

Tips for moving exams online

Your assessment plans, just like all your other learning plans, have probably been suddenly disrupted during this crisis. And, due to family responsibilities, or anxiety, your students may not have the time or ability to concentrate on full length exams like they would typically be able to in a classroom setting.

But all is not lost. As you know, the goal of giving an exam is to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit. If there are other ways of doing this -- for example, a culminating project, portfolio, or other open-ended assignment that a student could submit online, consider these before an online exam, particularly a multiple-choice exam.

If you decide to use a traditional summative exam, these research-based tips can make the online experience better for you and your students.

1) Create clear and specific rules and instructions so students know exactly what to do.

- Online assessment is new for your students. Reduce anxiety by clearly communicating the rules and instructions before the exam so there are no surprises.
- For example, if you would like them to write their essays in paragraphs or to show their work for problem sets, be sure to explicitly state this.
- The rules may include how many opportunities students have to complete the exam, if they can or cannot save and come back later to finish, if they need to put away all mobile devices or whether it is an open or closed book exam.
- Provide other details such as the list of learning objectives the exam will address, how many questions to expect, the amount of time they will have to complete the exam, how many points each question is worth, etc. A study guide or a practice test can also help your students prepare.

2) Reduce the opportunities for cheating.

- Password protect your exam and limit to one attempt.
- Require students to complete a statement of honesty before beginning the exam (this can be done through a digital form or added as the first item of the exam).
- Open and close access to your exam session within a predetermined time period.
- Shuffle items or create multiple versions of the exam to randomly assign to students.
- Create a pool or item bank to pull random questions from (many platforms allow for this, including MyLab and Mastering, and most learning management systems (LMS)).
- Ask students to justify or explain their answers by adding an open response field after each selected-response question.
- Use more open-ended question types instead of true/false or multiple choice questions if you don't have the capabilities listed above.

3) Make sure students can reasonably complete the exam within the time allotted.

Unless you are assessing how quickly your students can complete the exam, allow them ample time to complete it. It is important to keep in mind that your students don't know the knowledge and skills as well as you do, so be sure to cushion each item with more time than you would expect to take to complete the exam yourself. If possible, have an assistant or colleague proofread your exam before it is time to administer it.

4) Align your exam questions to learning outcomes.

- Regardless of whether the exam is online or on paper, if you are creating it from scratch, make sure you use the objectives as your guide as you develop the questions. Each objective should be addressed at least once.
- Determine which types of questions or items best reflect the learning objectives. For example, if the objective requires a student to critique a poem, then an essay question would be a logical and efficient choice, whereas a multiple choice question would not typically be the most efficient way to gauge a student's ability to critique. This will affect the method you use to administer the exam (for example, multiple choice questions are easy to do in most LMSs).

5) Scoring and point values should be based on the complexity and difficulty of the questions.

For instance, if you have a multipart question, consider assigning partial credit for each part of the question if the system allows. For math or science problem sets, allow students to show their work such as sending in a photo of their workings or describing the steps they took to solve a problem or complete a process.

Sources

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About the author



As a former classroom teacher, Sara is devoted to the pursuit of effective, stimulating learning design for all students. Prior to joining Pearson, she worked as a teacher in both virtual and face-to-face classrooms for 10 years. After receiving her MS in Instructional Design in 2005, she then moved into Instructional Design for both Higher Ed and K-12 institutions. Motivated to ensure students were able to access and receive high-quality, engaging learning experiences, she used her teaching and design experience to advise Texas educators on best practices for designing and teaching virtual courses.

She joined Pearson in 2012 as an Assessment Design Manager supporting Clinical Educational Assessment products with expertise using evidence-centered design and incorporating 21st century skills in online assessment development and innovative assessment task design. Now as a Principal Learning Designer for the Learning Research and Design team she is excited to use her skills in assessment design to help design and create effective learning experiences for students.

Sara currently lives in Houston, Texas and spends most of her free time with her husband, two sons, and miniature schnauzer. She has recently begun to learn to play the mandolin and loves visiting art galleries, attending plays, and reading just about anything she can get her hands on.