

# ADAPTING YOUR ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR REMOTE TEACHING

## A PLANNING RESOURCE FOR INSTRUCTORS

This document offers guidelines to help you select and use assessment strategies that promote learning in your remote courses. It is part of a suite of materials designed to help you think about planning to move your previously face to face course to a high-quality remote offering. Please review the following to contextualize your thinking around how to assess in the planned remote context:

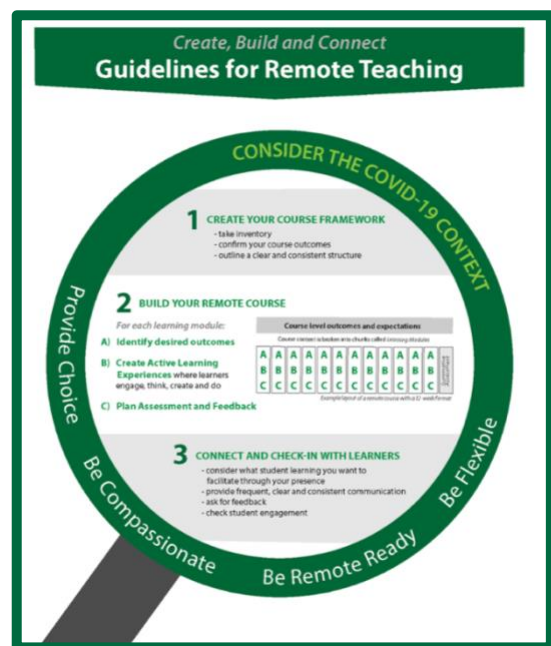
- [Good Practice Guidelines for Remote Teaching](#)
- [The Remote Teaching website for resources designed to support you](#)

### Adapting your Assessment Strategies for Remote Teaching

is a guide that focuses on strategies that:

- link assessment to learning
- allow students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways by expanding the possibilities for assessment
- foster a climate for academic integrity
- provide opportunities for practice and feedback, including debriefing and reflection after assessment

You are not expected to incorporate all the guidelines. Rather, we recommend that you select a small number of strategies that would best support student learning in your course context.



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## Link your Assessments to Learning

Students will naturally focus their attention on learning content that will be assessed. Therefore, try to ensure that each assessment is an opportunity for students to deepen their learning. Here are some guidelines to [make your assessment as clear and focused as possible to increase transparency](#):

- Help students see how assessment is linked to learning by explaining the value of each assignment/exam in terms of student learning. Try addressing these questions when you communicate to students about the assessments in your [planned remote course](#):
  - Why is the assessment part of the course?
  - How does the assessment relate to each course learning outcome it is connected to?
  - Where might students use the new knowledge or skill after the course?
- Explain to students how each assignment will be assessed and what you are hoping to see them demonstrate. Here are some strategies that improve student clarity about your expectations:
  - Share sample assignments/exams that received different grades (shown with permission) and ask students to discern differences in the quality of the work.
  - Show students tools you use to assess their work, such as a list of questions, a checklist, or a rubric. Watch a video to see [how to build an effective rubric](#).
- Explain how you expect students to use course materials to learn and prepare for assessments.
  - Describe—or demonstrate—your strategies for reading, annotating, synthesizing, and doing practice exercises. For example: Do you read articles from beginning to end? (Why/why not?) What sections of a book or article do you pay particular attention to and why? Do you read required and supplemental materials the same way?



### From Winter 2020 Student Feedback:

“During these tough times he always kept us up to date on his class and gave us time to prepare for assignments during these troubling times. He also gave us clear instructions on how he wanted it done and why each assignment was important.”

## Expand the Possibilities for Demonstrating Learning

Given that traditional closed book exams work less effectively in remote setting, it is important to consider alternatives.

### Adapting exams

You can replace or adapt your on-campus exam with a variety of open book options:

1. An assignment - typically due within term time (i.e. not within the final exam period).
2. Take home exam - would be provided to students with an extended window for completion (typically 2 days to a week).
3. Timed open book exam - once students start the exam, they have 3 hours (or less) to complete it.
  - a. The exam can be downloaded, completed offline and then uploaded back to the LMS, or
  - b. The exam can be completed via the LMS exam/quiz tool.

Assessments that took place on campus, such as 3-hour in-person invigilated exams, will no longer be viable in the prepared remote teaching context. Such assessments will therefore need to be adapted so that they support students with achieving the course learning outcomes while at the same time encouraging students to respect academic integrity. You can also change the traditional on-campus exam to a different type of assessment task that still corresponds to the intended learning outcomes.

Assignments and take home exams allow more flexibility. Students can take as much time as they need within the extended window to complete. These options also alleviate concerns regarding student access to reliable internet and are easier to administer. Timed open book exams using the download and upload option also reduce concerns regarding student access to reliable internet. Exam completion via the LMS exam/quiz tool requires uninterrupted internet access. (see [exam alternatives](#) at USask for Fall 2020).

