



## Alternatives to Examinations

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The COVID-19 circumstances are likely to impact student learning, their capabilities and their wellbeing. This will be particularly acute as we approach the end-of-semester final examinations. While the University is currently exploring an institutional licence for an online invigilated examination system, there is a need to rapidly consider other reasonable alternatives to exam-based assessments.

This document suggests methods for assessing content in an online learning and teaching environment, which would normally be assessed in a face-to-face invigilated examination. If the suggestions below, do not address all of your concerns, please contact the LTO ([LTO@nd.edu.au](mailto:LTO@nd.edu.au)) and we will work with you to find appropriate solutions.

In the coming weeks, the LTO will provide further resources on alternative assessments that are conducive to online learning for a whole range of assessment types.

### What are reasonable alternatives to examinations?

It is important to recognise that any alternative to the invigilated examination must meet professional standards, assess learning outcomes and ensure academic integrity. However, recognising the special circumstances that students currently find themselves in, they should also ensure accessibility, fairness and equity.

The five suggestions below are examples of alternatives to examinations that aim to address all of these criteria. However, they cannot exactly replicate the invigilated examination or in-class tests. Whatever alternative you implement, it is important that you:

- Seek approval from your Dean (or from whatever person/committee normally oversees assessment approval in your School);
- Ask colleagues to peer review your changes to ensure that content validity is maintained (i.e., that you are still assessing the learning outcomes), and that the new format is fair and equitable to all students;
- Read your revised instructions to students to check for clarity (where possible);
- Advise students about the changes and what is expected in the new assessment.

1. **Take home exams** in which you set the questions or tasks and ask the students to submit their responses online within a set period of time. As with normal take-home assessments students will have access to hard-copy and web-based resources to respond to the set questions. Therefore, the assessment questions would move away from focussing on recall and lower-order requirements - which can quickly be answered via Google – to higher-order application and

synthesis type questions. Take-home exams should require students to demonstrate *how* they use information rather than reiterate what they have learned.

2. **Timed release of examination papers or online assessments** which use the \*time-release features in Blackboard (e.g. tests) or Turnitin (e.g. long answer questions, essays). For example, you can release the exam paper via Turnitin at midday with a cut-off for submissions of a Word document by 4pm. To enhance academic integrity, you could release different (but equivalent) papers to different groups of students at the same time. You can also advise students that you will run 'spot checks' or mini-vivas with a sample of the student population. You can add a reflective component asking students to reflect on concepts discussed earlier in the semester or ask students to create and upload a video diary explaining their reasoning to an exam question and grade this reflection (i.e. demonstrating their application of knowledge).

*\* Note: times on Blackboard and Turnitin are Fremantle time, a crucial detail to be aware of when using time-release tests.*

3. **Online proctored exams** are already available in some Schools such as those using the ExamSoft application. We are looking to make this available across the entire University and while this could be used as a long-term solution it will not provide a solution for all exams this semester. Schools already trialling this software will be able to provide invaluable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of this software which will inform the LTO's efforts to provide institution-wide support.
4. **Online time-restricted exams using Blackboard quiz** is the least-best option in the current circumstances. Replacing a three-hour exam with a three or four-hour online test in Blackboard is a high-risk alternative if students are required to be online for the entire exam without any Internet interruptions, and/or have to share computing resources in their home. Given the current circumstances, this option cannot be supported as a summative assessment. However, shorter online revision quizzes leading up to a final summative assessment can assist students with time-management and staying on task (e.g. weeks 10, 13 and exam week). Furthermore, academic integrity for this type of alternative assessment cannot be assured (i.e., there is no way to check that the student has not co-opted another person to do the assessment for them),
5. **Replacing the examination with a different type of assessment.** There are a range of additional strategies you could adopt:
  - **Reconsider the weightings of assessments:** There is still time in the semester to introduce different assessment activities, and therefore to change the length and weighting of the final examination. One three-hour exam for example, may be better assessed as a take-home assessment in week 10 (plus a viva or reflection task).
  - **Reconsider whether a time-restricted closed book exam is absolutely critical right now:** Consider whether testing time-pressured professional capabilities must be done this semester. Might the invigilated time-restricted assessments that were done last semester be a sufficient test of student performance? Or could they be carried out next semester?
  - **Defer or re-schedule deadlines** allowing students more time to complete work, particularly if they are ill. Deadlines for the return of assessed work - with feedback - may also need to be reconsidered where staff are ill or have been adversely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.
  - **Change the mode of submission:** Work that was formerly submitted in hard copy should now be submitted electronically through Blackboard. Student videos can also be submitted electronically. Some work, such as physical artefacts, may still be problematic. In such cases you could consider whether it would be possible for students to video their work, explaining

the artefact. Resources are available in the LTO webpages that explain how students can upload videos in the assessment feature of Blackboard.

