

# Planning online assessment

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Faculty are often concerned about how they will create an online testing experience identical to the one they use in their onground classes. But there are many different ways to assess the same student learning in the online environment, depending on what faculty hope to achieve with the assessment. It can be a challenge to think about testing differently from the traditional proctored, in-class exam, as alternative testing options like open-book exams may, upon first glance, appear to defeat the purpose of assessment. We may assume alternative types of assessments are not rigorous because students can just “look up” the answers. In actuality, open-book exams are an opportunity to test students on higher-order thinking skills.

There are some differences in assessment practices and considerations when moving from the classroom to the online environment. This document introduces some options for developing and administering online assessments.

## 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 about online assessment, email usccet@usc.edu. Assistance is also available for Blackboard (blackboard@usc.edu) and Zoom (consult@usc.edu).

### Document contents

The following sections are offered in this support document

* Recommendations for developing online assessments
* How to conduct assessments online
* Examples of online assessment questions
* References

### Recommendations for developing online assessments

* Exams/assessments can be administered through Blackboard. Some forms of assessment, such as individual or group presentations, can be conducted during a live Zoom session, or recorded and uploaded to a Blackboard assignment. Students can also be tasked with producing a deliverable in breakout rooms that is submitted by the end of a class session.
* Develop assessments and assessment questions that require students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills (creation, evaluation, synthesis, analysis, application) rather than skills that demonstrate memorization (definition, recall, recognition).
* An assessment can serve as a learning experience if the tasks reflect the skills that will be required in the field rather than facts that would normally just be looked up. Design authentic assessments that reflect work that might be done in the professional environment (e.g., composing a memo instead of an essay).
* Use open-ended questions (short-answer, essay, problem-solving) rather than multiple-choice questions if possible and practicable.
* Consider whether the exam time restraints imposed by the classroom environment (e.g., 50-minute exams) need to be reproduced with online exams. Consider whether time limits could be problematic if internet issues arise, or family interruptions occur.
* Avoid high-stakes assessments, such as any assessment that contributes more than 25% of the course grade. High-stakes assessments raise student anxiety and can contribute to student cheating.
* [Disability Services and Programs (DSP)](https://dsp.usc.edu/coronavirus-update-faculty/) can assist you with providing accommodations for online assessments and exams.

### How to conduct assessments online

For each type of assessment conducted in a classroom, there is a technique for conducting it in an online environment.

#### Multiple-choice exam

Create a Blackboard test with multiple-choice questions. Blackboard will automatically grade the exam, like a Scantron, but will also record each student grade in the Blackboard gradebook. You can instruct Blackboard to randomize the order of the questions and/or randomize the order of the answers. You can also create a pool of questions from which Blackboard will randomly select questions to create each student’s exam. That way, every student gets a different exam. Blackboard can also time the exam so that students must finish within a set amount of time.

#### Written exam

Create a Blackboard test. Mix questions types in the exam. Options include essay and short-answer questions, questions that ask students to upload a file, such as a chart or image, and could also include multiple-choice questions.

#### Essay or report

Create a Blackboard assignment to which the student will upload the file containing their essay or report. Most file types are accepted by Blackboard. Turnitin is a feature of Blackboard that can check students’ work against a database of other students’ work, as well as publicly available work. For Turnitin, .docx and .pdf file types are recommended.

#### Performance, presentation, or speech

There are options for conducting these types of assessments. In a live Zoom session, students could perform their work for the instructor to observe in real time. If students are using media, such as a PowerPoint slide deck, the instructor can ask the student to share their PowerPoint window to the rest of the class during the live Zoom session and narrate as they proceed through the slides. Students can also share windows on their computer to show videos or audio recordings.

Alternatively, students could record their work on video (e.g., using a smartphone or laptop webcam) and upload their video file to a Blackboard assignment. Keep in mind USC Blackboard has a file-size limit of 40MB. For larger file sizes, students could upload their video to a YouTube or Vimeo account and provide a link to the online video in a Blackboard assignment. This assumes the student knows how to upload videos to an online platform. There are other ways students can share large video files, such as through shared Google Drive items.

#### Non-digital products

For some assessment, students may need to submit products that are not digital in nature, such as hand drawings, formulae, paintings, or 3D objects. These student works can be converted to digital files and uploaded to Blackboard.

Hand drawings and other 2D products can be scanned into a PDF file. There are many apps for smartphones that create a PDF file from a photograph; free PDF-creation apps are available from Microsoft and Adobe. Once converted to PDF, the file can be uploaded to Blackboard. The Google Drive app also has a feature for taking photos and moving them into Google Drive folders directly, from which they can be shared or downloaded as a PDF file.

Students can take videos of their 3D works and upload the videos to Blackboard. See more information in the section above for submitting videos.

#### Practice exams

Practice exams are an effective way to prepare students for an upcoming exam. In Blackboard, instructors can set the test options to allow unlimited attempts, so students can retake practice exams until they are comfortable with their performance.

### Examples of online assessment questions

Recognizing that all online assessments can practically be considered open-book and open-note exams, it is best to use exam questions that require higher-order thinking rather than simple recall. Following are suggestions for developing higher-order thinking questions. These questions can also be used to replace laboratory or clinical assessments.

**Move beyond memorization.**

* Instead of “In which year did the War of 1812 begin?” try “Which one event was most responsible for starting the War of 1812? Justify your answer.”
* Instead of “Which of the following is the definition of the term ‘infarction’?” try “Explain the difference between infarction and ischemia.”

**Probe for deeper learning.**

* Instead of “Which is more soluble in water? A: olive oil, B: alcohol, C: mercury” try “Explain why alcohol has a higher aqueous solubility than olive oil.” or “Rank the following by their solubility in water, from most soluble to least: olive oil, alcohol, mercury. Justify your rankings.”
* Instead of “Answer the following multiple-choice questions about the Smith article” try “Write a summary of the Smith article in no more than 80 words.”

**Assign authentic assessments.**

* Instead of “List the steps in conducting a motivational interview.” try “Produce a support document designed to help a novice practitioner conduct a motivational interview.”
* Instead of “Analyze a liquid sample using a gas chromatograph” try “Produce instructions for a novice user to analyze a liquid sample using a gas chromatograph.”

**Leverage critique and compare-and-contrast.**

* Instead of “Solve this equation.” try “Explain what error was made in the following attempted solution to an equation.”
* Instead of “What techniques are featured in Picasso’s Guernica?” try “Compare the techniques used in Picasso’s Guernica and Seated Woman.”
* Instead of “Perform a patient-intake interview” try “Observe this video of a patient-intake interview and submit three suggestions, based on course content, for improving the interviewer’s practice.”

Also see CET resource [Academic integrity in online assessment](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GsHBDcPPR8r1S2eLJt-bHAHKKV04F7iZ/edit).