

## How to avoid classroom cheating

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### Technology presents cheating challenges and opportunities



<sup>[1]</sup> Snapchat—snap a photo with a smartphone and the image disappears 10 seconds after the receiver opens it. Great for selfies, but also for sending answers on a test. The evidence of cheating, though not the effects, is gone within 10 seconds.

Can teachers keep pace with the inventiveness, the sheer creativity of cheaters, often using the latest tech gadgets they use for accessing their electronic textbooks?

Like doctors who want to heal, educators choose teaching because they love to learn and want to share that passion with anybody, especially the young.

For teachers, it is emotionally and intellectually exhausting to chase cheaters who obstruct the learning process, who play a game of accumulating points for non-learning. Grading a research paper can become a legal interpretation of what plagiarism is, placing burden of proof on the teacher, providing due process for the student, and complying with the school policy on cheating. Helicopter parents are known to bring lawyers to conferences about a student accused of plagiarizing. The real tragedy: students lose the opportunity to learn.

*(Next page: Steps to avoid cheating)*

However, teachers can infect students with the joy of learning and thereby avoid classroom cheating in several ways.

#### Learning, not testing

Create a classroom atmosphere of learning and work, not testing and scores. If school is about testing, the pressure to cheat is ramped up. When students are taught that test scores will make or break their future—either get them into an exciting career or the unemployment rolls—they do not see themselves as bell-curve winners in a race to the top, but players in a game they are challenged to beat.

Educational systems and testing should benefit only students, not quantify their progress for someone else's advantage. Students want to create their own lives using their education to be healthy, happy, safe, creative, and to learn about their world. When students feel powerless and insignificant in pursuing their own educational agenda, cheating becomes acceptable to assert some control for themselves and over someone else's imposed educational goals.

Students must believe that their teachers want them to succeed in learning what is important and trust they will. Teachers should talk through the steps for completing an assignment successfully and thoughtfully, or have students explain how they would do it. These metacognitive skills of self-reflection and self-monitoring will empower students with their own learning. Students want to be thinkers, not an educational statistic.

#### Use tests to learn

Turn assessments into opportunities for students to strut their stuff. Evaluation instruments may be flawed, but students should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that their learning may not be flawed. Allow them to take ownership in showing what they have learned. Encourage them to argue why an essay deserved the grade it received and what they have learned, not why they deserve more points or why excuses for poor performance are valid. Students need to know that teachers believe in their potential as learners and as human beings, and that teachers have empathy for the difficulties and successes they are experiencing.

#### Training wheels

A major part of instruction should lie in teaching students how to learn and guide them along the way with training wheels. After parents explain how to ride a bicycle, a child will practice with training wheels, sometimes unsuccessfully, until she masters the skill. Learning occurs while peddling, not while listening to an explanation of the physics behind riding on two wheels.

Teachers lecture on what plagiarism is, why to avoid it, and its ugly consequences. Plagiarism is taught with a lot of talk that students tune out, but in reality plagiarism is the result of actions. While direct instruction, practice in paraphrasing and summarizing passages, and writing citations are necessary, both intentional and unintentional plagiarism occurs not during the instruction or practice, but when students work independently, taking notes and citing sources. Left to their own devices without training wheels, they can fall.

Training wheels work because children can learn on their own without parents' constant assistance. However, it is unrealistic to believe that teachers can supervise the entire note taking process—checking that the information is in students' own words, ensuring they think about what they are reading, and documenting all sources.

Like training wheels, web-based software guides students through the entire process of creating the research paper. It allows the teacher easy access to monitor each student's progress and provide feedback with informal formative evaluation—not after a plagiarized paper is submitted, but during the process when the teacher can identify and prevent potential plagiarism and reinforce earlier instruction and practice.

#### Failure as success

Accept student failure as a learning opportunity. Failure is human and the cause for success. As Michael Jordan put it: "I've failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed." Teachers want to prevent failure, cheating, and plagiarism, but ultimately students will decide if they want to do their best to measure themselves, or to cheat, plagiarize and dodge the consequences. When called to account for themselves, students need empathetic teachers who will help them turn those failures into successful learning experiences.

Education is an opportunity for students to define who they are and who they want to become. Will they choose to be learners or cheaters? What they learn in their English or math class and what they avoid learning by cheating during their formative years are brush strokes that paint the picture that will determine what they value and how they imagine themselves now and as adults.

Because students want to learn what is important to them, they need to believe that the education system and their teachers care about them as people striving toward adulthood. Cheating is not inevitable if classrooms are conducted as exhilarating think tanks inhabited by teachers and students who have faith in themselves and who share the joy of learning.

Dorothy Mikuska is a former high school English teacher and founder of [PaperToolsPro](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.

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