

Take Home Exams

Take home exams allow students to consult some form of reference material while completing an exam.

Take home exams place the focus on higher level learning rather than memorization and recall.

Questions can ask students to analyze, evaluate, or synthesize knowledge, rather than just remember it.

Williams and Wong (2009) found that open book, open web exams work particularly well to emphasize “the importance of learner-directed discovery of knowledge,” and the “understanding of learning processes in terms of real-life performance as opposed to a display of inert knowledge” (p. 229). Consequently, such exams induce deeper learning, and provide students with opportunities to engage with contemporary real-world problems that enhance the authenticity and applicability of course materials.

Types of Take Home Exams

Take home exams can be divided into two categories, timed and untimed exams.

Timed Exams

In a timed take home exam, students respond to questions within a fixed time limit. Exams can be timed through D2L Quizzes or through D2L Assignment Dropbox functions (Turnitin can be enabled).

A timed exam increases the likelihood of independent responses, and reduces the likelihood of cheating. However they can present difficulties for students in different time zones or with different responsibilities (e.g. childcare), with accommodations that require them to have extra time or distraction free environments, or who lack reliable internet and technology.

Untimed Exams

In an untimed exam, students have a much longer (and often flexible) time frame with which to complete exams. The longer time frame can be facilitated via the D2L Assignment Dropbox (Turnitin can be enabled).

Untimed exams are more accessible to students, however, to ensure academic integrity they require higher order questions that ask students to apply, analyze and evaluate content (case studies, scenarios, readings, etc.)

Advantages of Take Home Exams

- Availability of reference material allows more freedom and flexibility in constructing exam questions
 - Emphasizes higher order skills, de-emphasizes “cramming” or rote memorization
 - Broader in scope –

- students can call upon more information than they could have ever been expected to memorize
- questions can be longer and more involved and require students to integrate information from multiple sources or types.
- exams can address a greater variety of subjects and learning objectives
 - Permits more realistic exam questions that mimic professional work where information is available and the skill is in determining the appropriate application
 - Easier to include multi-step problems
 - Can continue or extend work done in homework or other assessments
- Encourages students to develop new learning strategies to ensure their success
 - Enhances information retrieval skills
 - Places greater focus on knowing how to use information

Disadvantages of Take Home Exams

- Students may place too much emphasis on their reference materials
- Students may believe that they don't need to study as much, or may underestimate how long it will take them to locate the information in their reference materials.
- Student workload may be increased by the need to create reference materials before exams
- The reference material may not be available to all students, such as an expensive textbook that all students may not have purchased.
- Students may be unfamiliar with the format and will need to be provided with clear procedures and rules.
- Several types of questions that would be acceptable in a closed book exam will not work in a open book, take home exams – these include questions that ask for definitions, descriptions, or lists of properties, characteristics, etc. (Gupta, 2007 and Chan, 2009, as cited in Schwartz, n.d.)

Designing Take Home Exams

Design exam problems that take advantage of the open book format.

- Questions should require students to “do things with the information available to them, rather than merely locate and summarize or rewrite it” (Chan, 2009, as cited in Schwartz, n.d.).
 - Ask students to connect what they have learned in the course to their own lived experiences, observations, workplaces, and communities.
 - Put an emphasis on the process as well as the final product by asking students to document their process verbally or visually (this could also include a self-reflection component).
 - Present “relevant qualitative or quantitative data and then ask students interpretative and application questions – What does the data show? What relevance does this data or does the scenario have in terms of [current topic]? What other factors could potentially affect this data? How would you test for these?” (University of Newcastle)

- Evaluate questions you have drafted by searching online for the answer. “If the question is written in such a way that it can easily be found by typing the question stem into a search engine, you will want to consider revising it” (University of Wisconsin).
- Make sure there is enough time allotted for the exam – open book exam questions will typically take longer than closed book exams questions
- Set up appropriate marking criteria with the weight placed on knowledge, comprehension and critical thinking, rather than just recall.

Writing Take Home Exam Questions

Questions in open book exams “need to be devised to assess the interpretation and application of knowledge, comprehension skills, and critical thinking skills rather than only knowledge recall” (University of Newcastle).

[Bloom's Taxonomy](#) of educational objectives can be used to design questions of appropriate difficulty. In take home exam, questions should ideally be at the levels of applying to creating. These levels are highlighted in the table below:

Type or Level of Question	Students are asked to ...	Example question formats
Knowing & Remembering	recall knowledge of subject matter relevant to the discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What, where, who, when ...?• How many ...?• List ...• Describe ...• Define ...
Understanding	demonstrate understanding by constructing meaning from information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In your own words ...• Explain how ...• What did X mean when ...?• Given an example of ...
Applying	apply knowledge and understanding to a particular task or problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How would you use ...?• What examples can you find to ...?• How would you solve X using what you have learned?• What would happen in ...?

Analyzing	examine different concepts and make distinctions between them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the parts or features of...?• What are the competing arguments within...?• Why is X different to Y?• Compare and contrast...• What is the relationship between A and B?
Evaluating	make judgements about concepts or ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is most important/effective?• Which method is best?• Which is the strongest argument?
Creating	develop new ideas from what they know and understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How would you design a ...?• What alternatives are there to...?• What changes would you make?• What would happen if...?• Suppose you could ___ what would you do?• How would you evaluate?• Can you formulate a theory for...?

