ONLINE OPEN-BOOK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Educational Development, University of Plymouth, 2020-21

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1   INTRODUCTION

A timed online open-book assessment is an assessment that is set under timed conditions and allows students to access notes and resources. Online open-book assessment is a commonly used alternative to face-to-face invigilated assessment. In all cases, online open-book assessments align with programme learning outcomes and are normally modelled on existing exam questions.

Pedagogically there is a sound rationale for traditional exams to be replaced by online open-book assessments (e.g. they are more authentic and inclusive, they reduce anxiety, and improve retention of knowledge) so do consider using online open-book assessments. Always ensure that the relevant programme learning outcomes are not over-assessed.

This guidance offers strategies to help you prepare online open-book assessment and should be used in conjunction with local assessment norms in your School.

2   GOOD DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Ensure the online open book assessment is aligned with the original intended learning outcomes.

- The online open-book assessment should be simple and straightforward to implement and use. The less complex the assessment and the technology used to implement it, the more inclusive it is.

- Consult and follow the latest Assessment Policy, including the Addendum to Assessment Policy 2014-20 when designing, implementing, marking, and moderating online assessments.

2.1 QUESTION DESIGN

The main difference between timed face to face assessment (exams) and online open book assessment is the focus of the questions. In exams the focus is on recall of information, in open book assessments the focus is on reasoning, conceptualisation, problem solving, and interpretation of resources. This is an important distinction which affects the type of questions suited in each case.

Devise questions that require students to answer in more critical and analytical ways thus encouraging higher order thinking skills. Look to assess skills like independent research skills and/or the ability to synthesise different sources of information. When developing questions:

- Make the questions clear and straightforward.

- Avoid factual recall questions or use of MCQ or questions to which the answers can be easily found on the internet.

- Set questions which require students to interpret the information available to them, rather than merely summarising it.

- Set questions that require students to draw together conclusions from multiple sources; to independently locate a specific case study for dissection (from personal experience or independent research); or to base answers on very topical events (latest current affairs or data).

- Use case-based questions, for example, questions that require students to apply critical reasoning skills in response to a trigger scenario.

- Look at examples of online open-book assessment questions/ case studies. The University of Newcastle, Australia, provides useful suggestions for question structure, and the University of Edinburgh outlines ways to specifically evaluate and modify existing exam questions. Manish Malik at the University of Portsmouth identifies methods for designing questions based on research. Sally Brown and Kay Sambell make lots of suggestions for online/alternative assessment formats.

- Consider developing a pool of assessment questions, compiling a source-collection for the assessment and make use of case-based assessment questions.

- Check on copyright issues, and put together a set of papers, extracts, data, and other information from which students can find what they need to address the questions in the assessment.

- Make sure the number of questions is appropriate for the time limit of the assessment and the standard expected.

- Sense check/ validate new questions with colleagues for technical and educational robustness.

- Consider setting word limits for essay-type question to ensure parity across answers. Students doing open-book assessments may write less than in a traditional exam as they will be spending some of their time searching for, and making sense of, information and data. ABE recommends the following word limits for online assessments:
  - Level 3: 2,000 words +/- 10%
  - Level 4: 3,000 words +/- 10%
  - Level 5: 3,500 words +/- 10%
  - Level 6: 3,500 words +/- 10%

  Whatever word count you use, make sure it is clearly communicated to students.

2.2 LIMITING COLLUSION AND PLAGIARISM

- As online assignments will not be taking place in a moderated space, plagiarism and collusion are potential risks. Timed conditions of online assessments may mitigate these risks to some extent; as should carefully designed questions.

- For example, tasks or questions should not have only one correct answer, and instead questions that require students to catalogue, critique, plan, defend, reflect on their own learning, justify or rank rather than to explain or describe are plagiarism deterrents.

- Asking students to draw on latest topical material, their own experiences, or a range of sources chosen by the lecturer, means there is limited opportunity for students to obtain readymade answers from the internet.

- Google for answers to the questions you set and if the answers are easy to find - change them. Also, remind students that you have engaged in pre-emptive internet searches and are, therefore, aware of the commonly available sources.

