

Detecting and Preventing Cheating During Exams

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THE CENTER FOR Academic Integrity at Clemson University (previously at Duke University) reports that “on most campuses, over 75% of students admit to some cheating. In a 1999 survey of 2,100 students on 21 campuses across the country, about *one third* of the participating students admitted to serious test cheating.” Given this, it seems wise that we, as educators, learn as much as possible about cheating methods used by students.

While the University of Central Florida (UCF), like any large university, uncovers its share of cheating by students, formal statistics on cheating methods are not presently kept. However, informally brainstorming about instructors’ past experiences with student cheating methods has often proved useful in the training of new teaching assistants and adjunct faculty members, and the list of possible cheating styles presented in this chapter grew organically from such humble beginnings. While UCF did not gather statistics on the frequency of teachers observing or suspecting the employ of each method, the list grew with each new method observed or idea supplied by participants during brainstorming. In the past, we also did not inquire into how the future TAs and adjunct faculty members knew of these methods new to our list, but contented ourselves with having identified yet another technique. We are investigating possibly collecting data on both issues in the future, but here is what we have learned so far.

The dual notions of detection and prevention inform the current incarnation of the list. Our hope is not to merely identify, after the fact, how students are cheating, but to list possible measures that might aid in detecting students’ academic dishonesty while it is in progress. After all, we are best able to

catch cheaters if we know *how* they are cheating. Naturally, it is best of all to prevent cheating in the first place. Each method of cheating on the list lends itself to particular strategies in the classroom that, if enacted, would discourage students from even attempting to cheat. Indeed, a good testing environment benefits all students. A well-proctored, disciplined environment ensures fairness to everyone and provides comfort by assuring students that their academic achievements are being fairly measured. Cheating interferes with some of the best qualities of undergraduate education, including the intrinsic pursuit of knowledge and wisdom that an academic course of study normally encourages. Seen in this light, it behooves us as educators to do all we can to prevent it (minimize its presence), or failing that, to detect it (minimize its effectiveness). The very quality of undergraduate education depends on our success in this endeavor.

Using Other People

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
1. Whispering: asking for and giving answers verbally	Listen at all times for student whispering.	Use multiple proctors; wander continually; stand close to anyone whispering
2. Wandering eyes: looking over the shoulder of someone or to the side	Watch for wandering eyes, looking out of corner of eyes	Use multiple proctors; wander continually
3. Passing notes: scribbles on paper	Watch for contact between people	Leave empty chairs in between students
4. Sign language: use hand gestures (especially fingers for numbers) to communicate with others	Watch for movement of hands	Use multiple proctors; wander continually
5. Morse code – voice: use coughing or sneezing a set number of times to communicate an answer	Listen for rhythmic and repetitious noises; be wary of coughing	Demonstrate extra interest (go closer) when students cough
6. Morse code – nonverbal: use sounds like stamping feet, tapping pencil, etc. ,to communicate an answer	Listen for rhythmic and repetitious noises	Demonstrate extra interest (go closer) when rhythmic noises persist
7. Misdirection: one person distracts the proctor(s) while others cheat	Use multiple proctors; heightened alertness when a distraction occurs	Use multiple proctors; heightened alertness when a distraction occurs

Using the Body or Environment

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
8. Write on body: ink written on body part, perhaps covered by long sleeves	Watch for furtive movements. Beware not just sleeves, but under socks or even down shirts	Use multiple proctors; wander continually
9. Write on desk: especially when written in pencil for easy wiping later	Watch student eyes and hands; are they moving the test back and forth across the desk?	Examine desks before class, watch for scribbling just before test distribution
10. Cheat sheet: pre-written cheat sheet, usually small font, hidden in clothes or under wrist-watch	Observe student hand movements	Use multiple proctors; wander continually; OR allow cheat sheets and design test for application, not facts
11. Cheat sheet on floor: prewritten cheat sheet hidden in book or under folders below the desk	Observe student foot movements; watch for students looking down	Require that books or notes be stored in backpack, not under desk
12. Cheat sheet in bag: prewritten cheat sheet in backpack; accessed when getting new pen	Beware of “fetching a new writing utensil or eraser”	Consider requiring bags be placed in a pile at the front of the room
13. Bathroom: leave with permission; get notes pre-hidden in bathroom (or from a friend waiting outside lecture hall)	Send a proctor to follow the student, within reason	Scan bathroom for hiding spots before test; OR do not allow bathroom breaks
14. Chewing gum: write cheats on stick of gum in ink; pop into mouth if endangered (evidence is gone)	Wander room continually	Use multiple proctors; wander continually—cheaters will get scared and eat gum sooner than if you never wandered
15. Baby wipes: write on the body in ink, but have an alcohol wipe ready to remove evidence quickly	Watch for students looking at skin under clothing or having moist towelettes handy	Wander hall BEFORE exam so cheaters get nervous and wipe away the cheats
16. Invisible ink: visible only with a certain kind of handheld pen light	Watch for a tiny light being used secretly	Patrol the room regularly
17. Water bottle: remove label, write cheats on inside with small font, re-attach. Water acts as magnifying lens	Watch for students staring intently into water bottles	Require bottles remain on floor and not be used during the test

Using the Body or Environment (continued)