Assignments, take-home and timed open book exams are unsupervised and allow students to access supplementary information (from peers or material resources). Let students know before exams which resources you permit them to consult (see, for example, the [Open Book Exam Academic Integrity Statement](#) document).

Here are strategies for adapting your exams:

- Remove, add, and amend questions.
  - For multiple choice questions, use question pools and randomization features (e.g. randomize the questions and the order of the answers within a question using the Quizzes Tool in [Canvas](#) or [Blackboard](#)).
  - Pair some multiple choice questions with an “explain your answer” open-ended question so that students articulate their understanding.
  - Replace questions that require students to recall facts with more complex questions that prompt students to apply, analyze, and evaluate. For example, provide students with a link to an existing dataset and ask them to perform calculations or statistical analyses.
    - See a math example [PDF](#) / [Word](#)
    - See a general example [PDF](#) / [Word](#)
- Change the assessment criteria/rubric. Keep the same questions and adjust the weighting of your grading criteria so that higher order thinking questions that require students to go beyond recall by applying, analyzing, and synthesizing their learning have more value.

### Learn more about adaptation assessment strategies

- [Review an explanation of how to transform your current exam questions into open-book questions](#) (GMCTL, USask)
- See examples of good question stems for open book exams [A Guide for Academics – Open Book Exams](#) (The University of Newcastle, Australia)
- Curious about advice from other universities? Read examples like:
  - [Online Assessment Guide](#) (Taylor Institute, University of Calgary) or
  - [Assessments: Making Your Exam Work as a Take-Home Assessment](#) (Herriot Watt University)

### Try something different

Some assessment formats might be better suited to the remote environment than the traditional exam. [UBC has a great wiki guide that lists various alternatives and their pros and cons](#). Here are some examples of alternatives that classes at USask already use:

- Ask students to critique a current research article.
- Have students participate in a performance (virtual) or give a presentation.
- Develop a case study and ask students to make recommendations from the perspective of a particular stakeholder.
- Assess students' learning orally by having them upload an audio or video recording of themselves explaining an answer to a subset of questions on the exam (possibly just one or two). Depending on class size, you could conduct phone or web interviews with students.
- Use reflections as final learning assessments, either with or without a portfolio. [Read an example of how a USask Prof in Agriculture uses reflection](#).
- Create a two-stage exam, where students first complete and submit the exam individually and then, working in small groups, answer the exam questions again. During the group part, students receive immediate, targeted feedback on their solutions from their fellow students and see alternative approaches to the problems. This makes the exam itself a valuable learning experience while also sending a consistent message to the students as to the value of collaborative learning. [Read more about implementing two-stage exams](#).

### Learn more about alternative assessment strategies

- [Reimagining assessments](#) wiki (UBC)
- [Example evaluation schemes](#): learning outcomes, assessment type, tools (McGill)
- [Alternative Online Assessments](#) (University of Calgary)

## Foster a Climate of Academic Integrity

Focus on supporting learning rather than on punishment and surveillance. The causes of academic misconduct have been well-studied. Research shows that very few students plan on doing things like buying papers or crowd-sourcing exam questions when they enroll in courses. Instead, [their decisions to cheat are almost always taken at the last minute when they are under pressure](#).

Start by assuming that most students are honest and want to learn. Open book exams with a longer, and/or unsupervised time to complete could be viewed as opportunity for students to break your rules. Some students may use the time that way and that is deeply frustrating.

More encouraging is a view based in research about academic integrity in higher education (see Lang, J. (2013). *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA). The basic premise is this:

*When students are more confident they can do what needs to be done on their own, they are less likely to cheat.*

Here are some specific strategies for fostering academic integrity:

- Reinforce with students that creating a culture of trust and respect is a two-way street. Have a class discussion about what academic integrity is in your discipline and why it matters. Be explicit about your expectations for students and ask them what they expect of you. Such discussions can demonstrate that both students and instructors are responsible for creating that climate.
- Consider use of an [Academic Integrity Commitment sheet](#) where instructor and students commit to acting with integrity.
- Explain the rationale for your assessment choices to students as well as how they will be assessed. As noted above, sharing examples of previous assignments and [creating a rubric](#) for your assessment can help students focus their effort in learning and completing the assessment.
- Build in opportunities for students to demonstrate the thinking process informing their work, such as through multi-stage assignments, where students submit components of the assignment at staggered due dates. For both written and oral assignments, you can ask students to submit an annotated bibliography, their research question, an outline, and/or an opening paragraph. For assignments that involve calculations, you can ask students to explain the thinking underlying their answers.
- Ask students to integrate personal experience and reflections when possible in answering questions.
- Embed [The Academic Integrity Tutorial](#) into your Blackboard or Canvas course site. Incorporate it as a required learning activity and follow up with a discussion in the Blackboard or Canvas discussion forum.

