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Rethinking Cheating

Academic dishonesty in the classroom can happen anywhere, whether face to face or remotely. The following will help prevent or reduce cheating for testing and other assessments. Although it may be difficult to prevent cheating entirely, faculty who take mindful action with test and assignment design reduce the likelihood that students will cheat.

Testing Tips

- **Low-stakes is Better than High-stakes**
  Frequent online quizzing is a great way to get students used to the pattern of assessment and builds durable memory. If students have multiple opportunities to show you that they have mastered material (for example, taking a reading quiz after a reading), they are less likely to cheat than during a high-stakes midterm or final.

- **Mix Objective with Subjective Questions**
  Online testing may include objective measures (multiple choice, also called items). However, faculty can also use short-answer or essay questions. These question types are more subjective in nature and may demand of students a deeper understanding of the subject being tested. While mixing objective and subjective type questions may not discourage or stop sharing of information, it may limit the effect on the student's final grade (Watson & Sottile, 2010).

- **Time the Test**
  Timed questions give students less incentive to go looking online for answers. By setting a test with an expected completion time, unprepared students could have the most to lose as they spend time going over material, and risk not having sufficient time to respond to all questions. Take the test yourself and then figure on roughly four times that amount of time for students.

- **Use Question Banks**
  Rather than using a fixed number of items that remain unchanged, create a question bank using Canvas. A question bank generates an assessment with randomized questions you select. Pools can be created from new questions or questions in existing tests or pools. Pools are most effective when there are large numbers of questions in one group. The faculty member could then create an assessment drawing a specific number of questions from each of the question-type pools.

- **Randomize Questions**
  When creating a test in Canvas, one option allows faculty to randomize test questions, similar to taking the DMV driving test: students will not get questions posed in the same order.

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- **Limit Students Seeing their Responses**
  Limiting how and when students see their responses are ways to ensure test and answer confidentiality, but it can be at the cost of feedback. Available test options include letting students see responses and allowing students to see correct answers. Canvas considers these as Quiz Options. Providing test scores is important feedback that indicates how well students have performed and should be made available.

  However, through a process of elimination, students may be able to determine the correct answer for each test question if their earlier, submitted answers are identified as incorrect, or if the correct answer is provided. Students could lose the incentive to both prepare for testing or to seek out correct answers by reviewing lecture notes, assigned readings, or through group discussion after completing tests. Thus, faculty might reconsider whether to include student responses as an option to be displayed. This is especially relevant if faculty have allowed students to repeat tests. Each time a test is taken, students could attempt a different answer for a test question that was previously graded as incorrect. Correct answers to all test questions could eventually be accumulated and passed on to other students, or to students of future classes.

- **Display Questions One at A Time** – If a test or quiz is higher stakes, consider displaying questions one at a time. If there are multiple questions on a screen it is easy for students to take a screen capture of the displayed questions and share them with other students. While students can still screen capture pages with single questions, or even type them into a document, it is more time consuming and unwieldy. Also, consider locking movement by *locking questions after answering*. This is also called "backtracking." While a test-taking strategy, many high stakes online exams prevent students from answering questions out of order as another way to increase fidelity.

- **Use Higher-order Multiple Choice Questions**
  Multiple choice (items) can test higher order thinking quite efficiently. The following multiple-choice question formats require analysis and evaluation of class work in order to solve: Analogy, Case Study, Premise-Consequence and If/Then. Adding applied problems to solve during your online exam reduces the likelihood of a student being able to find a quick answer online. If using one of these types, such as analogy, for the first time, please show your students how to do them first! Look for the CETL webinar "Writing Better Test Questions" or email us.

Questions on **quiz building in Canvas**? Email CETL at cetltech@calstatela.edu

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Tips for Graded Assignments and Other Assessments

- **Formative Assessment is Authentic Assessment**
  Giving students formative assignments, where they are required to report their progress on a regular basis through Canvas (or via a shared Google doc), authentically records progress and is hard for students to plagiarize. Documentation makes it easier for faculty to see the development of a student's work from inception to completion, and possibly identify unexplained gaps that could occur if students used the work of others and claimed it as their own. Both documentation of progress through regular status reporting and occasional faculty input can add a greater level of scrutiny to students, making it more difficult to pass off the work of others as their own.

- **Use Discussion Assignments**
  Create a Discussion Board in Canvas requiring students to demonstrate critical thinking skills by responding to a relevant forum topic using specific criteria. Break up the discussion into a series of questions; students can select one question to answer --which helps you control the length of the thread. Note: Make sure to create a companion rubric in rubric so you can quickly score discussion postings. You may also choose to grade a posting randomly; this way students bring their best to every post.

- **Meaningful Assignments Reduce the Urge to Cheat**
  Creative, personal assignments that reflect students' lived experiences make it more difficult for students to plagiarize portions of a previous term paper or other sources that may only indirectly touch on class topics. There is nothing wrong with take home assignments, open book quizzes, or any assessment that allows students to use tools at their disposal to apply critical skills to real world problems that easy answers defy. As with discussion assignments, make sure you have a rubric at the ready for any graded assignment—students should know what the criteria are for evaluation of their work.

- **Check for Plagiarism using Turnitin**
  Turnitin is a plagiarism prevention tool that detects matches between students' submitted assignments and existing work by others. Turnitin at Cal State L.A. is now only available through Canvas as a Canvas Turnitin Assignment. Be aware that Turnitin comes with some limitations; as more institutions use it, the database does not scale, so there may be delays in checks for authenticity.

Questions on **designing assignments**? Email CETL and someone will get back to you for a consultation: cetl@calstatela.edu

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