# Why Students Cheat & What We Can Do About It: Encouraging Ethical Learning Practices in the Age of AI

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https://tinyurl.com/Y-cheat

**DIRECTIONS:**
Review the sample assignment below, then consider & discuss the following:

- How might a student attempt to cheat here (with *or* without AI)?
- What changes would reduce the incentives or opportunities to cheat?
- How could AI be incorporated *ethically*?
- What clarity could be added to the instructions and/or rubric?

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## Sample Assignment for Discussion

### COURSE: Intro to Digital Procrastination

***ASSIGNMENT: THE PRODUCTIVE LIE — A CRITICAL REFLECTION***

**Learning Outcomes**

By completing this assignment, students will be able to:

- critically examine their own digital work habits,
- distinguish between perceived productivity and meaningful progress, and
- apply course concepts to personal experience through reflective writing.

**Assignment Description**

Many digital activities feel productive even when they delay or displace more substantive work. These "productive lies" can be especially persuasive in academic and professional contexts, where organization, responsiveness, and preparation are often rewarded.

For this assignment, you will identify one digital activity that you regularly frame as productive but that often functions as a form of procrastination. Examples might include (but are not limited to):

- Reorganizing notes, files, or folders
- Rewriting to-do lists or planners
- Checking email or messages "just in case"
- Watching tutorials, explainers, or background videos related to a task
- Adjusting formatting, layout, or aesthetics before substantive work begins

You will write a 2–3 page reflective essay that examines this activity through the lens of course concepts.

Your reflection should address the following components:

1. **Description of the Activity**
   Clearly describe the digital activity and the context in which it usually occurs. Explain why it feels productive or responsible in the moment.

2. **Rationale and Justification**
   Analyze how you typically justify this activity to yourself. What language, assumptions, or beliefs support the idea that this activity is "helpful" or "necessary"?

3. **Connection to Course Concepts**
   Connect your experience to at least two ideas, frameworks, or terms from course readings or discussions (e.g., attention economy, task avoidance, frictionless design, cognitive load, motivation).

4. **Critical Reflection**
   Evaluate the consequences of this behavior. Under what conditions does it support your learning or work? When does it interfere? How does it affect your sense of progress, stress, or control?

5. **Forward-Looking Reflection**
   Conclude by proposing one realistic change you might experiment with in the future. This does not need to eliminate the activity entirely, but should reflect intentional adjustment rather than avoidance.

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## Format and Submission Guidelines

- Length: 2–3 double-spaced pages
- Tone: Reflective, analytical, and polished
- Audience: An educated reader unfamiliar with your personal habits
- Citations: Informal references to course materials are sufficient; formal citation style is not required
- Submit as a PDF or Word document

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## Grading Criteria (100 points total)

| Criteria | Description | Points |
|---|---|---|
| Clarity and Organization | Essay is well-structured, coherent, and easy to follow; ideas flow logically between sections. | 20 |
| Depth of Reflection | Demonstrates thoughtful self-examination and insight into personal habits and motivations. | 25 |

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|---|---|---|
| Use of Course Concepts | Effectively integrates relevant terms or ideas from the course in a way that supports the analysis. | 25 |
| Critical Perspective | Moves beyond description to evaluate trade-offs, consequences, and limitations of the activity. | 20 |
| Writing Quality | Clear, professional writing with minimal errors; appropriate tone and word choice. | 10 |

***Notes for Students***

This assignment values honest reflection over "right answers." There is no expectation that you resolve procrastination entirely—only that you examine it thoughtfully and connect your experience to the ideas we are studying.

****AI Disclosure statement:** *Dr. Boye collaborated with Microsoft Copilot to brainstorm the components of this sample assignment, then revised the writing, content, and structure to align with the objectives of the workshop.*

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## References & Resources


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