



AP[®] English Language and Composition 2015 Free-Response Questions

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Many high schools, colleges, and universities have honor codes or honor systems: sets of rules or principles that are intended to cultivate integrity. These rules or principles often take the form of written positions on practices like cheating, stealing, and plagiarizing as well as on the consequences of violating the established codes.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed argument for your own position on whether your school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system.

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (cartoon)

Source B (Vangelli)

Source C (Dirmeyer and Cartwright)

Source D (Kahn)

Source E (table)

Source F (McCabe and Pavela)

Source A

Bacall, Aaron. "Recent Research Has Shown That a Spycam Can Greatly Improve the Honor Code."
Cartoon. CSL CartoonStock, n.d. Web. 10 April 2013.

The following is a cartoon from an online cartoon archive based in Great Britain.



www.CartoonStock.com

Source B

Vangelli, Alyssa. "The Honor Code Vote: One Student Senator's View." *ParentsAssociation.com*.
ParentsAssociation.com, n.d. Web. 1 April 2013.

The following, an excerpt from a student's account of the introduction of an honor code at her high school, Lawrence Academy—a private boarding school in Massachusetts—was originally published in the school newsletter in May 1999.

When the honor code proposal first came under consideration in the spring of 1998, many students, including members of the Senate, were quick to criticize it. Students did not fully understand the role of an honor code; many saw it as another rule to obey. The earlier drafts of the honor code included specific penalties for violations of the honor code, which many students opposed. Students were expected to report or confront a fellow student if they knew that he/she had cheated, lied, or stolen. Failure to confront or report a student would result in a period of probation. Students opposed this obligation to take action against another student because they did not see it as their responsibility. They feared that a mandate to confront peers would create friction and that a subsequent report could not easily be kept confidential. . . .

After much discussion and debate in class and Senate meetings, the proposal was revised to eliminate any formal disciplinary actions, although the expectation to take action if one witnessed or knew about any dishonest behavior still existed. I saw the revision to eliminate all formal penalties in the honor code as a huge step in gaining student approval, both inside and outside of the Senate.

Another part of the code which received student criticism was a requirement for students to write a pledge of honor on every piece of work submitted, stating that it was the result of their own thinking and effort. Many students thought that a pledge of honor for each piece of paper submitted was excessive, but a less frequent pledge of honor could be a helpful reminder of their responsibilities. This section was revised to require a pledge of honor at the beginning of each term, affirming that each student will behave honestly and responsibly at all times. In signing this pledge of honor, students have reminders of these moral values and a responsibility to perform honestly in the school environment. The revised pledge of honor also helped gain student approval for the honor code.

Another turning point occurred when students began to examine the role of an honor code as something other than a new set of rules and regulations to obey. In order to understand the purpose of an honor code, the real question was what type of environment we wanted to live in. As Senate members, we brought this question to class meetings for discussion. Most responded that we needed an environment where students and faculty could live in complete trust of one another. Although some did not see a need for an honor code, we, as Senate members, concluded that this type of environment could only be achieved through first adopting an honor code. Implicit in an honor code is a belief in the integrity of human beings; it also provides students a clear explanation of the importance of behaving with the integrity and the expectation that our resulting actions will increase trust and respect in the LA [Lawrence Academy] community.

As the time to vote for the honor code approached, I and many other student members of the Senate felt pulled in two directions; we wanted to vote based on our consciences, but we wanted to represent the remaining skeptical and uncertain views of our fellow students. At the time of voting, most of us took the first option and voted according to our consciences, which we believed would eventually benefit every member of the school.

I voted in favor because I wanted to go to a school where I could feel comfortable taking an exam without worrying about someone looking at my paper and where I could be trusted visiting a dorm as a day student. I imagined that other students and future students of Lawrence would feel the same way.

Although the full acceptance of an honor code will take time, an important process has begun, one which I believe will ensure moral action and thinking here at Lawrence Academy.

Source C

Dirmeyer, Jennifer, and Alexander Cartwright. "Honor Codes Work Where Honesty Has Already Taken Root." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Chronicle of Higher Education, 24 Sept. 2012. Web. 20 March 2013.

The following is excerpted from a commentary published in an online newspaper focused on higher education.

The possibility that 125 Harvard students “improperly collaborated” on an exam in the spring has galvanized a continuing discussion about the use of honor codes. While Harvard administrators hope that an honor code can improve the academic integrity of the college, critics—especially Harvard students—are skeptical that signing a piece of paper will suddenly cause a cheater to change his ways.