From: Anderson, L. & Krathwohl, D. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

Alternate Types of Questions

Just because it's a take home exam doesn't mean you have to use only long answer questions. For example, you could try:

- Give multiple choice questions where every choice is correct. Students have to explain why they've chosen a particular answer.
- Have students write the questions and then explain what the question is testing (Bonus: pair them with a student who has to answer and provide feedback on the question).
- Give students a question and ask them to write multiple answers with at least one being correct, one plausible, and one totally wrong.

Within D2L Quizzes there are several options suited to take home exams:

- Randomize test questions (from a large question bank) to create a unique assessment for each student.
- Use an algorithmic question generator to create calculation-based questions that have different parameters and numbers in the questions and in the answers.
- Limit the date/time students are able to access the assessment (make sure to keep time limits realistic)
- Use delayed feedback so that students can see the score they have achieved only after the test is over for everybody in the class.

This document was produced by Curtis Maloley, Michelle Schwartz, and Nada Savicevic from the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching at Ryerson University. Contact us: teachingcentre@ryerson.ca

Examples of Take Home Exam Questions

Upper-level - Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences. Nicole Campbell, Western University

Sample Question: There is a new trend where pregnant women are refusing the glucose challenge test. If you were a healthcare provider that had a patient who was considering refusing the test, what would you say to them and why. Use your knowledge from multiple lectures to support your response.

- *This question offers students an opportunity to apply their knowledge to a real-life professional situation, and asks students to synthesize content from multiple lectures in order to create an effective response.*

Sample Question: A recent article titled “Type 2 diabetes research held back by animal models” highlighted that animals might not be an appropriate model to research diabetes. Based on what we know about animal and human islet biology and type 1 versus type 2 diabetes, was/is there merit in using animal models to study both types of the disease?

- *In this question, students must evaluate the merits of using animal models to study diabetes by applying knowledge from multiple course units.*

Lower-level - Sport Media Theory and Practice Curtis Maloley, Ryerson University

Sample Question: Find an example of an athlete apology online and analyze: (a) the specific image repair discourse(s) the athlete employs; and, (b) the success or failure of the apology in relation to the discourse. In explaining the image repair discourse(s) you’ve identified, you should make reference to the assigned course reading from Utsler and Epp (2013). Your example of an athlete apology cannot be one that has already been discussed in the reading, lecture or online discussion. Please include a link to your online source in your answer.

- *The question is designed to have students apply a course theory to relevant online examples of their choosing, and to make specific reference to a relevant course reading. It also reinforces writing skills that students have to apply in writing their research essays for the course.*

Sample Question: If you had to choose only ONE theory from RTA 105 that you would say has most impacted the way you view sport media, which one would you choose? Explain the theory you have chosen and discuss why you feel it is important. How do you think your understanding of this theory will impact the way you tell stories in the sport media industry?

- *The question is designed for students to both demonstrate knowledge of a relevant course theory, but also to reflect on the importance of translating theory into practice in their discipline, which is one of the principle outcomes of the course.*

Administering Take Home Exams

When administering take home exams, it's important to set expectations for students. Dr. Nicole Campbell from Western University has the following suggestions:

- Communicate with students about when they will receive the questions and when their responses are due.
- Discuss where you expect students to get information to support their responses (e.g. lecture content, lecture content and textbook, etc.)
- Discuss how each question will be evaluated (e.g. ideas, flow, writing style, etc.) and if you will be using a rubric to assign points.

Academic Integrity in Take Home Exams

You should design your assessment with the understanding that students may have full access to their textbook and the internet, however take the time to define what you mean by “open-book” to your students.

- Exactly what materials are students permitted to access?
- What, if any, constitutes appropriate collaboration with their classmates?
- Will you be using Turnitin to evaluate their submissions?
- Will students be asked to submit the crib notes or reference materials they created as part of their studying process?

You could use this as an opportunity to discuss academic integrity, asking all students to agree to an honour code that they will use only the approved materials. For example, make the release of an exam contingent upon the student’s acknowledgement of an honour code such as the following:

Consistent with Ryerson’s Policy 60: Academic Integrity, I agree that all the assignments, quizzes, project work and exams I complete will represent my work and my work only. I understand that all forms of academic misconduct are prohibited. I also understand that academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, all forms of cheating, including the use of unauthorized materials, plagiarism, false identification, and forgery. In addition, I understand that it is my duty and my responsibility to familiarize myself with Ryerson’s Policy 60: Academic Integrity and inform the instructor if I become aware of any violations to this Honour Code.

Read more: [Online Exam Considerations](#), Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching, Ryerson University.

Work Cited

Anderson, L. & Krathwohl, D. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

This document was produced by Curtis Maloley, Michelle Schwartz, and Nada Savicevic from the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching at Ryerson University. Contact us: teachingcentre@ryerson.ca

Campbell, N. (drsoup09). (2020, March 14). Here you go! Some [simple instructions and my example](#) from last year. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/drsoup09/status/1238898966961496066>

Centre for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). A guide for academics - Open book exams. University of Newcastle Australia. Retrieved from https://www.newcastle.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/268980/Open-Book-Exams.pdf

Schwartz, M. (n.d.). Open Book Exams. Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching, Ryerson University. Retrieved from <https://www.ryerson.ca/learning-teaching/teaching-resources/assessment/#accordion-155378592484-open-book-exams>

University of Wisconsin Extended Campus. (2020). Unproctored Online Assessments. <https://ce.uwex.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/UnproctoredAssessments.pdf>

Williams, J.B. and Wong, A. (2009), The efficacy of final examinations: A comparative study of closed-book, invigilated exams and open-book, open-web exams. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 40: 227-236. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-8535.2008.00929.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2008.00929.x)