

ESSAY-WRITING ASSIGNMENT/CONTEST

An essay-writing activity can deepen student understanding and commitment to academic integrity. An essay assignment focused on integrity and integrated into the regular writing curriculum is the best way to implement this strategy. If such an assignment is not possible, then an Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) can implement its own integrity essay contest to advance the integrity theme school-wide and provide a publishing opportunity for student writers.

Completing an integrity essay linked to literature or as a stand-alone assignment will enable students to:

- Learn to evaluate characters in literature and current situations by applying standards of integrity;
- Complete a writing process to identify integrity as demonstrated by characters in literature and reflect on the importance of integrity to them personally and to society; and
- Discuss the importance of integrity with peers, parents, and other adults.

Specifically, an integrity essay-writing assignment will help students “develop criteria for making informed judgments and decisions, and uphold their beliefs in order to conduct themselves in a moral, ethical and legal manner,” as stated in Connecticut’s Common Core of Learning for Aspects of Character. This standard is undoubtedly a shared learning goal in all 50 states and other nations.

The following outline is designed to help a planning committee successfully complete an essay writing activity/contest in support of academic integrity:

Topics	Tasks	Who Is Responsible	Time to Complete
Define objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will English/language arts teachers be recruited to integrate an integrity-themed writing assignment into curriculum? • Will AIC implement the activity as a stand-alone contest? 		
Administration support	Get approval of the activity plan from the school administration		
Timeline	Determine timeline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and approvals • Recruiting prizes • Recruiting teachers • Posters and PR campaign • Essay writing • Essay judging • Winner notification/celebration 		
Recruit prize donors (local businesses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTA/PTO • Restaurant meal certificates • Savings bonds from banks • Tickets for movies, sports, or other events 		

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Topics	Tasks	Who Is Responsible	Time to Complete
Teacher involvement	Recruiting teachers to include the activity as a class assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stand-alone persuasive writing assignment supporting academic integrity• Integration into a response to literature to evaluate the integrity of characters and apply it to a modern setting		
Essay expectations	Establish criteria for evaluating essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set length (e.g., one to two pages)• The essay should positively affirm that the student understands the value of integrity• The essay should provide a relevant analysis of the literature character in light of integrity or an example from modern life• The essay should show thought and attention to grammar and style		
Paperwork	Essays should be submitted to the AIC by class teachers or directly from students (Suggestion: if teachers include the essay as an assignment, only the top four or five essays for each class are submitted to the AIC.) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each essay has a cover page with the essay title, student name, and contact information• The essay includes the essay title on each page• No student names are on essay pages to identify the writers• Each essay is numbered on each page by the AIC to keep students anonymous to judges		
PR campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create information flyers/posters and remember to brand the activity with your AIC logo/motto on all documents. Also include the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contest name• Why, who, when, how students can participate• Prizes and awards that can be cited on college applications for top 10 essayists (pick your own number depending on number of anticipated participants and availability of prizes)• Participation in larger events (for example: in Connecticut, Laws of Life Essay Program, www.ethicsed.org/programs/lawsoflife/index.htm)• If not done as class assignment, solicit English teachers to grant extra credit to those who complete essay• Strategies to distribute posters/flyers: hallways, lunchrooms, library, classrooms, online• School announcements: PA/TV• School-wide gatherings: lunch, assemblies, etc.		

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Topics	Tasks	Who Is Responsible	Time to Complete
Essay judging	<p>Recruit judges from faculty, parents, community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit a sufficient number so that each essay has two judges• No judge reads more than 10 essays (about a 90-minute commitment)• Essay judges have essay-judging criteria and the form to score essays• Judges record scores on the essay-judging form for each essay by essay number (assigned by the AIC) and return completed form to the AIC• The AIC tabulates all scores and ranks the average of two judges' scores• The AIC has additional judges to break ties in rankings		
Notification of participants	<p>Letters or e-mail go out to all participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Congratulations to winners and time/place of recognition• Thank-you to all participants, noting the value of the activity• Host recognition and prize distribution during some event: school board meeting, school-wide assembly, etc.• The letter includes some reflection on the value of integrity and why the AIC implemented the activity		
Publication of essays	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The AIC publishes an anthology of selected essays• Selected essays are sent to relevant essay contests/projects (see earlier link to Connecticut's Laws of Life essay program)• Selected essays are published in the student paper• Selected essays are submitted to local papers• Selected essays are published on the AIC/school website		
Reflection/evaluation	<p>Seek evaluation feedback from all participants with a brief survey or questionnaire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers• Students• Judges• AIC <p>Summarize the results of the feedback and determine modifications or continuation of the activity for the future</p>		

For more on Connecticut's Common Core of Learning for Aspects of Character, visit www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Curriculum/Curriculum_Root_Web_Folder/finalccl.pdf.