They’re right. Not all colleges have what it takes to make an honor code effective—not because the students aren’t honest, but because they don’t expect anyone else to be. And with honor codes, expectations determine reality.

According to research by Donald L. McCabe, a professor of management at Rutgers University who specializes in student integrity, students at colleges with honor codes—typically student-enforced—cheat less than their counterparts elsewhere do. Our experience at Hampden-Sydney College would seem to support this conclusion: We find little evidence of cheating, even when professors work in their offices during exams. Indeed, you have not seen an honor code at work until you have seen a show of hands for those who did *not* do the reading for today’s class turn out to be completely accurate.

Our honor code is strictly enforced, and the enforcement is handled by an all-student court. Students convicted of lying or cheating can expect to receive punishments ranging from suspension to expulsion.

However, honor codes don’t always work. Mr. McCabe says that their success depends on a “culture of academic integrity” that leads students to take enforcement of the rules seriously. But economic theory suggests that it’s more a matter of expectations. When it works, the culture makes for a successful honor code as much as the honor code makes for a successful culture.

Student expectations about the integrity of their classmates can determine whether the college culture reinforces honesty. Say that each student arrives as a “cheater” type, an “honest” type, or somewhere on the continuum between them. Whatever the individual’s innate level of integrity, we believe that each student will decide whether or not to cheat by weighing the costs and benefits.

With a peer-enforced honor code, the likelihood of being caught depends on other students’ tolerance for cheating. Students who enter a college of mostly “honest” types will more often choose not to cheat even if they are innately “cheater” types, because the higher risk of getting caught makes the costs greater.

That leads to a feedback loop, as more of the population behaves like “honest” types than normally would, increasing the impression that everyone is honest and raising still higher the expectation of being caught. This feedback loop generates the culture of trust and integrity that students—like those at, say, Davidson College, which has a well-publicized honor code—reportedly value so highly.

Unfortunately, the feedback loop can go the other way. If a student enters a college with mostly “cheater” types, not only are the costs of cheating very low, encouraging fellow “cheater” types to cheat, but the benefits of cheating (or the costs of not cheating) are very high, encouraging even “honest” types to cheat. That leads more students to cheat than would normally do so, creating a culture of dishonesty.

The success of the honor code, then, depends on the expectations that students have of their peers’ behavior, which is why colleges with successful honor codes must invest considerable resources in programs that influence how the honor code is perceived.

Source D

Kahn, Chris. “Pssst—How Do Ya Spell *Plagiarism* ?
Cheating Scandal Tests Honor Code at U. Va.”
Daily Press. Daily Press Media Group, 14 April
2002. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

The following is excerpted from an article in a regional newspaper headquartered in Newport News, Virginia.

At the University of Virginia, there’s a saying that students soon commit to memory: “On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment/exam.”

Students write this on every test in every class during their college career, pledging as their predecessors have since 1842 never to lie, cheat or steal. It’s a tradition that’s made Thomas Jefferson’s school a richer academic environment, students say, as well as an easier place to find lost wallets.

But even here, where honor is so well defined and policed by an elite student committee, plagiarism has become a problem.

Since last spring, 157 students have been investigated by their peers in the largest cheating scandal in memory. Thirty-nine of those accused of violating the school’s honor code have either dropped out or been expelled—the only penalty available for such a crime.

Some students who had already graduated lost their diplomas.

“It’s not like we’re saying we hate you, it’s just that we have standards here,” said 22-year-old Cara Coolbaugh, one of the students on U.Va.’s Honor Committee who has spent countless hours this year determining the fate of her peers.

The scandal began in a popular introductory physics class designed for non-majors. The course, which explores pragmatic topics such as why the sky is blue and how light bulbs work, usually attracts 300 to 500 students per semester—too many to watch closely. Instructor Lou Bloomfield said he started to worry about plagiarism after a student confided that some of her friends had copied papers from a file at their sorority. To find out for sure, Bloomfield spent an afternoon programming a computer to spot repeated phrases.

He fed in computer files of 1,500 term papers from four semesters of classes, and matches started popping up.

“I was disappointed,” Bloomfield said. “But I wasn’t so surprised—I have a large class.”

A few of his students had simply copied from earlier work. Others had lifted at least a third of their papers from someone else.

The Honor Committee, whose 21 members were elected just before the plagiarism scandal hit, was overwhelmed. Most professors usually have a few people they’d like to investigate. Bloomfield handed over a list of more than 100.

Philip Altbach, a higher education scholar at Boston College, said he isn’t surprised. “Plagiarism is more common now,” he said. “It’s just easier to do.”

