



JOB AID – CREATING OPEN BOOK EXAMS

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Purpose

This job aid will guide you through the process of creating open book exams for in person, online, or blended courses.

Background

An open book exam is an assessment that allows students to refer to class notes, textbooks, or other approved material while completing their exam. An open book exam can also mean that students are provided the exam questions in advance.

Why Use Them?

Instructors create open book exams with questions that require students to use critical thinking and higher order reasoning skills to answer them. Closed book or traditional exams tend to encourage memorization. Open book exams can mimic the workplace and help to build essential and employability skills in students.

Things to Consider

In open book exams, it is important to create effective exam questions that require students to apply their knowledge through analysis. Students may need support in preparing for a open book exam, as often students assume that they because they can look up the answer in a book they do not need to prepare. Highlight the importance of preparing to apply and understand rather than just to recall ro know.

How To

Questions in open book exams need to be created to assess the interpretation and application of knowledge, comprehension skills, and critical thinking skills rather than only knowledge recall.

Here are some tips:

- Create questions that require students to apply their knowledge, and use critical thinking skills. For example, case studies and scenarios have students apply their knowledge to real-world situations.
- Managing your time can be challenging for students who are not used to open-book exams. Clear and unambiguous questions to limit time spent students interpreting the questions.

So that time can be used using their resources and applying their knowledge to effectively respond.

- As students will have resources with them, create questions that required students to apply their critical thinking skills rather than finding and recording the information found in their resources.
- As with any assessment, keep focused on the learning outcomes of the assessment. What skills and knowledge are you assessing?

How to Phrase Open Book Exam Questions

Here are some example questions and starters:

Type of Question	Students Are Asked To...	Example Questions and Starters
Understanding	Demonstrate understanding by constructing meaning from information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your own words, • Explain how... • What did X mean when...? • Give an example of...
Applying	Apply knowledge and understanding to a particular task or problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you use...? • What examples can you find to...? • How would you solve ____ using what you've learned? • What would happen if...?
Analyzing	Examine different concepts and make distinctions between them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the parts or features of...? • What are the competing arguments within...? • Why is X different to Y? Compare and contrast... • What is the relationship between A and B?
Evaluating	Make judgements about concepts or ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is most important/effective? • Which method is best? • Which is the strongest argument?
Creating	Develop new ideas from what they know and understand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you design a...? • What alternatives are there to...? • What changes would you make? • What would happen if...? Suppose you could ____ what would you do? • How would you evaluate ...? • Can you formulate a theory for...?

(Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2017)

References

Centre for Teaching and Learning. (2017). *A Guide for Academics—Open Book Exams*. University of Newcastle Australia. Retrieved from <https://communities.surf.nl/files/Artikel/download/2017%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Academics%20-%20Open%20Book%20Exams%20%28The%20University%20of%20Newcastle%29.pdf>