

Remember what open book exams are for

The defining premise of open book exams is that students are able to consult their notes, textbooks and other sources. Questions in open book exams therefore need to go beyond testing for factual or replicative knowledge and look for students to demonstrate higher order thinking, problem solving, application and analysis.

Be careful with your time limits

Within Canvas you can specify the release date, due date and due time for students to submit or complete quizzes and assignments. Be sure to consider how much time will really be needed based on the number of questions and the type of questions you've posed but also keep in mind that some students may have poor internet connectivity or share computer access.

Change it up

If you are adapting questions originally written for an traditional closed book exam for what is now an open book exam do keep in mind that students are no longer sequestered away from information sources and will be able to access any online sources including Canvas itself.

Take your own exam

Canvas instructors can view a quiz or assignment as a student would by using the "Student View" feature. This allows you to check that the student experience of the assessment is just as you intended.

Tell your students what to do

Make sure in the wording of your questions that students are clear on what you're looking for. Students should be focused on working with available online and traditional information sources to show you that they've achieved the relevant learning objectives, not on trying to interpret the question or looking for irrelevant information.

Talk to your students

Open book exams are not widely used and, as a result, students might not understand them or know how to prepare for them. Talk to your students about open book exams and why you are using them. Encourage students to think about how they will use the facility to consult their notes, textbooks and other sources during the exam. Challenge assumptions like the idea that you don't have to study for open book exams. Remind students that directly copying text from the sources they can access is still regarded as plagiarism.

Consider new kinds of questions

Consider a number of different ways to formulate your open book exam questions, for example:

- Start by providing students with a specific dataset, scenario or problem.
- Provide students with some kind of artefact or proposal to interpret, critique or critically evaluate.
- Ask students for their own examples or instances of a general principle, rule, phenomenon, concept or trend.
- Ask students to come up with some aspect of a design or plan to meet the needs of a specific client, customer, user or community.
- Ask your students to argue for a particular position or from a particular perspective (theoretical or other).
- Identify relevant sources to base a question on and let student know they will be called on to make use of these sources as part of the exam.

Try keeping it short

Sometimes limiting the length or word count of exam answers can be more challenging and revealing than asking students to write as much as they can about a particular topic. Consider looking for, e.g., 100 word interpretations or 200 word arguments (or, if the exam is hand written, then specifying the approximate number of lines of text or portion of an A4 sheet students should use). If reducing the word count or length of the answer, be sure that the question being asked is adjusted accordingly.

Remember what you want to assess

Keep the learning objectives for your module in mind as you devise your closed book exam. Ask yourself what you want the students to demonstrate or apply. What skills or knowledge or competence do you want the students to have achieved?

