

5 Tips for Using Take-Home Exams

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Teaching and Learning Services

What Are Take-Home Exams?

Take-home exams are open-book exams that can be done outside of class. Students can complete a take-home exam in the location of their choice, it is generally non-proctored, and the time limit is typically days and even weeks, depending on the complexity of the questions. Students can also normally use their lecture notes, the internet, and any other books or resources that they might have at their disposal to complete the exam.

Take-home exams often allow students the opportunity to demonstrate more complete knowledge of a topic, rather than demonstrating their ability to answer many questions within a specific time limit. Research on take-home exams in post-secondary indicates that they promote higher order thinking skills, and allow more time for reflection (Bengtsson, 2019). Other potential benefits of take-home exams include:

- Allowing a more authentic demonstration of learning
- Allowing students to demonstrate their learning using the resources they would have at their disposal in a professional environment
- Reducing test anxiety for some students
- Reducing the number of accommodations that some students require (e.g., separate rooms or extended time)
- Allowing students without formal accommodations the flexibility to meet their own learning needs

How do you address the most common forms of academic misconduct related to take-home exams? Exam design is key, and the focus on higher order thinking skills (Tip 1), clearly communicating expectations around collaboration and assistance (Tip 2), as well as a brief justification of these expectations will go a long way towards minimizing cheating behaviour. See the points in the blue bar to the right for some additional considerations and tips.

Because take-home exams often have students do more complex tasks, they may more accurately reflect a professional environment, and therefore be a more useful in some courses.



Academic Integrity Tips

- Replace long written feedback with a five-minute feedback/interview session (by Collaborate or phone), during which you ask students about one part of their exam answer and provide personalized feedback;
- Ask students to sign a pledge that corresponds to your exam expectations;
- Provide a brief reference to academic integrity expectations and a link to MacEwan's [Academic Integrity Website](#);
- If possible, personalize exam questions; make them interesting;
- Develop exam questions that ask the student to write about their reflective process (metacognition);
- Develop exam questions that build on earlier activities or assessments;
- If you are teaching a lower level course and your exam must focus on retrieval of knowledge, consider an online exam, instead.

Contact the [Academic Integrity Office](#) for further information on how to prevent and detect academic misconduct in take-home exams.



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5 Tips for Using Take-Home Exams (cont.)

Five Tips

Tip 1: Focus on Higher Order Thinking Skills

You may be wondering if students might be more tempted to cheat on take-home exams. One solution to this potential problem is to not ask students questions that can simply be copied. Look at your learning outcomes and formulate questions that focus on the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: Applying, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating. This usually means abandoning multiple choice and short answer questions in favor of more open-ended question types. It's also useful to require that students justify their answers and/or reference course-specific materials directly. These strategies mean that even if students collaborate, they will still have to express their answers in their own terms.

Tip 2: Establish Your Expectations and Communicate Them Clearly

Are students allowed to take examples from the textbook? Can they talk to others about the questions? Can they sit down in a group to work on questions? Or do you want them to do the test on their own? Will there be a word limit for answers? Do they need to provide proper citations/references? Take the time to think about your test-taking expectations for your students and then communicate them to students as clearly as possible. (Hint: Set a recommended length for answers so that students don't go too far with their research and responses.)

Tip 3: Weigh the Pros and Cons of Time Limits

The appropriate amount of time to give students to complete take-home exams will vary. Some instructors may opt to give a short exam that is released to students with a required submission time of only an hour or two. Others may opt to give students more time to formulate more creative and/or complex answers. There is no single right amount of time for a take-home exam.

Tip 4: Address Common Misconceptions

Students often have misconceptions about take-home and open book exams, so it's important to address both your and their expectations in advance. Give students the opportunity to ask questions about the exam before you give it to them, and ask students what they think about doing a take-home exam. Common student misconceptions include that take-home exams are easy, that you don't have to study for them, and that you should write as much as you can for answers with the time that you have.

Tip 5: Evaluate and Refine the Experience

Remember that not all pedagogies work out perfectly the first time around. Make a commitment to reflect on your experiences creating and delivering a take-home exam, and if possible, get feedback by asking students to reflect on and share their own experiences doing a take-home exam.

Remember, you can always contact Teaching and Learning Services (teaching@macewan.ca) for advice and support on creating and using take-home exams or any other pedagogy.

Further Reading

For more information, please see the following:

Bengtsson, L. (2019). Take-home exams in higher education: A systematic review. *Education Sciences*, 9(4), 267. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/educsci9040267>

Dagilyte, E. & Coe, P. (2019). Take-home exams: Developing professionalism via assessment. In A. Bone & P. Maharg (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on the scholarship of assessment and learning in law* (pp. 109-138). ANU Press. Retrieved from <https://www.istor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctvp7d4db.10.pdf>