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
18. Baseball cap: reading the underside of the brim	Watch for wandering eyes	Remove all hats
19. Sunglasses: cheats pasted or written on inside of dark sunglasses	Observe carefully any sunglasses that stay on during the test	Remove all sunglasses
20. Barrel pens: pens with a small window and click to rotate messages can have a “safe” setting and use the other click settings to write cheats	Be suspicious of the pen-click noise	Stand near any student clicking abnormally
21. Bra: cheat sheet stuck into center of bra, visible only when looking down into blouse	Watch student eye movements	Use multiple proctors; wander continually
22. Leg fan: cheat sheet folded like a fan and taped inside thighs; student hikes up skirt and opens legs, and cheats are visible only to the cheater	Watch student eye movements	Use multiple proctors; wander continually

Using Technology

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
23. Cell – texting: type out a text message to someone else in class (or even at home) and get silent text reply	Watch for cell phone usage of any kind	Prohibit cell phones in test environment
24. Cell – photo: take photo of test question, send to someone at home, get silent text reply	Watch for cell phone usage of any kind	Prohibit cell phones in test environment
25. Calculator – program: type formulas or cheats into calculator before test begins	Patrol room frequently; watch for frantic clearing of calculator results; watch for “flipping through” calculator read-out	Prohibit calculators in test environment; OR ask department to invest in a box of “simple” calculators to share for tests
26. Calculator – sharing: program cheats ahead of time and let someone else use the calculator during the test	Watch for sharing of calculators	Prohibit calculators in test environment; OR ask department to invest in a box of “simple” calculators to share for tests
27. iPod – professor: listen to recorded lecture during the test; possible to hide earphone wires behind long hair	Scan for earphone wires; patrol room nonstop	Prohibit iPod usage; require devices to be placed into backpack below desk
28. iPod – student: pre-record yourself saying formulas and cheats; listen during test	Scan for earphone wires; patrol room nonstop	Prohibit iPod usage; require devices to be placed into backpack below desk

Other Methods

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
29. Mutilate: erase, cross out, crease, fold, cover over (even with Chapstick) “non-answer” parts of the Scantron form to confuse the machine and guarantee a 100% score (note: none of these methods work all the time)	Watch for any alterations of Scantron form	Patrol the room often; erase any pencil markings over the pre-printed black lines along the side of the Scantron (the most common method); hand-score any suspicious Scantrons.
30. Shades of gray: guess about multiple answers in the same line, all in gray so you have a chance to get lucky. Also possible to erase the wrong answers if you get the form back, and make a case for the machine not seeing your answer	Give a cursory glance to all Scantrons before being scored; make a note of students who left multiple answers potentially filled in; it helps to photocopy such Scantrons before scoring them, as a record	Do not hand back Scantrons; report student grades to them electronically instead
31. Lie about answer: Leave answer blank entirely, but bubble in the correct answer in “gray” when the form comes back, and claim the machine didn’t read it	Make a photocopy of any Scantrons that have blank spaces	Do not hand back Scantrons; report student grades to them electronically instead
32. Duplicate Scantrons: have a friend take the test on two forms but keep one. In next hour, you turn in his/her form as your own	Watch for someone filling in two Scantrons during the test, perhaps one on top of the other.	Use a different version of the test for each class section (or at least reorder the questions)
33. Steal questions: keep the question packet and give it to someone who will take the test later in the day	Watch how students pack up at the end of the test, and keep an eye out for questions being stuffed into bags	Require return of questions; verify that every student turning in answers also turns in question sheet
34. Bank Questions: memorize questions from last year’s test, saved by a friend or a social (Greek) organization	Detect pattern of sudden perfect scores for a student whose grades were much worse previously	Change the test every semester—more than just the order of questions!

Other Methods (continued)

<i>Cheating Method</i>	<i>Detection Method</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
35. Publisher’s questions: contact the textbook publisher and pose as an instructor; request test bank	Detect pattern of sudden perfect scores for a student whose grades were much worse previously	Don’t use the publisher’s test bank
36. Feign Illness: after seeing test, get permission to go home sick and take the same test later	Detect pattern of sudden perfect scores for a student whose grades were much worse previously	Use different questions on make-up exams
37. Ringer: send in an expert to take the test for you and write down your name	Check ID when Scantron is handed in	Tell students you will check ID when Scantron is handed in

Reading this list, one is struck by patterns that repeat multiple times. Detecting student cheating is often a matter of being extremely aware of where the students are looking, which implies a need to watch their eyes almost constantly (this may also prove to be the most effective method of prevention, as they will be aware of the extra attention). For this reason, among others, proctors are strongly advised to avoid bringing along any work of their own to the exam.

The other pattern that leaps out from the list is one of noise and distraction. Proctors need to use their ears as well as their eyes. While whispering may be one of the most common forms of cheating, it is hardly the most complicated method. iPods raise the ante, but more prosaic methods involve misdirection and multiple students forming a distraction. Any sound disruptions in the room should heighten the proctor’s alertness.

When it comes to preventing cheating, which ought to be the real goal, much of this advice calls for proctors to roam the test room frequently. For large classes, the use of multiple proctors is highly encouraged. Instructors in the same discipline or department might agree to help each other proctor for free as a joint service. Proctoring actively is a full-time activity that requires complete concentration to be done effectively. As a proctor, one should give full attention to the classroom anyway, to be available to answer student questions and to reinforce the impression that students and their work environment are the top priority.

Works Cited

Center for Academic Integrity, Rutland Institute for Ethics, Clemson University. Available at <http://www.academicintegrity.org>