

Strategies for Online Exams

(Updated: November 16, 2020)

Overview

Assessing student achievement of course learning outcomes is an important part of learning. Many face-to-face courses rely on proctored, high stakes summative exams to assess students' learning. Replicating this online can be challenging. This document provides an overview of how to create equitable assessments online.

Key Take-aways:

1. Flexibility and compassion are essential.
2. Proctored exams are not always equitable in this environment; shift to alternative assessments or an open-book format.
3. Effective assessment design can help ensure academic integrity.

Major Considerations

1. Emotional / Cognitive Load

Whenever possible, be compassionate and flexible. Everyone is facing extraordinary stress during this ongoing pandemic. Students in your course may be caring for children or other family members, facing financial hardship due to unemployment, or dealing with loss of family and friends. All these things can affect their ability to concentrate and learn new information.

2. Learning Outcomes

Your primary goal is to assess the learning stated in the [learning outcomes](#). Although you may be most comfortable with doing this with a high-stakes exam, other tools may also achieve this goal and reduce students' stress levels. Visit these pages for ideas for alternatives to traditional exams:

- [Alternatives to Traditional Testing – UC Berkeley](#)
- [Alternatives to Traditional Exams and Papers – Indiana University Bloomington](#)
- [Infographics as a Creative Assessment](#)

3. Technology & Timing

Before making decisions on assessment structures reach out to students to understand their needs. Our [Student Technology Survey](#) can help you understand students' access to technology. Consider adding additional questions about schedule and living conditions to get a full picture. Some of your students may no longer be able to participate during scheduled class time. Consider offering a wide option of times to take the assessment or multiple options for completion.

Assessment Options

Assessments aim to measure progress towards learning outcomes. Consider the following: can you effectively measure your students' learning using an assessment option other than a high-stakes exam? The following list of alternative assessments was adapted from both UC Davis's [Keep Teaching: Options for Final Exams](#) and U of M – Dearborn's [Final Exam Strategies](#).



IF YOU ARE ABLE TO GIVE AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TO YOUR FINAL EXAM, CONSIDER:

<i>Assessment Options</i>	<i>Potential Impact on Student Performance & Well-Being</i>
1. Low-stakes alternative assignment online (e.g., reflection on course learning, essay connecting course topic, brochure, infographic, etc.). Can be submitted and graded on Canvas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An equitable practice that reduces anxiety for most students. • Reflection is a good means for enhancing and demonstrating learning. • Requires minimal technology and promotes academic integrity.
2. Open-book alternative assessment or assignment; Convert multiple-choice to short answer; Convert other exams to papers, presentations, or projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-book alternative assessments can be more equitable for students with less access to quiet spaces to take exams and may be preferred by students during times of distress. • Expectations for new assessments should be communicated clearly and opportunities should be given to practice the use of new technology. • Faculty should consider using alternative assessments that students are already familiar with to prevent added stress.
3. Online optional assessment or assignment; all students have the choice to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. accept current grade; or b. complete final assessment to possibly improve grade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For lower-performing students: Equitable practice that allows for student agency and the opportunity to succeed. • For higher-performing students: Allows students agency to focus on other priorities if needed.

IF YOU NEED TO PRESERVE YOUR FINAL EXAM IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM, CONSIDER:

<i>Assessment Options</i>	<i>Potential Impact on Student Performance & Well-Being</i>
4. Open-book, open-note non-proctored online exam using Canvas quizzes (time or untimed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May increase stress (especially when timed) for students unfamiliar with the format, practice opportunities should be given. Features like question pools, randomized questions, and multiple question types can increase academic integrity. • Open book/notes decrease summative function of the exam, but this issue may be outweighed by the exam’s potential to promote additional learning. This practice is more equitable than 5, below. • If using a timed exam we recommend allowing at least a 24 hour window for students to access the exam.
5. Online, proctored exam using Lockdown Browser or Monitor (closed book) Note: This option is only recommended for instructors who were using these tools the entire semester <u>and</u> who have confirmed students still have access to appropriate technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely increase in anxiety for students new to the online testing environment and compressed timeline for learning new technology; also, students may lack workspace and/or technology to carry out an uninterrupted, proctored exam. • Students may already be experiencing high stress due to public health concerns, and a high stakes exam may exacerbate this, resulting in poor performance.

Contact [the Office for Teaching and Learning](#) for assistance planning and setting up your exams.

Recommended Reading: Thomas Tobin’s [Student Agency in Uncertain Times](#) (Inside Higher Ed)

