
Tip sheet – Appropriate use of exams

While exams are often considered a popular form of assessment, they are prone to misuse because they are not always the most appropriate or [authentic form of assessment](#). At Flinders the [Assessment Practice Procedures](#) (3.2) specifically define exams “as assessment activities that are invigilated, and generally centrally administered”. Exams described in this way are usually used as summative assessment pieces and (according to procedures) should not be included as part of the topic assessment unless they can be “demonstrated to be the most appropriate method for assessing student learning”, or they are “required for professional registration or accreditation” (Assessment Practice Procedures 3.2.b).

This Tip sheet will help you consider whether an exam is the most appropriate form of summative assessment in your topic. It also suggests resources to help you consider other forms of assessment and indicates what needs to happen if an exam is the appropriate.

Determining whether an exam is the most appropriate assessment method

Exams as a form of summative assessment support you in determining the knowledge a student has acquired from participation in your Topic. They may be used to indicate whether students are able to recall the knowledge they have acquired and (in many cases) apply it to various scenarios when under pressure. However, even where you are testing students’ capacity to recall knowledge and apply it to a scenario in a pressured situation you still need to question if an exam is the best approach. When having your assessments [moderated](#), you could ask the moderator to consider whether they consider an exam is the most appropriate form of assessment.

Before deciding if an invigilated exam is the best method of assessment see: [Assessment alternatives to exams](#). The Tip sheet, [Authentic assessment](#) provides a range of assessments that may replace an exam. Examples of assessments which require using similar skill sets to exams include asking students to:

- participate in a viva or recorded interview (where they respond to questions)
- use their knowledge to recreate an experiment or produce a short video indicating how they have used formulae and data to determine a result
- create a mind map which shows each step of their thinking as they assess a scenario and form a diagnosis (University of Notre Dame, 2020)
- create a poster or fact sheet where pertinent information is appropriately applied to a specified scenario (Parmer, 2020)
- online quizzes, which may also be used for formative assessments may also allow students to demonstrate their capacity to recall knowledge and apply while under pressure

If none of these alternatives (including those listed in the linked resources) are justifiably appropriate, a take home exam, an open book exam or a quiz may be used as alternatives. Determining how [academic integrity](#) will be supported if using these alternatives is important.

Using Quizzes

Online [quizzes](#) should not be the automatic “go to” alternative to an exam but when well designed (see [Aligning quiz questions with Bloom’s taxonomy](#); [Using FLO quizzes with large student numbers](#) and [Incorporating Socratic questions into your FLO site](#)) can provide an alternative to ensuring learning outcomes are met. As with other exam alternatives, it is essential to design your online [quizzes to minimise collusion](#).

Exam is required for professional accreditation

Where the accreditation body for your topic explicitly indicates students cannot pass the course unless they sit formal, invigilated exams, then these must be incorporated into the assessments.

What to do next

If the only option is an exam, as the Topic coordinator you need to:

- timetable the exam
- ensure the exam can only be completed by the student it is intended for
- set a realistic timeframe for the exam while allowing sufficient time for reading and toilet breaks (for example ensure answers can be provided within the set time frame (providing a word limit may be useful, but be realistic and don't set 500 words for a task that needs 1,000 to get an HD)
- ensure your questions align with the learning outcomes you wish students to demonstrate (if students are required to show critical thinking skills an essay style response may be appropriate)
- have a large bank of questions which automatically rotate to make it harder for students to share answers
- provide scope for submission of calculations or the drafts of workings
- ensure an appropriate supplementary exam has been prepared

References

Parmer, L. L. 2020, [Alternatives to traditional exams as measures of student learning outcomes](#), *The Scholarly Teacher*, International Teaching Learning Cooperative, LLC
University of Notre Dame, 2020, [Alternatives to Examinations](#)