Reconceptualizing Exams Online
March 19, 2020

There are three main avenues for reconceptualizing your exams when transitioning to an online space: transition them to an open-note/open-book format, turn the exam into an alternative assessment, continue with attempting a closed-book format using a monitoring software to proctor.

It is **highly recommended that you avoid** using a proctoring software. First, this is a software and level of monitoring your students have not consented to at the beginning of your course and now would have no way to opt out. Students may feel uncomfortable with that level of monitoring and access. Second, this is a technology that is new to both you and the students and as with all technologies it has the potential to glitch or fail. It also requires that students have access to a webcam and this may not be technology all of your students have. Third, it is still possible for students to find a way to cheat when using computer lockdown or monitoring software. That being said, you may still feel this is the right move for your course. If so, instructions for using Respondus Monitor can be found on
https://teachingcontinuity.wustl.edu/.

General suggestions

Avoid questions that can be directly Googled. For example, use more scenario-based questions rather than pure definitions. Ask questions that encourage your students to apply or analyze knowledge rather than remember definitions. Don't pull questions directly from testing banks that are readily available online.

Consider other question formats. A class that normally uses only multiple-choice questions can have some additional question formats that are still easily graded at-scale in an online environment (e.g., fill-in-the-blank grading can be partially automated). Canvas can also display images in exam questions.

General suggestions for transitioning to Open-note/Open-book

Access to course materials. Some students may not have access to notes or other materials from before spring break. If you plan to test students on that content, make sure that you have confirmed that all your students have their materials or that you have provided access. For example, survey your students, contact your publisher about how students can get free access to the ebook, set up a place for students to share notes and actively encourage this, or write your own notes and post these for students.

Adapted from material created by Shaina Rowell at CIRCLE.

Getting students on board. Think carefully about how you talk about the exam with students. For example, a time-limit on an open-note exam could feel frustrating to a student. But if you clarify that this is done for the sake of their learning they will be more accepting.

Smooth transition online. Create an "instructional quiz" due at least one day before the exam. This will use the same Canvas features that your exams use so that students can see what it will be like. They will feel more comfortable and you will solve most tech problems prior to the actual exam. The actual quiz questions can contain key information about taking an online exam. This may also include an honor statement or you might put one in the exam itself.

Accommodations. Canvas has a way to set up extra time for students who need it. You will need to know which students in your course have time accommodations and how much time they get. Canvas also has a way to set an exam for different dates/times for specific students in distant time zones or if students are unavailable to take the exam at the same time as everyone else. Be aware that students with disabilities may need additional or different testing accommodations in this online space. It's important to identify those students quickly and to work with them and [Disability Resources](#).

Test security and reusing exams. It is best to just assume that these exams will somehow end up available for future students. If you reuse exam questions year-to-year, consider either using different questions this year or writing new questions next year. Options: Give a shorter exam this year to save some questions for next year (might happen anyway since you'll likely be covering less content), switch how you ask some questions (e.g., if you usually provide the term and ask for the definition, swap this), use some other types of questions (e.g., fill-in-the-blank).

General Suggestions for Switching to a Different Assessment

Consider your learning goals for the assessment. It is possible that these learning goals can be assessed through a different kind of assessment. If you typically ask a combination of MC and short-answer questions on an exam, consider transitioning to exclusively written responses. Could the learning goals still be achieved through a presentation, paper, detailed problem set?

Be aware of your grading support. If you have them, check in with your co-instructors, AIs, undergraduate TAs etc. to see what amount of time or ability they will have to grade an alternative assessment. If you teach alone, be realistic with yourself about your time and mental space to grade a more detailed assessment over the coming weeks.

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Communicate with your students. Discuss with them why you are making these changes and how this assessment will still fulfill the learning goals you've set out for the course. Consider getting student input into the redesign of the assessment.

Recommended Canvas Settings

These settings are meant to 1) reduce reliance on notes during the exam to encourage studying and preparation, and 2) reduce cheating such as sharing answers with classmates.

- Randomize order of questions using a question group
- Randomize order of answer options (for a work-around for options like "all of the above", see link in Canvas Resources below)
- Set a time limit
    - Too long might discourage adequate preparation and studying, or may even encourage cheating between students; too short may be stressful.
    - Can set extra time for accommodations
- Have most students take the test at about the same time (set a limited window of availability)
    - Make this at least a little longer than the time limit to provide some flexibility, but not too long to prevent cheating
    - May need separate availability for students in far-away time zones or who are unavailable at the usual time
- You can also set the exam to only show one question at a time, which can reduce cheating. But it can also be very frustrating for students, so we only suggest using this if you feel it is necessary.
    - A sub-option to this is that after a student answers a question and moves on, they cannot go back. Again, students find this frustrating and we don't recommend it in most cases.
- After submission, do not allow students to view which answers they gave and the correct answers until everyone has taken the exam.
    - In "Grades" (your gradebook in Canvas, outside of the Quiz options), set the exam to the manual posting option so that scores are not released until you are ready.
- You can give an extra attempt to individual students if they accidentally submit their exam (e.g., for technical problems); however, this is outside of the Quiz options on the set-up page, so do not check the "allow multiple attempts" option when originally setting up your exam.

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General Canvas Resources

There are several "tricks to the trade," so we recommend that if you haven't done quizzes or exams on Canvas before that you ask for help. But these support pages are good resources.

- Creating questions: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-12943-4152724267
- Work-arounds for "all of the above" questions: see bottom of this webpage
- Randomizing questions: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-12979-415298624
- Quiz settings: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10152-415241475
- Manual posting of grades: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-17329-41521116618
- Extra time or extra attempts: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-12711
- Viewing quiz statistics: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-13037-415241484
- Regrading a question: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-12823-4152457763
- Reviewing auto-graded fill-in-the-blank questions: https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-13949-4152816809

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