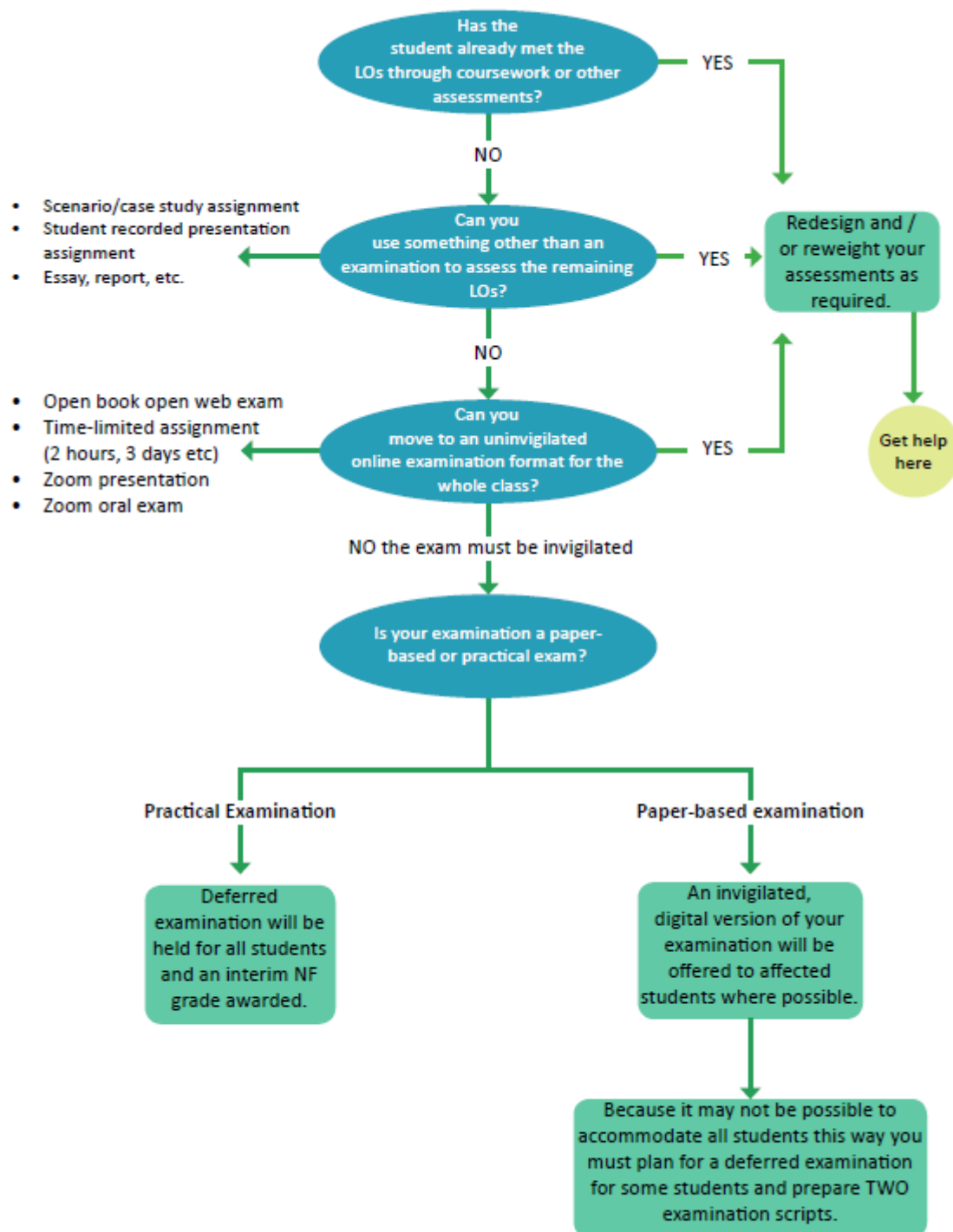
- **Communicate changes to assessments to students, and consider support requirements:**  
Explain why and how assessments have changed, and how these changes will better support student learning in these uncertain times. Where the changes require students to produce work in a new format – e.g. a video or a viva, provide opportunities for practice. Provide ways for students to ask questions about the assessment, such as a Collaborate/Zoom session specifically devoted to assessment advice; or a dedicated online discussion forum for asynchronous communication. It is also useful to create your own video explaining the task, including possible pitfalls and uploading this to Blackboard. Also, communicate changes to all staff involved in the assessment including tutors (and sessionals) and learning support staff.
- **Consider an alternative form of assessment** such as the ones outlined below:

