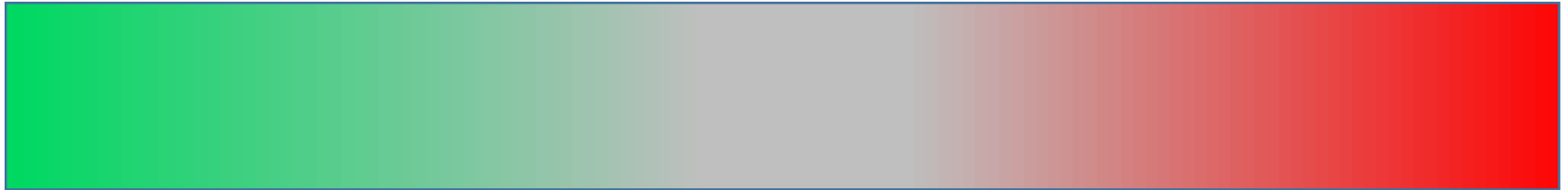
Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having difficulties with certain parts.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

They are both having trouble on some question.
They discuss how they are approaching it, and make progress.
They end the meeting, without taking away written record.

Scenario 2

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

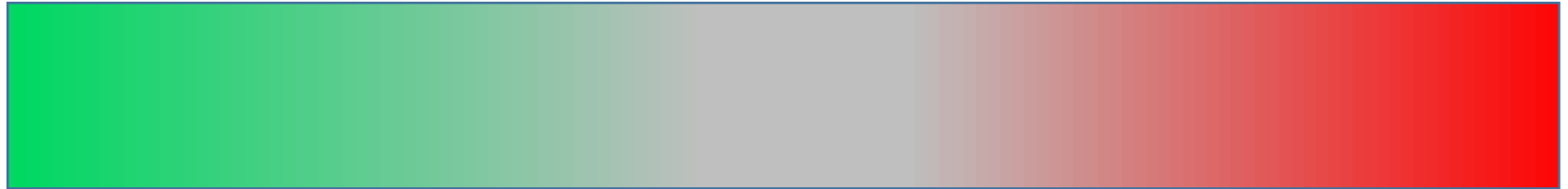
Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B gives Student A some hints.

Is this acceptable ?

Scenario 2

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

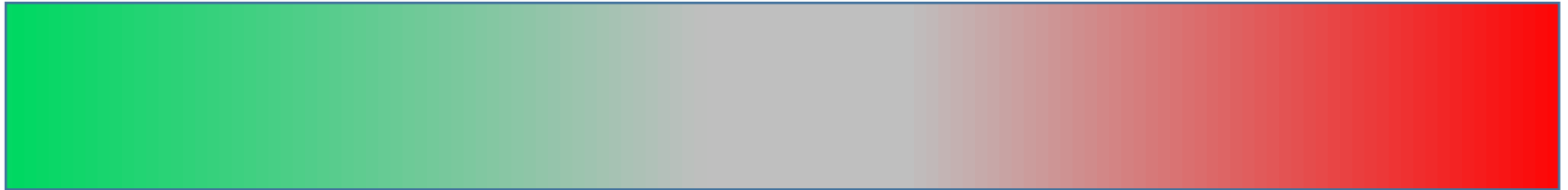
Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B gives Student A some hints.

Yes it is acceptable. Student B is playing a similar role as a T.A. here, and needs to use the same judgment as a T.A. would.

Scenario 3

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B describes his solution to student A.
Student A understands and is now “good to go”.

Is this acceptable? (Same Q if you replace Student B by TA.)

Scenario 3

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

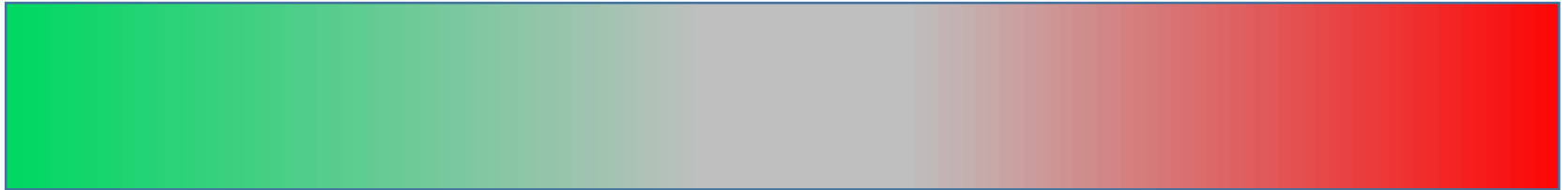
Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B describes his solution to student A.
Student A understands and is now “good to go”.

Yes, it is acceptable, but it is getting into the gray zone.

Scenario 4

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B looks at Student A's code, figures out what A is doing wrong, and tells A what to change.