### Learn more about strategies for fostering academic integrity

- Giving an open book exam? Consider modifying [this template](#) to send to your students.
- What is academic integrity? ([Educatus Blog: GMCTL](#))
- What do I need to know about academic integrity and remote teaching? ([Educatus Blog: GMCTL](#))
- How can I protect the integrity of my assessments in a remote environment? (USask, Remote Teaching site/ [Plan for Assessment](#))
- [Academic Integrity Faculty Checklist](#) (International Center for Academic Integrity)
- [Academic Integrity and Online Learning](#) (University of Calgary)
- [Building Academic Integrity into Your Course](#) (Rochester Institute of Technology)

## Provide Opportunities for Practice and Feedback

The remote delivery environment requires students to be more self-motivated and independent than in the typical on-campus, classroom-based setting. You can promote these dispositions by reducing the content students will be responsible for learning, and increasing opportunities for students to practice and get feedback on their work. Increase those opportunities by integrating more low-stakes assignments that will incrementally prepare students to succeed on higher-stakes assignments and exams. For example:

- Ask students to develop a draft for peer feedback. If you can, have them share a partial draft. That way they can catch each other's mistakes early before they are duplicated.
- [Use a discussion board for peer feedback.](#)
- Break down large assignments into stages, with components due at different times of the term (often also called a ladder assignment). Staged assignments allow you to see how students are progressing, and feedback at the different stages can help them move forward with the assignment. This is the most important if an early error, such as writing a bad thesis or creating a bad experimental design is likely to impact the outcomes of the entire assessment.
- Have students do a similar type of assignment twice: first, with support, and then, more autonomously. The second assignment can also be more conceptually challenging and worth more marks.
- Have students work both individually and in small groups. Students can submit work individually to ensure accountability, and then, through peer support in small groups, students can work out problems together.



### From Winter 2020 Student Feedback:

“Our group was able to call my instructor and have a thorough conversation regarding the assignment. Anything we discussed that was relevant to other groups was summarized and sent to an email to all students. This was very beneficial.”

## Help students prepare for exams

In the remote environment, students are likely to need additional supports to know when they are sufficiently prepared for exams and when they have overestimated what they have been learning by listening and viewing. Here are some examples of things you can set up to help them identify how prepared they are and give them opportunities to practice.

- Using formative assessment throughout the class to assess students' knowledge of material that will appear on an exam. It will help you know what they are understanding as you teach, and ensure they are clear when they haven't understood something well enough.
- Promote self-assessment to raise students' awareness of their progress. The quiz tools in Blackboard and Canvas allow you to set up self-assessments that will provide students with immediate, ungraded feedback on their understanding of course content.
- Scheduling online study sessions where TAs are available to answer questions real time. An open WebEx room is a great way to approach this if the class is small enough or you subdivide it into groups.
- Have students complete practice exams (individually or in small groups) and discuss results together.
- Have students review course materials and submitting potential exam questions (with answers) to a group in Canvas or discussions boards in Blackboard or Canvas. For practice, students can answer the exam questions submitted by their peers.
- Having students contribute to an exam preparation study guide. You can set up a collaborative “study guides” using online collaboration tools like OneDrive or google docs.

## Debrief and reflect after assessments

Once an assignment has been handed in, or an exam has been taken, it doesn't have to be "over." Debriefing major assessments can be learning opportunities for students. Here are a few ideas for encouraging students to deepen their learning by reflecting on their performance. It is okay to make reflecting on past performance another assessment. Known as "assessment as learning", it is one of the most effective ways to ensure students remember what they learned for a test or assignment.

- Prompt students to write themselves a memo that addresses one of these prompts: "What did I learn taking this exam that I want to remember for the next one?" or "What did I learn completing this assignment (or from the instructor's feedback) that I want to remember for future assignments?" Collect these memos and return them to students shortly before the next major assessment or collate them into a study guide for the class.
- Moderate a discussion forum where students correct their exam answers and submit corrected answers (possibly for grades).
- Give feedback to the entire class by posting an announcement or video in Canvas or Blackboard. Share common strengths and weaknesses you saw in students' work. Encourage a conversation about how the weaknesses could be addressed in a discussion thread.
- After a major assessment, describe links that you see between student actions and student success. For example, you can track who has accessed Canvas or Blackboard, and then correlate the data to grades. The data might help students see how their actions can directly affect their success. Both LMS software packages generate simple graphs in their analytics.
- Allow student resubmission of drafts after feedback if appropriate. Canvas allows students to [predict the difference the additional effort could make to a grade](#).
- Suggest students use a tool like the [Test Analyzer: Exam Review Self-Reflection](#) to become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. Invite students to share the results of this self-reflection with you so that you and students can work together toward better preparation for future exams. This type of reflection promotes a growth mindset and improve study habits.



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