The Internet provides an inexhaustible source of information, and it’s tempting to simply insert phrases directly into reports, Altbach said.

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Source E

Sledge, Sally, and Pam Pringle. "Assessing Honor Code Effectiveness: Results of a Multipronged Approach from a Five Year Study." *Research & Practice in Assessment* 5 (2010): 4-12. Web. 20 March 2013.

The following table is from a research report describing an ongoing study at a small public university to assess student, faculty, and alumni perceptions of academic integrity.

Student Research and Results

Members of the student honor council were encouraged to create their own survey and administer it in their classes. Faculty oversaw the research project. . . . The student survey was given in Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 resulting in 275 usable responses. The findings are located in [the following table].

Highlights from Student Research: 2007-2008

Topic	%
Students who believe the honor code is enforced fairly	48
Students who do not know the range of sanctions that can occur	42
Students who would report a fellow student for cheating	8
Students who say the honor system is discussed in class and on the syllabus	65
Students who have violated the honor code and not been caught	40
Students who believe that failure on the assignment was a reasonable sanction for a violation of the honor code	88

Source: Sledge, S. & Pringle, P. (2010). Assessing honor code effectiveness: Results of a multipronged approach from a five year study. *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 5, pg. 9.

Source F

McCabe, Donald, and Gary Pavela. “New Honor Codes for a New Generation.” *Inside Higher Ed*. Inside Higher Ed, 11 March 2005. Web. 20 March 2013.

The following is excerpted from an opinion piece published in an online publication focused on higher education.

Research confirms recent media reports concerning the high levels of cheating that exist in many American high schools, with roughly two-thirds of students acknowledging one or more incidents of explicit cheating in the last year. Unfortunately, it appears many students view high school as simply an annoying obstacle on the way to college, a place where they learn little of value, where teachers are unreasonable or unfair, and where, since “everyone else” is cheating, they have no choice but to do the same to remain competitive. And there is growing evidence many students take these habits with them to college.

At the college level, more than half of all students surveyed acknowledge at least one incident of serious cheating in the past academic year and more than two-thirds admit to one or more “questionable” behaviors—e.g., collaborating on assignments when specifically asked for individual work. We believe it is significant that the highest levels of cheating are usually found at colleges that have not engaged their students in active dialogue on the issue of academic dishonesty—colleges where the academic integrity policy is basically dictated to students and where students play little or no role in promoting academic integrity or adjudicating suspected incidents of cheating.

The Impact of Honor Codes

A number of colleges have found effective ways to reduce cheating and plagiarism. The key to their success seems to be encouraging student involvement in developing community standards on academic dishonesty and ensuring their subsequent acceptance by the larger student community. Many of these colleges employ academic honor codes to accomplish these objectives.

Unlike the majority of colleges where proctoring of tests and exams is the responsibility of the faculty and/or administration, many schools with academic honor codes allow students to take their exams without proctors present, relying on peer monitoring to control cheating. Yet research indicates that the significantly lower levels of cheating reported at honor code schools do not reflect a greater fear of being reported or caught. Rather, a more important factor seems to be the peer culture that develops on honor code campuses—a culture that makes most forms of serious cheating socially unacceptable among the majority of students. Many students would simply be embarrassed to have other students find out they were cheating.

In essence, the efforts expended at these schools to help students understand the value of academic integrity, and the responsibilities they have assumed as members of the campus community, convince many students, most of whom have cheated in high school, to change their behavior. Except for cheating behaviors that most students consider trivial (e.g., unpermitted collaboration on graded assignments), we see significantly less self-reported cheating on campuses with honor codes compared to those without such codes. The critical difference seems to be an ongoing dialogue that takes place among students on campuses with strong honor code traditions, and occasionally between students and relevant faculty and administrators, which seeks to define where, from a student perspective, “trivial” cheating becomes serious. While similar conversations occasionally take place on campuses that do not have honor codes, they occur much less frequently and often do not involve students in any systematic or meaningful way.

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2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1

The essay's score should reflect the essay's quality as a whole. Remember that students had only 15 minutes to read the sources and 40 minutes to write; the essay, therefore, is not a finished product and should not be judged by standards appropriate for an out-of-class assignment. Evaluate the essay as a draft, making certain to reward students for what they do well.

All essays, even those scored 8 or 9, may contain occasional lapses in analysis, prose style, or mechanics. Such features should enter into your holistic evaluation of an essay's overall quality. In no case should you give a score higher than a 2 to a paper with errors in grammar and mechanics that persistently interfere with your understanding of meaning.

