



## Online open book assessments

In 2020/21 no examinations will take place on-campus except where these are practical assessments requiring the use of onsite facilities, or where a PSRB absolutely requires in-person exams, as opposed to online proctored exams.<sup>1</sup> In this context, many course teams have opted to deliver online open book assessments.

This document provides ideas to support the development of online open book assessments. These ideas are not requirements but have been collated based on examples of practice from across the university and externally.

### What is an online open book assessment?

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'Open book assessments' are designed to allow students access to supporting materials such as notes, textbooks, summaries and other resources while answering the questions set.

Students are normally required to complete the assessment within a defined time period, for example 24 hours. The questions are released to students online at a specified time and they are expected to submit their answers online by the end of the timed period.

### Why use online open book assessments?

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Open book assessments don't just test a student's ability to recall information but instead require a more critical and analytical approach to answering the questions set. Where traditional closed book exams might result in superficial application of knowledge, well designed open book assessments can encourage critical thinking to demonstrate understanding and application of relevant knowledge.

### Designing online open book assessments

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To develop an effective open book assessment, you need to devise questions that require students to apply knowledge analytically, using critical thinking.

The following top tips will help you to achieve this:

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<sup>1</sup> Each of these cases is subject to further discussion with the PSRB

1. Design questions around the module learning outcomes, consider what knowledge and skills are you aiming to assess?
2. Devise questions that assess interpretation, evaluation and critical thinking rather than knowledge recall.
3. Set questions that are clear and easy to understand to reduce the time students need to interpret the question and to limit misinterpretation.
4. Consider using scenario or problem-based questions that require students to apply their knowledge rather than summarise information.
5. Avoid questions that allow students to locate and rewrite information from the source material.

## **Supporting students with open book assessments**

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Whilst there are clear benefits to open book assessments there are also some things you need to consider to support students to succeed. Most students will have experienced closed book timed assessments but may be less familiar with open book assessments and so will need to be supported to understand how to approach these.

The sections below respond to questions that students might have about these types of assessment.

### **How long should I spend?**

Whilst the assessment period may be 24 – 48 hours in length, students are not expected to spend the full period of time on their answers. You might want to indicate how long a student should expect to spend on an answer or specify an indicative word length. It is likely that answers would be shorter than in a closed book exam as students will need time to search and make sense of the resources available to them in the time period.

### **How should I prepare?**

Students may falsely assume that an open book assessment is easier than a closed book exam and as a result, may fail to adequately prepare.

You should encourage students to spend time preparing for the assessment and to prepare notes or summaries that they can use during the timed period. This will ensure that they use the timed period effectively.

Examples of summaries they might prepare are:

- Key theories and ideas, referencing several authors
- Key texts, such as books and journal articles
- Experiments and processes
- Case studies or legislation

### **Will I get a chance to practice?**

As with any type of new assessment method that students are experiencing for the first time, it is advisable to offer formative attempts to allow students to practice. A formative attempt

should allow students to experience an online open book assessment under the same conditions they will experience at the summative stage.

### **Are there particular sources I should use?**

You might want to compile a list of sources for use in the assessment, particularly where you want students to draw on specific theories or case studies.

### **Where should I do the assessment?**

You might want to give your students some advice and guidance about creating a good environment for completing the assessment. This might include:

- Minimise distractions as far as possible
- Think about location, sitting position, noise and temperature
- Try to arrange a block of time to complete the assessment
- Take a break if needed, move away from the screen, have a drink and re-focus

### **Do I need to reference and create a bibliography?**

Online open book assessments are timed assessments rather than coursework and therefore it is unlikely that you will want students to give full references or create a bibliography. You may still want students to use citations or provide key information such as author names, titles of publications and dates.

You should provide students with clear guidance of expectations around what level of referencing (if any) is required.

### **Will academic irregularities regulations apply?**

The rules around academic irregularities apply to all open book assessments and this should be made clear to students. You should also advise students whether the assessments will be submitted to Turnitin.