

Considerations for Take-Home Exams

Many instructors are thinking of shifting previously scheduled face-to-face exams to take-home exams. While this does not necessarily change much for instructors and students in the Humanities and Social Sciences, where essays and long answers are common, some instructors may be concerned about determining appropriate levels of difficulty and mitigating academic misconduct. Here are some considerations for preparing, administering, and evaluating take-home exams:

Creating Take-Home Exam Questions

- As with any assignment, it is important to establish for yourself and your students what the purpose of the assessment is and how it connects to course learning outcomes. What knowledge and skills are you asking students to demonstrate, and why?
- Asking clear and straightforward questions enables students to write precise answers. Requiring that students refer to particular themes, concepts, or passages covered in class can help them focus on what they have learned while also reducing possible academic misconduct. For more information on asking good test questions, visit Cornell's resource on Asking Good Test Questions: <https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/assessment-evaluation/asking-good-test-questions>.
- Consider asking students to reflect on how particular texts or concepts relate to material from other courses or their wider lives. This will allow them to apply knowledge beyond your individual course and may be particularly valuable during periods of academic disruption such as the one we are in now.
- If you are concerned about academic misconduct, consider using a search engine to explore what comes up when you search for specific keywords. This can give you a sense of how you can frame your questions in a way that will elicit original answers.
- For more information on preparing effective exams, see <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/creatingexams.html>.

Determining and Communicating Assessment Criteria

- Again, it is important to establish for yourself and your students what the purpose of the assessment is and how it connects to course learning outcomes. The answers to these questions may change when transitioning to a take-home exam, but it is important to be clear either way.
- Consider the differences between a research essay and a traditional face-to-face exam. The former typically takes much more time to complete than the latter in part because it involves identifying, accessing, consulting, and citing external sources. The latter, in contrast, generally requires students to answer questions based only on what they

already know. When preparing a take-home exam, it is important to be explicit about what you want your students to accomplish and with what resources.

- It is also important that you are transparent ahead of time about how students will be graded. If you would not normally grade their grammar or syntax in a regular exam, for example, does it make sense to grade it in a take-home exam?

Administering Take-Home Exams

- It is sound practice to give students a generous amount of time to complete the exam. This flexibility enables them to determine when and where they will be able to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and reduces the risk of technological problems. Depending on the nature of the exam, you may wish to give them up to 24 hours to several
- You may wish to distribute a list of questions in advance and then give students a limited number from which to choose for the exam itself. This allows students to thoughtfully prepare while still ensuring that they have some flexibility to choose which questions they want to answer.
- You can ask students to complete an exam in a document they upload to Avenue, or you can create a multi-part exam (e.g., short answers, multiple choice, essay questions) within Avenue itself. For information on how to do this, please see <https://wiki.mcmaster.ca/avenue/assessment - quizzes>.