

Helping Students to Stop Cheating and Learn the Material

Educators face a dual challenge: ensuring students deeply engage with course material while addressing the potential for AI-assisted cheating. Below are strategies to achieve both goals, grounded in fostering genuine learning and maintaining academic integrity.

Helping Students Learn Course Material

1. Active Learning Techniques:

- a. **Problem-Based Learning (PBL):** Design assignments where students solve real-world problems using course concepts. For example, in a biology class, ask students to analyze a local environmental issue and propose solutions, encouraging critical thinking over rote memorization.
- b. **Collaborative Activities:** Use group projects, peer reviews, or in-class discussions to promote engagement. Tools like think-pair-share or jigsaw activities ensure students process material actively.
- c. **Scaffolded Assignments:** Break complex tasks into smaller, structured steps. For instance, in a history course, have students submit an outline, then a draft, before a final paper, guiding them through the research process.

2. Personalized and Contextual Learning:

- a. **Connect to Real Life:** Relate material to students' interests or current events. In a math class, use data from recent sports statistics or economic trends for problem sets.
- b. **Differentiated Instruction:** Offer varied formats (e.g., videos, readings, hands-on activities) to cater to diverse learning styles, ensuring broader engagement.

3. Formative Assessments:

- a. Use frequent, low-stakes quizzes or reflective journals to gauge understanding and provide feedback. Tools like Kahoot or Google Forms can make this interactive.
- b. Encourage self-assessment by having students explain their reasoning or reflect on what they found challenging.

4. Leverage Technology Wisely:

- a. Use platforms like Canvas or Moodle to create interactive modules with embedded questions or simulations. For example, physics students could use virtual labs to experiment with concepts like momentum.
- b. Incorporate AI as a learning tool, such as having students critique AI-generated summaries of course material to deepen their understanding.

5. Build Metacognitive Skills:

- a. Teach students how to learn by modeling study strategies, like spaced repetition or concept mapping. For instance, in a literature class, guide students to create visual timelines of a novel's plot to reinforce comprehension.
- b. Encourage goal-setting and self-monitoring to foster ownership of learning.

Preventing AI-Assisted Cheating

1. Design AI-Resistant Assessments:

- a. **Open-Ended, Unique Questions:** Create prompts requiring personal reflection or application to specific contexts AI struggles to replicate. Example: "How does this economic theory apply to your hometown's job market?"
- b. **In-Class or Proctored Assessments:** Conduct exams in controlled environments or use live oral exams to verify understanding. For remote settings, tools like ProctorU or Zoom-based viva voce can work.
- c. **Process-Oriented Tasks:** Focus on the process, not just the product. Require drafts, annotations, or explanations of problem-solving steps to ensure originality.

2. Use Authentic Assessments:

- a. Assign tasks that demand creativity or personal input, like designing a project, creating a portfolio, or presenting orally. For example, in a programming course, ask students to build a unique application and explain their code in a live demo.
- b. Incorporate peer or self-assessment to encourage accountability and reflection.

3. Leverage Plagiarism and AI Detection Tools:

- a. Use software like Turnitin, Grammarly, or ZeroGPT to detect AI-generated text. These tools analyze writing patterns for anomalies, though they're not foolproof.
- b. Compare student submissions to their prior work to spot inconsistencies in style or quality.

4. **Educate About Academic Integrity:**

- a. Discuss the ethical implications of using AI to cheat, emphasizing long-term consequences like skill gaps. Frame integrity as a professional value.
- b. Create clear policies on AI use in assignments, specifying when it's permissible (e.g., for brainstorming) and when it's not.

5. **Adapt to AI's Presence:**

- a. **Integrate AI as a Tool:** Allow controlled AI use (e.g., for research or grammar checks) while requiring students to document their process. For instance, ask students to submit an AI-generated draft alongside their revisions to show their contribution.
- b. **Randomized or Dynamic Questions:** Use question banks or tools like Pearson's MyLab to generate unique problem sets, reducing the effectiveness of AI solvers.

Balancing Both Goals

- **Foster a Growth Mindset:** Emphasize learning as a journey, rewarding effort and improvement over perfection. This reduces the incentive to cheat while deepening engagement.
- **Build Relationships:** Create a classroom culture where students feel supported and less pressured to cheat. Regular check-ins or office hours can help identify struggling students early.
- **Iterate and Reflect:** Continuously assess which strategies work by collecting student feedback or analyzing performance trends. Adjust assignments to stay ahead of AI advancements.

Consider the story of Regulus

Teach students the concept of honor: In Rome, Regulus was given freedom to address the Senate. Physically unbound, he could have stayed in the safety of his homeland, surrounded by family and fellow citizens. A lesser man might have seen this as an escape from the Carthaginian prison, where chains and suffering held him. Yet Regulus, bound by his oath, faced a deeper captivity—one of honor.

Knowing full well the consequences, he declared that his honor compelled him to return to Carthage, as he had sworn. To stay in Rome would be to break his word, a fate worse than any physical prison.

As Cicero later recounted, Regulus said, “Lock me in a prison, and I will strive day and night to escape its chains; but bind me by my honor, and I can never escape, for my soul is held by my word.”

Teach students honor...something more important than a diploma. An unearned diploma will open doors, yet honor will improve the world and make one's life worth living.