

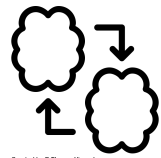
Adapt your Assessment Approach

Sub-Title: Ditch Your High-Stakes Final Exam

Do the assessments truly reflect the primary learning outcomes you want for students - or are they riddled with loosely related, easy to mark exams that do not give you a true picture of deeper learning?

You've probably heard of and may be familiar with Bloom's Taxonomy. It is only one of several ways to think about what you want your students to know and be able to do with information and concepts. Are you just after memorization or do you expect application, analysis and evaluation? Notice the verbs used for each level:

- Bloom's Taxonomy (Carleton University)
<https://carleton.ca/viceprovost/blooms-taxonomy/>
- Bloom's Taxonomy (Vanderbilt University)
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>



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Check out a few of the ideas/samples of assessments for the level of critical thinking you are after. Are your assessments telling you what you want to know?

- Bloom's Taxonomy (University of Waterloo)
<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/planning-courses-and-assignments/course-design/blooms-taxonomy> (Don't miss the examples for Cognitive Domain - scroll down just a bit on the page.)
- Cognitive Domain (Humber College)
[http://www.humber.ca/centreforteachingandlearning/assets/files/Teaching%20Methods/cognitive%20domainwith%20activities\(1\).pdf](http://www.humber.ca/centreforteachingandlearning/assets/files/Teaching%20Methods/cognitive%20domainwith%20activities(1).pdf)
- Bloom's Taxonomy (College Teaching Tips)
<http://collegeteachingtips.com/354/blooms-taxonomy>

Are the bulk of your assessments crowded into the last couple of weeks of the course?



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How many other courses might your students be taking this term? What if all or most of them have weighty final assignments? Studying for a big final exam or getting a big paper/project turned in on time might just be an exercise in stamina and resilience under stress for your students, rather than an accurate assessment of their knowledge/skill. Consider using a more distributive method with assessments early in the course and throughout the course...more opportunities for

students to practice and demonstrate what they are learning. To help you think about all this, check out this graphic:

So You Need to Put Your Exam Online

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/ETMgIM1WAAps7D.jpg>

Here are a few ways to begin modifying your approach:

More traditional approaches

- Several shorter quizzes at more frequent intervals will help both you and your students to know how they are doing before it is too late to adjust or get help.
- For a major paper, require submission of many of the parts (at least in draft form) long before the end of the course. A problem statement or thesis might come first. Initial annotated bibliography or literature review, outline of major points, etc. can be submitted and marked before the final paper is submitted.

Less traditional approaches

- Authentic – applied (or could be applied) in the real world
 1. Letters to editor, Briefs to CEO's, Argument brief for a court case, Risk analysis for a new project/program,
 2. Explain the concept or make the case to: a 6 year old, your grandparent, an immigrant, your weird uncle who never agrees with you
- Offer students some choice in how they are assessed. The choice can come in the form of a choice of essay questions, choice of assessment form (test, project, paper, video, etc.) See this short list: Choice of Assessment <https://alludl.ca/create/assessment/choice-of-assessment/>
- Other examples of alternative assessments
 1. Alternative Assessments Online <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/teaching-continuity/student-assessment-ideas>
 2. 13 Alternatives to Traditional Testing <https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/13-alternatives-traditional-testing>
 3. Download a comparison table that explores the pros and cons of 16 diverse assessments that can be done virtually: <https://sally-brown.net/download/3148/>

Don't have time to develop rubrics for marking purposes - How about modifying one? 50+ Beyond-the-Essay Rubrics

<https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/50-beyond-essay-rubrics>

How can you be relatively assured that the student is doing their own work on assessments and not 'cheating'?

Probably the most truthful answer to this question is, "You can't." But this is most likely true in most face-to-face courses, as well. There are always a **few** students who are canny enough, unprincipled enough and don't really want to know how they are performing. We've all read the examples of amazing lengths some will go. Let's focus on the other students - the majority of students - and just do our best with the others. Much of what you have read, above, will help significantly. Many of the alternative assignments are more engaging, less stressful and less likely to invite cheating. **Exam Design: Promoting Integrity Through Trust and Flexibility**, <http://insights.nursekillam.com/reflect/exam-design/>



Created by Adrien Coquet
from Noun Project

Some universities are making online proctoring services available. While those selling the systems are excited about doubling, tripling and quadrupling their sales, many students and instructors are leery of these systems. In a well-balanced article from *The Ubysey*, [Students, faculty express concerns about online exam invigilation amidst COVID-19 outbreak](#). The article represents the proctoring company as having addressed many issues that we would all be concerned about. It also quotes students and faculty who do not think this is a good idea. Some of the concerns include:

- The need to reconfigure home systems e.g. disconnecting some equipment
- Some students may not have the necessary equipment
- Unstable internet connections can cause the exam to be halted
- Privacy - Students are required to move the webcam to show the entire room, eye movements are monitored, mics might pick up bits of conversation happening in a room nearby, etc.
- Students are not allowed bio breaks
- Likely challenging for instructors who have not taught online

Another article worth reading on this topic:

From Inside Higher Ed, [Big Proctor: Is the fight against cheating during remote instruction worth enlisting third-party student surveillance platforms?](#) which states, *"Chief among faculty and student concerns are student privacy and increasing test anxiety via a sense of being surveilled. Pedagogically, some experts also argue that the whole premise of asking students to recall information under pressure without access to their course materials is flawed."*

Heavily Weighted Final Exam: If, after honestly and seriously considering the above questions, you still feel that the best approach is a Final Exam we'll offer a few suggestions - BUT FIRST, skim **What is the purpose of Final exams, Anyway** <https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-Is-the-Purpose-of-Final/245127>



- Create a large test bank of questions, set the online test to give each student a randomized set of questions that appear one to a page. Set a time-limit for each question or for the test, as a whole. Do not allow students to go back to past questions. *This sounds kind of harsh, doesn't it?* [5 Reasons to stop doing timed online exams during COVID-19](#) from Inside Higher Education
- Find a way to let students experience the testing environment before the high-stakes test. Let them get confident with the technology and be sure their equipment can access and perform.
- Talk to your IT Department to learn about proctoring an online exam. This tends to be fraught with technical, human and perhaps even legal difficulties but some institutions are trying to make surveillance work. You can see if yours is one of them.

Further reading:

Assessment and Remote Teaching: Options and Opportunities

<http://www.bu.edu/ctl/assessment-and-remote-teaching/>

Open Book Assessments <https://pivottodigital.trubox.ca/open-book-assessments/>

Online Strategies for Final Assessment

<https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/online-strategies-for-final-assessment>

Examples of responses to this Challenge:

- A. Decide NOT to give a big, proctored exam. (It isn't right on a lot of levels, right now.) Choose to move to several smaller quizzes, move to open book tests, or decide to include one or more other kinds of assessment.
- B. Decide how many quizzes are appropriate and at what points in the course they should occur, revamp the questions to suit the online quizzes and assign weight for each. Outline the format (Timed? Randomized question bank? Open or closed book?, etc.)
- C. Describe one or more alternative assessment activities that you'd like to try instead of a high-stakes final exam. Write instructions, provide any needed resources, articulate grading criteria...maybe use a rubric.
- D. Decide to offer regular (bi-weekly?) tests where students can take the quiz more than once. Perhaps these are non-graded self-tests that students can use to test their own understanding and retake as many times as needed. Write/create several of these quizzes.

