



HONESTY MODE: NO CHEAT CODES

"Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."

-C.S. Lewis

OVERVIEW

Students discuss and reflect on honesty, and are invited to create a personal commitment for honesty, helping to build classroom norms around academic honesty.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the school year, to set classroom norms around honesty
- If you are noticing some academic dishonesty in your classroom

TIME REQUIRED

- < 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Bulletin Board (see [bulletin template idea in video game theme](#)) (optional)
- Handouts for commitments (see [templates to print out](#)) (optional)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will:

- Explore the importance of academic honesty
- Reflect on why people keep or don't keep their promises and commitments
- Make a commitment to choose honesty, academic or otherwise

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)
- [Supports, Modifications and Accommodations for Students](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Honesty
- Integrity

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect on whether you have ever faced a personal dilemma about academic honesty. If so, what contributed to your temptation to be dishonest? What did you decide to do, and what contributed to that decision?
- Have you noticed your students struggling with academic honesty? What might contribute to their desire to be dishonest or honest?
- Because the understanding of when and how to be honest is strongly influenced by culture, consider reviewing suggestions for "[Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)" to ensure this practice leaves space for students' varying understandings of honesty.

INSTRUCTIONS

REFLECT & DISCUSS: ACADEMIC HONESTY

- Start with a written reflection. Give students a few minutes to write down their thoughts and beliefs about academic honesty. How do they define academic honesty? Do they think it's important? Why or why not? Is it important for them, individually, to be honest in their academics? Why or why not?

- Discuss:
 - *How would you define academic honesty?*
 - *What are some examples of academic dishonesty?* [sample answers: not cheating on tests; using AI dishonestly to complete tasks; giving credit to sources, such as researchers, AI, group members]
 - *What are some reasons we might be tempted to be dishonest?*
 - *Why do you think it is important to be honest in our schoolwork?*
 - *For example, why is it important to give credit to (cite) our sources when we write papers or create projects?*
 - *For example, how can cheating negatively impact you (even if you end up getting a good score on a test)?*
 - *Why do you think so many students cheat, even when they know it's wrong?*
 - *How can we be honest in our own projects, papers, and tests?*
 - *What are some important ways we can be honest in our group work?*

REFLECT, DISCUSS, & PRACTICE: HONESTY COMMITMENTS

- Invite students to reflect once more:
 - *Interestingly, researchers have found that something called “honesty commitments” can help us stay honest when we might be tempted to cheat. They’ve discovered that when we make a commitment or promise to do something, we are more likely to follow through with that action we want to do.*
 - *Take a moment to quietly think about a promise or a commitment—it doesn’t have to be about academics—you have made in the past.*
 - *Why did you make that promise or commitment? Did you end up keeping it, or did you break it? Why did you keep or not keep it?*
 - *You can write down some notes to yourself if you would like. These won’t be shared with me or anyone else.*
- Discuss:
 - *To whom do we often make promises or commitments? Can we make a promise or commitment to ourselves?*
 - *What are some reasons we make these promises or commitments?*
 - *Why might we choose to keep our promises or commitments? What can help us keep them?*
 - *What are some reasons we might break our promises and commitments? Are there sometimes good reasons to break them?*
- Commitment practice:
 - *Now that we have discussed the importance of academic honesty and the power of promises, I’m going to invite you to think of a commitment you might want to make this year. It could be a commitment around academic honesty, or, if academic honesty is not something you struggle with, it could be about something else in your life.*

- *It is your choice to make a commitment.* [Note: If a student doesn't want to make a commitment, then suggest they can write about something they want to improve upon this year.]
- Options for making the honesty commitment:
 - Have students write a personal commitment in a journal, on a piece of paper, or using [these templates](#).
 - Allow students to keep these commitments private, or create a [public space](#) for them to display their commitments.

CLOSURE

- Invite students to reflect through writing or discuss as a class what making these commitments means to them, and/or how making these commitments contributes to the classroom climate and benefits everyone.

SOURCE

Jenna Whitehead, Ph.D., Simon Fraser University

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify next time?
- How might you revisit these commitments throughout the school year?
- Did you notice cultural differences in students' understanding of academic honesty? How might you honor these individual differences throughout the school year, while still upholding your school's expectations for academic integrity?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research shows that [verbalizing](#) a commitment to a behavior, such as honesty, increases the likelihood of following through with that behavior. For example, when researchers [studied](#) 640 students aged 10 to 14 in India, they discovered that students who made an explicit promise to be honest were more likely to act honestly and were less likely to [cheat during experimental games](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Academic dishonesty is a [widespread problem](#) in education. For instance, [researchers studied](#) over 20,000 high school students from 2000 to 2010 and found that 3 out of 4 students admitted to cheating at some point, whether by copying someone else's work, cheating on tests, or some other form of academic dishonesty.

Students cheat for a wide [variety of reasons](#) that researchers are still trying to understand, from individual factors (e.g., pressure to achieve or academic entitlement—"the [perception](#) that one is

entitled to higher grades than earned, regardless of one's ability or how much one studied or prepared for an exam or course requirement") to more contextual factors (e.g., absence of honor codes or honesty norms within a school).

Regardless of the reason, research shows cheating undermines students' [motivation](#) and confidence in their own abilities. Punishment alone does not always reduce cheating; instead, when students value learning and understand the negative effects of cheating, they report less cheating behaviors.

When we help students develop [positive values](#) like honesty and integrity in their schoolwork from a young age, it sets them up for success not just in the classroom, but in life beyond school as well.

TERMS OF USE

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