

Promoting Academic Honesty in Exams

The most effective way to promote academic honesty in exams is to change the assessment environment. Below are some tips and strategies that can help you encourage academic integrity in your exams and beyond.

1) Lower the stakes

- High-stakes exams increase pressure on students therefore the likelihood of students being tempted to cheat, especially when students feel unsure about their abilities (Lang 2013; McCabe 2012).
- More frequent, lower-stakes assessments can thus help reduce motivation for cheating.
- Another benefit of frequent, lower-stakes assessments is that they have been shown to be more beneficial to learning, especially in regard to long-term retention (Brown et al 2014).

2) Foster intrinsic motivation

- Students are more likely to be tempted to cheat when their primary motivation in a course is extrinsic (e.g., grades, meeting requirements, etc.) (Anderman and Koenka 2017; Lang 2013).
- Intrinsic motivation in learning (i.e. wanting to learn something for its own sake), on the other hand, can reduce instances of dishonesty.
- Strategies for encouraging intrinsic motivation include emphasizing the authentic applications of course material, showing enthusiasm, and clearly communicating connections between class material and the course's learning goals. Other ways to encourage intrinsic motivation can be found on this page on how to [stimulate interest](#) in your students.

3) Focus on mastery over grades

- Try making mastery of the material the focus of the course instead of performances resulting in grades. Remember, "Assessments present opportunities for students to demonstrate how well they have achieved the learning objectives for the course; they are not the learning objectives themselves" (Lang 2013, 92).
- One way to do this is to give students multiple opportunities to show you their mastery of the material. For example, one can allow students to take self-graded online quizzes multiple times until they achieve a certain score. Frequent assessment can help, as does giving students choices in which assessments to complete.
- While you might draw inspiration from [mastery grading](#) or [specifications grading](#), you can also keep the focus on mastery of the material using traditional grading schemes, if you wish. For example, avoid comparing students to one another on their performance (e.g. sharing exam distributions), and instead provide feedback to individual students on how well they demonstrate their knowledge of the course material.

4) Talk about academic honesty

- Talk openly about academic honesty policies and what constitutes a violation of academic integrity in your course. Be specific as different instructors often have different expectations, especially regarding collaboration, sharing of materials, etc.
- Focus the discussion on what constitutes academic integrity (e.g. whether or not collaboration is permitted), not on ethics (e.g. that it's inherently wrong to cheat).
- There is some evidence that students signing honesty pledges, especially directly before or after an exam, can help reduce instances of cheating. This effect may have more to do with an open culture that promotes academic honesty, however, than the pledges themselves (McCabe et al 2012; Lang 2013).

5) Reduce opportunities for cheating

- Assume that any past exams are out in the open and that students may have access to them. If you have reused exam questions from year-to-year, consider either using different questions this year or writing new questions next year. Paraphrasing questions can also help reduce cheating (Golden and Kohlbeck 2020).
- Write complex questions that require students to apply knowledge and that probe higher-order thinking. Consider scenario-based questions that require students to apply knowledge to a novel scenario. This can come from designing a [question stem](#) that relies on application or an understanding of multiple concepts covered in the course. It can also be done by providing answer choices that require a high level of understanding to discriminate between them.
- Balance measures of preventing cheating with their impact on all students and with the overall tone of your course.
- If giving online and/or take home exams, check out our [online exam resources](#) for specific suggestions on how to design online exams that promote academic integrity.

WashU Academic Integrity Policies:

Washington University in St. Louis has academic honesty policies that apply to all students, as well as policies and procedures that differ by school. Familiarize yourself and help your students become familiar with WashU academic integrity policies. One easy way to do this is to provide relevant links in your course syllabus.

- University-wide Policies: [Undergraduate](#) / [Graduate \(pdf\)](#)
- School Policies: Arts & Sciences: [Policies, Resources](#) / Brown School: [Definitions, Procedures](#) / [McKelvey](#) / [Sam Fox](#) / [School of Law](#) / [School of Medicine](#) / Olin: [MBA, DBA, PhD](#) / [University College](#)

Further Resources:

[Conversation about Academic Integrity @ Olin](#) / [Inclusive Practices for Addressing Academic Integrity](#) / “Cheating Lessons” by James Lang: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) / [International Center for Academic Integrity](#) / [Translating Your Exams Online](#)

References and Additional Reading:

- Anderman, E. M., & Koenka, A. C. (2017). [The Relation Between Academic Motivation and Cheating. Theory Into Practice](#), 56(2), 95–102.
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- Golden, J., & Kohlbeck, M. (2020). [Addressing cheating when using test bank questions in online Classes. Journal of Accounting Education](#), 52, 100671.
- Lang, J. M. (2013). *Cheating lessons: Learning from academic dishonesty*. Harvard University Press.
- McCabe, D. L., Butterfield, K. D., & Treviño, L. K. (2012). *Cheating in college: Why students do it and what educators can do about it*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Morris, E. J. (2016). Academic Integrity: A Teaching and Learning Approach. In T. Bretag (Ed.), *Handbook of Academic Integrity* (pp. 1037–1053). Springer Singapore.
- Nguyen, J. G., Keuseman, K. J., & Humston, J. J. (2020). [Minimize Online Cheating for Online Assessments During COVID-19 Pandemic](#). *Journal of Chemical Education*, 97(9), 3429–3435.