- Devise a series of slightly different questions or data sets, assigning students to these randomly or strategically.

- Check out the section on 'Remedies for preventing plagiarism' in the Guidelines for creating open-book exams from Université Concordia, Canada for more information on this.

- Enhance students' awareness of collusion and plagiarism by directing them to the UoP guidance on plagiarism.

3 STUDENTS' LEARNING NEEDS

- When designing online timed open book assessments it is important to consider the range of the learning needs and limitations that students may experience. These can include physical impairment, mental health difficulties, specific learning differences, caring responsibilities, English as a second language, access to technology, international time zones, etc.
- Develop local responses for students who cannot access online environments due to lack of access to technology/ broadband.
- Assume students have minimal technology at their disposal.
- Avoid the need for students to print out materials.

3.1 MODIFIED ASSESSMENT PLANS

- If appropriate consult any Modified Assessment Plans (MAPs) that identify support strategies for students with specific needs. For further information on MAPs, please visit UoP Disability Services.

- In situations where MAPs are relevant:
  - If specific needs are known and/or captured in the MAP consider contacting the student prior the assessment and check with them that their home-setting is addressing their needs.

  - Advice to a student with physical impairment might include taking frequent breaks and ensuring that core resources are accessed prior to the assessment where possible.

  - Advice to a student with Dyslexia might include strategies such as: providing students with deadline reminders or breaking large chunks of work down into smaller pieces with associated deadlines as this will aid with time management.

  - It is particularly important for students with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) that expectations around the home assessment are communicated clearly in advance. This includes expectations regarding word limits and what a finished essay/report/dissertation should 'look' like. This should include the format as well as content, and what is expected from an academic piece of work of this kind. More guidance on ASC is available here.

- o For students with mental health issues, ensure that they are aware of the UoP online mental health support. Advise students to break down large projects into small chunks with associated deadlines. Developing a timetable can be helpful.
- o Advise students who have difficulty typing that they can write out their answers and upload a scan or photograph. Make sure they have clear local instruction on how to do this.
- o Decide whether students who cannot (or prefer not to) type can record their answers and submit a sound file.
- o Look at these resources to support inclusive design of online open-book assessment:
  - ➢ The UoP Education Commons offers some ideas (e.g. *Category: Inclusivity; Sub-category: Designing inclusive online assessments*)
  - ➢ The 'Technology to assist with inclusive practice' site (e.g. see link to DLE online course on 'Creating accessible content').
  - ➢ The guidelines on Accessible design for learner variability (Queen's University Belfast).
  - ➢ The UoP guidance on specific conditions.

3.2 SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO PREPARE FOR ONLINE OPEN BOOK ASSESSMENT

- Student Learning provides guidance on how to get the most out of learning online, and the academic skills students are being expected to demonstrate in an open book assessment (e.g. referencing, independent research, synthesis). Student should not however attempt to directly engage with this service during an open book assessment.

- Educational Development have developed specific guidance for UoP student participation in online open-book assessment.

4 DELIVERING ONLINE ASSESSMENTS

4.1 ACCESS

- Schools should ensure that students have access to appropriate technology to take and submit the assessment (PC or Laptop). It is not recommended to take the online assessment on a mobile device.

- Students should be advised to use a PC/Mac or a laptop.

- Students should be advised if they require specific software to complete the assessment.

- Where possible, students should be given the option to take the assessment online or offline without having to rely on an internet connection for the whole duration of the assessment.

- Add additional resources (e.g. sound recordings) as downloadable files so students can work offline if necessary. Consider that that there may be problems downloading larger files, such as videos, and so these should be avoided.

- Consider the utility of adding the question paper and/or answer sheet as a Word document so students have the option of typing their answers into it.

4.2 SOFTWARE

- Use [Moodle Assignment](), [Moodle Quiz]() or [Pebblepad](), or set up a Moodle submission area where students upload their completed work by a given deadline. If students are unfamiliar with these platforms, set up a practice submission activity for them.

- The Moodle Assignment functionality is more suited to open-book assessment like essays, learning journals and papers which require manual grading.