9 – Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for the score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in development, or impressive in their control of language.

8 – Effective

Essays earning a score of 8 **effectively** argue a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, reconsider, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They develop their argument by effectively synthesizing* at least three of the sources. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and convincing. Their prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not necessarily flawless.

7 – Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for the score of 6 but provide more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style.

6 – Adequate

Essays earning a score of 6 **adequately** argue a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They develop their argument by adequately synthesizing at least three of the sources. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and sufficient. The language may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 – Essays earning a score of 5 argue a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They develop their argument by synthesizing at least three sources, but how they use and explain sources may be uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writer's argument is generally clear, and the sources generally develop the writer's position, but the links between the sources and the argument may be strained. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the writer's ideas.

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2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1 (continued)

4 – Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 **inadequately** argue a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They develop their argument by synthesizing at least two sources, but the evidence or explanations used may be inappropriate, insufficient, or unconvincing. The sources may dominate the student's attempts at development, the link between the argument and the sources may be weak, or the student may misunderstand, misrepresent, or oversimplify the sources. The prose generally conveys the writer's ideas but may be inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

3 – Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less success in arguing a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They are less perceptive in their understanding of the sources, or their explanation or examples may be particularly limited or simplistic. The essays may show less maturity in their control of writing.

2 – Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate **little success** in arguing a position on whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code or honor system. They may merely allude to knowledge gained from reading the sources rather than citing the sources themselves. The student may misread the sources, fail to develop a position, or substitute a simpler task by merely summarizing or categorizing the sources or by merely responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated, inaccurate, or inappropriate explanation. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of control.

1 – Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation, weak in their control of writing, or do not allude to or cite even one source.

0 – Indicates an off-topic response, one that merely repeats the prompt, an entirely crossed-out response, a drawing, or a response in a language other than English.

— Indicates an entirely blank response.

* For the purposes of scoring, synthesis means using sources to develop a position and citing them accurately.

Sample 1A

The conflict regarding the utilization of honor codes can be seen in any school system, from elementary schools to college. Some argue that honor codes are ineffective in reducing cheating in schools, but statistically, this is not the case. While some argue that honor codes should not be implemented for reasons such as ineffectiveness of the code and the creation of a "big brother"-esque environment, honor codes should in fact be implemented because they promote a healthy academic environment, they statistically lower the percentage of academic dishonesty in schools, and they are adaptable to fit any school environment.

Firstly, one might think that honor codes will create a totalitarian sort of school environment. This idea can be seen in Aaron Bacall's comic, which satirically states that "a spycam can greatly improve the honor code" (Bacall). While this is a reasonable assumption, it doesn't hold up when put to the test. For example, in an article by Donald McCabe and Gary Pavela, they point out that "Many schools with honor codes allow students to take their exams without proctors present, relying on peer monitoring to control cheating" (McCabe and Pavela). They go on to say that a peer culture develops on honor code campuses that makes cheating socially unacceptable. This proves that an honor code system can be implemented without excessive monitoring of students.

Secondly, some say that an honor code would do little in changing the responses of students. For instance, students at Lawrence Academy in Alyssa Vangerli's article stated that they did not see it as their "responsibility" when asked to report cheating (Vangerli). Another example is the Harvard students in Jennifer Dirmeyer and Alexander Cartwright's article on honor codes, who "were skeptical that signing a piece of paper will suddenly cause a cheater to change their ways" (Dirmeyer and Cartwright). While these are valid assumptions, it can be seen later in Dirmeyer and Cartwright's article that a strictly enforced honor code run by students reduces the likelihood of someone cheating due to punishments ranging from suspension to expulsion, in addition to the social disapproval attached to cheating in honor code schools (Dirmeyer and Cartwright). Furthermore, according to McCabe and Pavela's article, "the highest levels of cheating are usually found at colleges that have not engaged their students in active dialogue on the issue of academic dishonesty" (McCabe and Pavela). Due to these factors, the implementation of some form of an honor code system is proven to reduce cheating.

Furthermore, one might say that a too strict or too lenient honor code would not be especially effective where they attend school. However, as can be seen in Vangerli's article, honor codes can be changed to accommodate the students. For example, the students at Lawrence Academy thought that the original pledge of an honor system being applied to every piece of work was too excessive, so it was changed so that students only had to sign a pledge of honesty once each term (Vangerli). This is further supported by Dirmeyer and Cartwright's experience with Hampden-Sydney College where there is an honor code punishment system, but the professors are able to be outside of the room during exams because the peer-influenced system is in play (Cartwright and Dirmeyer). These two examples show that the honor code system is flexible and can be effective in many different environments.