If you currently use....	You could instead consider using ....	To assure standards you might need to consider...
<b>Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) and other tests requiring students to demonstrate a range of skills</b>	It may be possible for students, to submit videos of themselves performing a range of practical tasks, and for these to be kept as a work portfolio.	This may be problematic in professional disciplines where the achievement of specific capabilities is required at 100% e.g. drug calculations in nursing and medicine. A further in-class assessment of these skills may need to be scheduled for later in semester two.
<b>Viva Voce exams</b> , e.g. for in-person oral assessments or PhD examinations	These could readily be undertaken via Collaborate or Zoom or other electronic remote means.	Students may need support and practice sessions to develop confidence to work virtually where they have no prior experience.
<b>In-class presentations</b> where students speak to an audience of their peers/others and are assessed not only on the content but also their presentation techniques	Ask students (individually or in groups) to submit an electronic presentation which can then be tutor-marked and peer-marked. Ask students to create a narrated PowerPoint presentation as this is likely to be a familiar software. Ask students to create a short video made using mobile phones or laptop and uploaded to a YouTube private channel. Audio recordings (podcasts) can also be submitted electronically. Give students the freedom to choose the presentation format.	You will need to take account, given the recorded presentation format, students should have multiple opportunities to prepare the item they are submitting, rather than having to cope with the one-off nature of a live presentation. You should also consider, given the differences in students' access and experience with hardware and software to clearly focus on how the students present, not the quality of the format in which they present.
<b>Theatre, dance and other performances</b>	Individuals and *groups can be asked to work off-site to prepare and submit <b>videos</b> of their work, alongside <b>reflective commentaries/accounts</b> * social distancing restrictions permitting	Group performances may be complex to organise off-site. Videos cannot replicate the authentic live performance element but may suffice in crisis times

If you currently use....	You could instead consider using ....	To assure standards you might need to consider...
<b>Assessed seminars, group discussions</b> and other similar activities	Use Collaborate or Zoom if these have to be face-to-face synchronous discussions. But consider alternatives for in-class presentations.	Staff as well as students may need be supported to learn how to use this approach if it isn't currently part of their normal learning experiences.
<b>Lab work</b>	Replicate some aspects of lab work through simulations in which students are presented with data sets and asked to interpret the data. Or create a video or photographic record showing students data being produced elsewhere. Ask students to conduct the work at home and upload a video of their work. In small classes real-time observed practicals can be done over Collaborate or Zoom but will be very time intensive.	Viable alternatives will mean students focus on data <i>interpretation</i> rather than working in the lab to produce results.  If possible, provide students with <i>different</i> data sets for interpretation.
<b>Posters</b>	You can potentially use a digital infographic, mind map or other visuals which can be submitted via Blackboard assignments, or posted to a Blackboard Wiki or in other online shared spaces, particularly if peer review is required.	To confirm authenticity of the submitter, you may wish to supplement this with a short online oral assessment.
<b>Peer assessments and support</b>	Peers can email each other drafts for comments or use online spaces within Blackboard, e.g. a dedicated Collaborate session private to students.	
<b>Portfolio, logbook or assessment notebook</b>	It is likely that the best solution here is to move hard-copy portfolios to electronic submission.	Access to e-portfolio software is only available in some Schools. Others may consider submissions via standard electronic documents or through other online spaces. You will need to give thought to reducing/removing criteria about the quality as students will have different access to software and skill sets
<b>Face-to-face feedback</b>	Individual and group feedback can be delivered online via audio, text or video.	This is strong assessment practice, as it can encourage student reflection and evaluative judgment which students can apply in future learning.

### Decision tree

The following graphic, which has been distributed by The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ACODE), is a useful tool to help you determine the best course of action to take in considering alternative assessments:



Adapted from <https://twitter.com/davecornier/status/1238877713903104004/photo/1>

## Acknowledgement

This resource is drawn from work shared by Sally Brown and Kay Sambell (Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment), and by The Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE), Deakin University.