

# Academic integrity in online assessment

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Online course assessment involves different considerations than assessment in the classroom, including different concerns about academic integrity. The online student has opportunities to cheat on exams that are not present in the classroom. Previously, some faculty have used Respondus Monitor to discourage and detect cheating during exams by remote students; such software is no longer available for use at USC. This resource offers recommendations and suggests considerations when planning and implementing assessments for remote students.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review this document before developing, revising, or administering tests, quizzes, and other assessments for online students. To [consult with CET](http://cet.usc.edu/) about online assessment, email usccet@usc.edu. Assistance is also available for Blackboard (blackboard@usc.edu).

### Promote academic integrity

* At the start of the exam, have students agree to an honor code. Specify the behaviors you expect for the exam. For example, “I pledge not to receive assistance from others on this exam, nor provide assistance to others.” Include details specific to the exam, such as “I will cite any sources I use on the exam, outside the course textbook and my course notes.”
* Foster a culture of integrity (“I trust that everyone will work independently on this exam”) rather than a punitive culture (“Anyone who talks with other students about the test will be punished”). To shape a class’s norm of academic integrity, be very clear in your expectations of student behavior during the assessment. For example, “cite all referenced sources,” and “do not communicate with others about the assessment.” Explain to students what you consider “cheating,” and why it is inappropriate. Reference professional standards.
* Eliminate high-stakes exams that account for a large portion of the overall course grade. High-stakes exams increase student anxiety, which is one motivation for cheating. Replace a high-stakes exam with two or more smaller exams and/or other forms of assessment (see the alternative assessments section below)

### Reconsider your assessments

* Acknowledge that students will have access to the internet when completing the exam. Do not ask questions that can be answered through a simple internet search. Assume that every exam is an “open-book” exam, or “open-internet” exam.
* Restructure the grading of the course to distribute grading weight over multiple exams and/or other forms of assessment (see the alternative assessments section below)
* Compare your assessments to your list of course learning objectives. If a learning objective has already been sufficiently assessed through other means, leave it off the exam.
* Identify the course learning objectives to be assessed in an exam, and ensure that each exam question is a valid measure of at least one learning objective.
* Hand-written answers are an option for online courses, especially for responses that require drawings, graphs, and equations. Students can digitize their written work and upload it to the LMS in lieu of an online exam. For more information, see the CET resource “Handwritten student work.”
* Consider having students submit a document with their short-answer or essay responses through Turnitin. Turnitin, which is available for Blackboard assignment submissions, checks student work to identify text that may be plagiarized.

### Design exams that discourage cheating

#### Multiple-choice question exams

Contact USC ITS (blackboard @usc.edu) for assistance with implementing the options below in Blackboard.

* Randomize the order of answer options for each question.
* Randomize the order of questions in the exam.
* Use questions banks. Compose multiple, similar exam questions for each learning objective being tested, and instruct Blackboard to randomly choose one question from the set for each student.
* Set the exam to display only one question at a time, and disallow backtracking to previous questions.
* Include some short-answer questions. In multiple-choice exams, include a few short-answer questions that require students to justify their answer to the previous question.

#### Other types of exams

* Design exam questions that require more than memorization, focusing on application and evaluation, and ask students to justify their answers.
* Provide an image or graph for students to analyze.
* Ask students to compose an appropriate question for a specific course topic, provide the correct answer, and include an explanation of the answer.
* Provide a list of terms and ask students to explain the relationships between all the terms in one paragraph.
* Provide students flawed work and have them identify and correct errors.

### Use alternative assessments in place of traditional exams

* Explore what other instructors have tried. Try an internet search using ”assessment” and the discipline name or course title. Talk to your local peers.
* Consider each of the assessment types below. Not all will be relevant or appropriate for your course and content.
  + Authentic assessments, tasks that reflect the type of work a professional in the discipline might perform in the course of their work.
  + A product design or proposal
  + Informational brochure suitable for the general public (or a specific audience)
  + Newspaper article or letter to the editor
  + Response to a case study
  + Literature review
  + Annotated bibliography
  + Analysis paper (legal brief, policy memo, critique, executive summary)
  + Research proposal
  + Course summary/study guide
  + Projects, which may be individual or group efforts. To maximize individual accountability in group assignments, each group member can have specific, assigned responsibilities and/or deliverables.
  + Online discussion forums or blogs

### Resources for more ideas

[Authentic assessment (Indiana University Bloomington)](https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/authentic-assessment/index.html)

[Remote Testing (Pepperdine University)](https://community.pepperdine.edu/seaver/center-teaching-excellence/keep-on-teaching/online-tests.htm)

[Alternatives to traditional exams and papers (Indiana University Bloomington)](https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/alternatives-traditional-exams-papers/index.html)

[Giving exams online: Strategies and tools (Vanderbilt University)](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/online-exams/)

[Handling exams when your course unexpectedly moves online (Indiana University Bloomington)](https://blogs.iu.edu/citl/2020/03/13/exams-online/#.X_3rJS2cawA)

[Alternatives to exams for remote teaching (Tufts University)](https://sites.tufts.edu/teaching/2020/03/18/alternative-to-exams-for-remote-teaching/)

[How to prevent cheating during online tests (Schoolology Exchange)](https://www.schoology.com/blog/how-prevent-cheating-during-online-tests)

[Alternative assessments to proctored exams (Kansas State University)](https://www.k-state.edu/keepteaching/proctored-exams.html)