FOUR WAYS TO TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG
(adapted by the UCSD Academic Integrity Office from
The Institute for Global Ethics, www.globalethics.org)

1. The "Rules/Standard Conventions" Test

The tough part of this test is that the rules or standard conventions may not be articulated every time they would apply.

For example, it is against the rules to submit a paper written by someone else as if it was your own work. A professor may not explicitly state that you can’t do this, but it is assumed that everyone knows this, that it is a standard convention.

How do you know if something is a rule? How do you figure out the unarticulated standard conventions?

2. The "Gut Feeling" Test

If you can’t tell from published rules or you cannot ascertain the standard convention in a particular situation, you could move on to the second test---check your gut!

What does this mean? It means checking in with your conscience---whether it is the little voice in your head or the feeling in your gut. Oftentimes, our conscience knows what our ego doesn’t want us to realize because our conscience interferes with us getting something we want (like a higher grade than deserved).

How do you know you’re about to do something that your conscience tells you you shouldn’t be doing? Is there a voice in your head? A feeling in your stomach? Does your body react?

Finish this sentence, “When I’m about to do something that’s wrong, I…..”

3. The "Role Model" Test

If you can’t tell what’s right and what’s wrong from the rules, standard conventions or your conscience, you may want to try asking yourself the following question:

If my parent/spiritual advisor/respected role model knew what I was doing, would they approve?

4. The "Professor's Behind You" Test

If you can’t tell what’s right and what’s wrong from the rules, standard conventions, your conscience, or a role model, perhaps this test will help.

Picture your professor standing behind you watching the way in which you are completing your academic assignment. What would she say? Would she approve of your method?

If the answer is “no,” then it is probably the wrong thing to do.

The “Professor’s Behind You” test may be one of the best tests to use for questions of academic ethics. And if you can’t picture what she would say, you should really ask her!