- ATLAS functionality in Pebblepad: particularly well suited for ePortfolios. Staff can create templates that students populate. These can be marked online, and written feedback released. Please note that the summative grades are manually entered into Markbook.

- Moodle Quizzes are more suited to closed-book tests or formative assessments. You can create a range of different question types. Quizzes are graded automatically, and feedback is released immediately.

- Simple Moodle Submission area: created so students can upload materials that are downloaded by staff and marked outside of Moodle. The grades are entered into Moodle manually.

4.3 ASSESSMENT TIMINGS

- Determine the timing of the online open-book assessment. There is a range of disciplinary, institutional, and professional body norms/requirements that influence the length of time of an online assessment. Longer time-windows are more inclusive. The UoP has decided that in most cases this should be 48 hrs.

- Do not run online assessments at weekends; be cognisant of world time zones.

- Avoid the bunching of online assessment deadlines. Coordinate with your colleagues accordingly. In the case of summative online assessments this will be managed externally via the exam timetable unit.

- All new alternative assessments should be aligned with these submission slots: 0900; 1200; 1500; 1800h (all British Summer Time - BST).

4.4 COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

- Send clear and timely instructions and related materials to students on how to prepare for the online assessment

- Disseminate clear guidance on online assessment etiquette as relevant.

- Consider how to deliver instructions in multiple accessible formats, i.e. written and a podcast.

- If emailing students instructions for an online open book assessment, use and log an [automatic notification of receipt]() and automatic notification that the message has been read.

- Suggest schedules to students for example, a useful guideline for open-book assessments is to allow half of the time allocated to finding information and preparing the answers and the other half for writing up the answers.

- Disseminate marking criteria to students in advance.

- Providing reading lists in advance is good practice so all students can have the opportunity to start reading new material early.

4.5 SUPPORTING STUDENTS DURING ONLINE ASSESSMENT

- Let students know there will be staff support available for technical issues with delivery of the assessment, but that staff will not be available to answer any assessment content-specific questions.

- Inform students of the general University IT support contact details, the phone number is +44 (0)1752 588588 option 3 for students. Advise them that there may be a delay in resolving issues and that issues can only be resolved within the normal working hours of Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00 BST.

- Advise students to submit their assessment Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00 BST to ensure support is available if something goes wrong.

- Direct students to the Moodle Online Submission help site, which has a number of help videos and technical guidance on how to submit to Moodle online assessments.

- Remind students that during the University's examination period Student Services continue to be available including Student Learning. However, it is not appropriate to contact Student Learning during the assessment to ask assessment related questions.

- If a student is struggling with mental health issues during the assessment they should visit the University's Mental Health Support resources.

4.6 OVERSEAS STUDENTS

- In the case of overseas students, if the online open book assessment is timed for 48hrs+ you will not normally need to extend the availability of the assessment. If it is for less, then you should consider:
  - Using adaptive release to allow specific groups of students to take the test at different times.
  - How students in different time zones will access support on an equal basis to students in the UK.

- Ask yourself these questions to establish any issues with overseas students accessing content:
  - If you use a streaming service to provide media in the assessment, will all your students be able to access it?
  - Will students be able to access the DLE or other submission platform?
  - Will overseas students be able to access the same range of content as students in the UK?

5 MARKING AND MODERATION

- Ensure that the marking criteria are appropriate and constructively aligned and therefore, relate clearly to the relevant assessed learning outcomes.

- Consider the balance you are seeking in the marking criteria – content and understanding/ structure or standard written English.

- Consider working together with your colleagues to collate a pool of general feedback comments that can be shared with students.

- Marking and moderation is subject to the UoP Assessment policy.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY

Students should be able to complete the assessment in accordance with guidance for safe use of display screen equipment e.g. allowance for breaks. The Health and Safety Executive provide guidance on setting up an appropriate workstation and how to best schedule breaks from screen time: https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf and https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/vdubreaks.htm.

7 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

*This document was modelled on the University of Bristol's 'Online Assessment-Essential Guidance' by kind permission of Digital Education, University of Bristol

Links provided in document above and other sources that were consulted to inform this guidance document are as follows:

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