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## 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).

### 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 consider how authentic an exam is as a form of assessment. Also consider some alternatives to exams. These might include:

- an interactive oral assessment, viva or recorded interview (where they respond to questions)
- using knowledge to recreate an experiment or produce a short video indicating how they have used formulae and data to determine a result
- creating a mind map which shows each step of their thinking as they assess a scenario and form a diagnosis (University of Notre Dame, 2020)
- creating 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 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 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.

## Consider Learning Type

Exams are often an assessment of acquisition (of knowledge) of the students but there are many different types of assessment of learning that can be used instead. The table below looks at some alternative to exams based on Laurillard’s (2012) learning types. Many of these incorporate more than one type of learning but have been placed into the table based on their predominant characteristic. Look at your learning outcomes and choose an assessment type that will help the students demonstrate what they know in a way other than an exam. Sometimes a little rewriting of existing assessments will be enough.

**Alternative Assessment types (based on Laurillard’s learning types)**

Learning type	Acquisition	Collaboration	Discussion	Investigation	Practice	Production
<b>Description</b>	Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos (the teacher controls the narrative of learning).	Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself.	Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers.	Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught.	Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal	Learning through production is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice.

Assessment types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take home exam (could include open book, longer form essays or problem-based questions); consider demonstration of a more research-based approach with a reflective component</li> <li>• Write an exam based on topic knowledge (include answers and justify rationale for questions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem-solving (e.g. students collaborate to produce solution/s to a relevant issue)</li> <li>• Create a webpage (on an issue to do with course content).</li> <li>• Create a wiki (as a resource able to be used in the field)</li> <li>• Collaborate to produce an annotated bibliography</li> <li>• Design a Theme for a Conference (and describe why this would be of interest to discipline)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on an online discussion within the topic</li> <li>• Evaluate thinking (e.g. students discuss what they found and compare sources)</li> <li>• Assess participation in synchronous discussions (e.g. via Collaborate)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique and explanation of video practice (e.g. find / create videos and post online; include a critique task for students)</li> <li>• Research and find the facts / research behind a relevant or current issue</li> <li>• Analyse data from online database (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video upload of task performance</li> <li>• Online simulation tasks</li> <li>• Reflection on online role plays or other online practice tasks</li> <li>• Completion of tasks in virtual labs</li> <li>• Complete a grant application or award nomination and include justification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio production (e.g., series of videos / artefacts showing production over time)</li> <li>• Real time oral assessment</li> <li>• Reflection on process or production of work</li> <li>• Evaluate a website.</li> <li>• Literature review (e.g. evaluative annotated bibliography)</li> <li>• Create a blog, resource, model, computer program, animation (provide choice of content to allow for student agency and reduce academic integrity issues)</li> <li>• Produce a journal article, book review, report etc.</li> </ul>
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## 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

Laurillard, D. (2012) *Teaching as Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology*, New York: Routledge.

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](#)