Accommodating Students in Online Exams

Though many final assessments are typically administered as a timed exam, several challenges arise in an online environment, especially with regard to accommodations.

Challenges with Accommodating Online Timed Exams

1. **The Test Centre cannot set up accommodated tests in the online environment**

   Instructors are responsible for satisfying accommodation requirements, including setting up extended writing times, remaining available for questions during the writing period, addressing the use of memory aids, and many other unique needs. See these D2L Quiz Setting Options for information about setting up extra time. For more information about the Test Centre, see the Test Centre: Faculty FAQ.

2. **Technology is often incompatible with accommodation needs**

   Exam and testing software, including D2L and virtual proctoring, present challenges such as providing extra time and scheduled breaks to select students, compatibility with necessary assistive technology, and uploading required supplemental material (e.g. memory aid).

3. **Instructors must implement accommodations while still upholding academic integrity**

   The Test Centre procedures for upholding academic integrity (Policy 60) while accommodating students, cannot be applied in online exams. Virtual proctoring systems do not adequately invigilate tests and cannot recognize individualized accommodation needs. Therefore, it may be difficult for instructors to guarantee the academic integrity of the final exam within a timed online format. An alternative assessment form might be a more effective way to balance academic integrity and accommodations.

To alleviate the challenges and workload associated with test administration, we strongly encourage offering an alternative to a timed final exam. If you are facing challenges implementing a student's testing accommodations, please email testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca

See Online Exam Considerations for more information regarding the limitations of timed online exams. Additional information is available in the Exam Guide for Professors and Invigilators from the Office of the Registrar.

Best Practices in Online Assessments

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If you must administer a timed final exam to adhere to the essential academic requirements of your course or program, please consider the following. Many of these strategies will help all students in your courses as they deal with limited technology, varied living situations, and stressful times.

1. Be Flexible

- **Provide the whole class with a set percentage of extra time**. Providing 100% extra time will address the requirements of most accommodations.
    - **Caveat:** Providing extra time for a timed final exam can create scheduling difficulties that may be difficult to manage on your own, such as students ending up with exam periods that run late into the night, or extra time for one exam running over into the next exam period.
- **Rather than a timed exam, offer** **alternatives to exams**, such as take home assignments or re-weighting of grades.

2. Be Transparent

- **Be transparent about expectations and consequences around academic misconduct**, specifically issues with writing longer than the time allotted (accommodated or not).
- **Inform students that all tests are time-stamped by D2L Brightspace**, so you will be aware of when each student starts and finishes.

3. Be Clear

- **Communicate time parameters:**
    - **If offering extra time to the whole class:** identify how much time the assessment is designed to take and clarify the specific percentage of extra time being provided.
    - **If not offering extra time to the whole class:** clarify that students who do not require extra time as an accommodation should only use the standard time set, and explain that students with accommodations for extra time can continue to work until the accommodated time limit is met.
- Let students know how they can contact you for the duration of the writing period.

Important: Any communication or assessment solutions cannot compromise confidentiality of students registered with AAS.

Addressing Common Accommodations: Suggested Solutions

Extra Time / Time Restrictions / Split Exams

There are a variety of accommodations related to the time that exams are administered, including:

- Tests split in two parts to be written on different days
- Restrictions on how frequently a student can write (e.g. one exam per 24 hours)
- Extra time or scheduled breaks during tests or exams.

Suggested solutions include:

1. Provide all students with extra time. However, keep in mind this may lead to scheduling issues:
    - If timed tests are scheduled according to the regular exam schedule, students with two exams in one day may have another exam start during the extra writing time
    - If the exam start time is early evening (eg. 6:30pm), students may be writing—and instructors invigilating—through very late hours
2. Find an alternative mode of assessment that is untimed and give students a wide date range for completion.

Test Location

Some students have disability impacts that make it difficult to focus for extended periods of time. These students are typically accommodated with distraction-free writing locations. Additionally, many students are currently sharing spaces with others (e.g. children) and may be unable to find a distraction-free environment at defined times.

Suggested solutions include:

1. Provide flexibility regarding when and where tests or exams can be written, (eg. night or early morning)
2. Find alternative evaluation methods, such as take home assignments or re-weighted grades.

Memory Aids

Some students require a memory aid for tests/exams. These are usually approved by faculty, checked by the Test Centre, and submitted with the test or exam, however, there is no capability in online testing to ensure that students are using approved memory aids.

Suggested solutions include:

1. Assign open book exams to the entire class
2. Request that students email the memory aid they used directly after the exam and take their submission in good faith *or* offer the option to upload materials to a D2L folder
3. Ask all students to agree to an honour code upon entering the exam that they will use only the approved materials.