**Open-Book Exams**

Open book exams allow you to ask students what they understand about the “big picture” and how course concepts work together.  From a learning perspective, these types of exams allow you to get at higher level processing by asking students to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast, or evaluate information.

Perhaps you have historically used multiple choice or short exam questions on your final exam and are moving to an open-book final exam.  You have an option to take these questions and extend them by making them open-ended. For example, you can ask students to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast or evaluate information.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Multiple Choice/Short Answer Question** | **Open-Book Question** |
| Which of these bests describes X? | Explain how X applies to Y situation? |
| Which of the following could occur if X interacted with Y? | What implications does X have on Y current events? |
| What theory best explains X? | Compare and contrast three different theories and how they would adapt as X evolved. |

Other possibilities involve providing case-based situations. You might give students a problem or a scenario and ask them to apply concepts from several parts of the course to develop an answer with citations.

**Things to consider:**

* Course-Related - When designing questions, think back to what are the most important things you wanted your students to come away knowing (your outcomes/key topics) and ask them to *do things* with this knowledge, not just recall and reproduce the information.  Ask yourself - how can I get my students to show me they have learned this?
* Resources - Students will have access to an abundance of resources and it will prove difficult to limit access to resources in our current situation.  It is possible to provide specific directions if there are resources they must include - notes, textbook, journals, the number of required resources, and how they should be integrating/referencing references in the exam.
* Time - ensure there is adequate time for the students to complete the open-book exam.  Typically, these exams take longer than closed-book exams, but make your time expectations realistic and clear (4 hours, 24 hours etc.).
* Grading - Set appropriate and transparent assessment criteria with the weighing on the skills you are assessing (critical thinking, synthesis etc.) rather than on basic knowledge and recall.  Preparing a marking rubric ([see examples](https://teaching.usask.ca/articles/assessment.php)) with your outcomes in mind for each question on the exam will prove invaluable and save time when marking.

**Helpful Links:**

* Rubrics: <https://teaching.usask.ca/articles/assessment.php>
* Using an Open-book Examination in an Engineering Subject: <http://www.polyu.edu.hk/assessment/arc/contribution/eg_bse01.pdf>
* A GUIDE FOR ACADEMICS - OPEN BOOK: EXAMS<https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/268980/Open-Book-Exams.pdf>