(As a TA, do you ever do this?)

Scenario 4

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B looks at Student A's code, figures out what A is doing wrong, and tells A what to change in the code.

This can border on unacceptable. *It depends on what is wrong.*

Scenario 5

Acceptable

Unacceptable



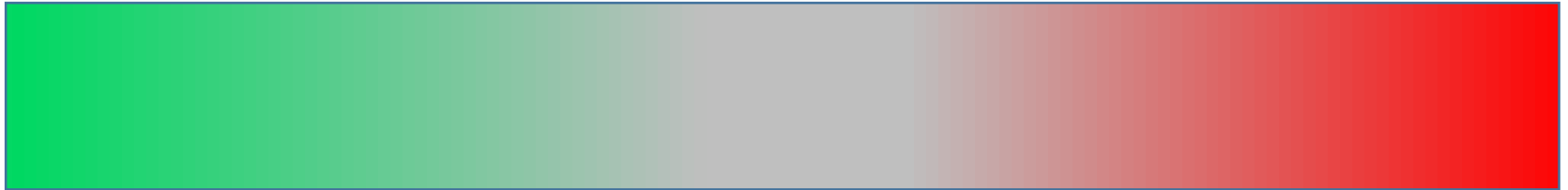
Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. **Student B gives their solution code to student A.**

Scenario 5

Acceptable

Unacceptable



Two students are working independently on the assignment.
They are having some difficulties.
So they meet to discuss the assignment.

Student A is having trouble on some part that Student B has solved. Student B gives their solution code to student A.

This is unacceptable, regardless of whether Student A modifies the code before submitting it.



Part 1 Conclusions

Acceptable

Unacceptable



- The end cases are easy...
- ... but there is a big gray zone. So, when helping students, you have to use your good judgment.
- Consult with other TA's and with the instructor.

Part 2:

How can we (TA's) *reduce* plagiarism
in our courses ?

- assignments
- tutorials

Design good assignments

1. Don't use the same assignments from year to year.

If your instructor is doing that, then point out to them that this will lead to cheating. *Minor changes* to a previous assignment might be enough to make previous solutions less applicable.

Take leadership role!

Design good assignments

2. Use small step sizes.

If students don't know where to begin, then they are much more likely to plagiarize.

Design good assignments

3. Make the most difficult parts worth the least marks.

Why ?

Design good assignments

4. Explain in the PDF what the *learning* goals are.

Why is it important to *do* the assignment ?

The goal is *not* get the right answer
(just as our goal tonight is not to feed you pizza).

Design good assignments

5. Make the assignment fun.

Tell a story to dress up the technical parts.

Give good tutorials

1. Interaction

Students should talk to each other about course work.
But they need to *learn* how to do this.

Give good tutorials

1. Interaction

Students should talk to each other about course work.
But they need to *learn* how to do this.

It is harder to make this in a big group.
It takes practice to make it work well.

Mea culpa!

Give good tutorials

2. Discuss plagiarism scenarios that emerge.

- Before the assignment is due
Which parts are difficult? Which hints are helpful?
- After the assignment (taking it up)
Which parts were difficult? Which hints were helpful?

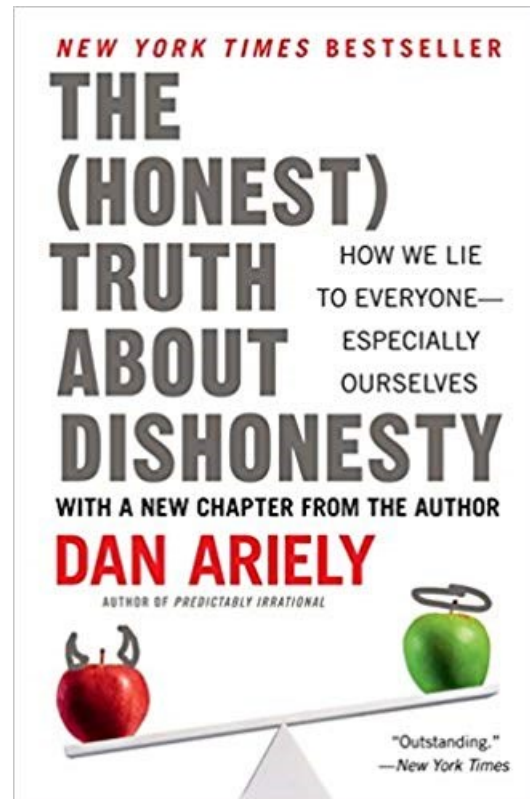
Don't be shy to *remind* students that plagiarism

- is a serious offense (Student Code of Conduct)
- is morally wrong



If the reminder occurs close to a time when they are tempted, then they will be less likely to do it.

For interesting reading on the science of dishonesty:



(lots of Youtube videos by him too)