In conclusion, honor codes should be completely implemented in all schools because they foster good academic environments, they are statistically proven to reduce levels of cheating when put into practice, and the codes are adaptable to fit any environment. There are many who oppose the honor code system for various reasons, but when looked at in a larger scope, the honor code system is effective more often than not.

Sample 1B

As a student gets older, the question of honor within themselves is based on his or her own integrity. The acknowledgment of receiving a high grade on a test using one's own knowledge is far more satisfying than knowing the answers are someone else's. Therefore, an honor system is almost mandatory, making sure that everyone's assignments come from their own knowledge. While an honor system is established, the honor system at my school should be maintained because of its fairness to students while also punishing them for their actions simultaneously.

Students across the globe should feel secure when taking an exam in that no one around them is copying their responses. A code of honor aids such security by making students aware of those around them. Some schools go to extreme lengths to inflict a code of honor on their students. For example, Alyssa Vangerli admits that her school of Lawrence Academy is over the top with the honor system when she states, "Another part of the code which received student criticism was a requirement for students to write a pledge of honor on every piece of work submitted, stating that it was the result of their own thinking and effort." While a code of honor is necessary in school systems, it is an onerous task to make students write an entire pledge of honor before completing each assignment. Conversely, my school has a solid system that punishes students for plagiarism and cheating, but does so in a way that the student is not overwhelmed. Furthermore, the students get a zero on an assignment and possible suspension, which is fairly reasonable considering the offense.

In comparison to a code of honor within my school, I believe that a peer-enforced honor system should be added to schools across the nation. Not only does this system keep students from plagiarizing or cheating, but it furthermore allows the students to be honest human beings, which could undeniably help them when obtaining a job or career. As Jennifer Dirmeyer and Alexander Cartwright state in their article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, "With a peer-enforced honor code, the likelihood of being caught depends on other students' tolerance for cheating." I whole-heartedly agree with Dirmeyer and Cartwright's claims on peer-enforcing an honor code. Such a system could boost not only my school but schools and universities across the nation in lowering percentages of cheating and plagiarism rates.

Overall, people across the nation should care about and be concerned with honesty in schools. Responsible parents hope to see their children as honest and respectable adults when they become older. To see such honesty, maintaining an honor code is critical as the children/students learn to be honest and to have integrity.

Sample 1C

Though the official 'Honor Code' ideal has been enforced in schools for 17 years (Source B), its core principles are those that have been ideals for thousands of years. Honesty is a trait that was valued long before the existence of high schools. It's an idea of

From a young age, we are taught not to lie, to obey common decency and to portray good character rather than to cheat, steal, or else face consequences. This can alienate our human instincts to do exactly what we are told not to do. Even in Moses's Ten Commandments, we were taught a basic honor code. A common violation of an honor code, particularly in college (Source F), is plagiarism. This "habit" begins in high school where an honor code may not be strictly enforced. However, a student survey at a school with an official honor code states that 48% of students do not believe the code is fairly enforced, and only 8% would report a student for cheating (Source E). This may be a result of the honor code not being blatantly or actively effective.

While many students may claim that honor codes are ineffective, just as many would advocate in favor of an honor code. The efficacy of an honor code can be reinforced by applicable teachings early in a child's schooling career. It's simply an issue of the morals learned in the early stages of life that can immensely benefit the presence of an honor code in schools.

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2015 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1 (continued)

source is not employed to support the argument for maintaining an honor code. The essay asserts that the student's school has a "solid" honor system but provides insufficient evidence for this claim. Midway through the essay, the student introduces a new idea, that "schools across the nation" should incorporate "a peer-enforced honor system." This argument is neither adequately explained nor supported. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas; however, this essay earned a score of 4 for the weak link between its argument and the sources, its unconvincing arguments, and its inadequate explanations.

Sample: 1C

Score: 2

This essay demonstrates little success in arguing whether a school should establish, maintain, revise, or eliminate an honor code. Instead, the essay largely substitutes the simpler task of arguing for the value of honesty and other values in honor codes that have existed "for thousands of years." Relying heavily on summary rather than synthesis, the essay consistently fails to develop an argument or go beyond repeating information from the sources; for example, the essay repeats Source F's observation that a "common violation of an Honor code ... is plagiarism" but shows little success in using the source to develop or support an argument. The essay confusingly concludes that the "frugality of an honor code can be reinforced by applicable teachings early in a child's schooling career." For its inappropriate explanations, lack of development, and failure to address the prompt, the essay earned a score of 2.