

Summer Exams 2021: Adapting exams to ‘take-home’ assessments

This guide provides advice on the range of options for converting traditional in-person exams into take-home assessments that students undertake remotely.

Contents

Context.....	2
Guiding principles	2
What is a take-home assessment?.....	2
Available options and time-limits.....	3
Exceptions	3
Programme level approach.....	3
Exam timetable	4
Academic integrity and assessment design	5
Points to consider when designing take-home assessments	6
Learning outcomes	6
Orientation of task.....	6
Inclusivity & accessibility.....	6
Workload & assessment equivalence	6
Assessment criteria	6
Moderation.....	7
Guidance on the options available for take-home assessments.....	8
Supporting your students.....	11
Developing students’ assessment literacy	11
Academic Integrity and the use of Turnitin.....	11
Support for you.....	12

Context

Given the ongoing COVID-19 situation, Summer Exams in 2021 will be undertaken predominantly online as take-home exams or coursework.

Feedback from the RUSU student survey indicated that students were largely satisfied¹ with the emergency take-home exam format as a replacement for in-person exams in Summer 2020. Qualitative feedback centred around the flexibility of the format relieving stress and anxieties, particularly for students with disabilities.

“Should always be an option I think. As a DAS student, this took away a lot of pressure and think my results reflected my work that I have put in rather than my memory skills.”

“I really liked it as it was a considerably less stressful environment than in-person exams, please make it a regular thing!!”

Guiding principles

In developing our approach to take-home assessment, we have been guided by lessons learnt from Summer 2020 and the following principles:

- fairness to all students, providing a full opportunity for students to consolidate their learning, demonstrate their academic achievement and gain the full benefit of their studies
- reliability of assessment to ensure that awards achieved by students meet sector and professional requirements, are respected by employers, accrediting bodies and other stakeholders, and have the same value as degrees awarded in previous years
- support for students to complete the academic year and undertake their assessments, allowing flexibility and reflecting the diverse needs of our students and the different circumstances that they find themselves in as a result of the current situation
- enabling students to achieve their degree or to progress to the following year in accordance with the normal schedule, as far as reasonably possible.

What is a take-home assessment?

Students will receive the exam paper or assignment brief online, work on the tasks/questions set unsupervised off campus and submit their answers electronically within a defined time period.

¹ A total of 588 students completed the survey. 47.45% of students were either ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very Satisfied’ versus 9.86% of students being either ‘Dissatisfied’ or ‘Very Dissatisfied’. A large portion remains ‘Not applicable’, which most likely takes into account students undertaking coursework only.

Available options and time-limits

To ensure students can easily navigate requirements between different modules, and allow flexibility for things like time differences, caring arrangements and any interruptions or technical difficulties, take-home assessments are limited to the following 3 options:

1. Take-home exam: 23 hours
2. Take-home exam: time-limited within a rolling 23-hour window of availability. Use of this format is limited to modules where there is a clear need to impose a time limit to preserve the academic integrity of the assessment.
3. Replacing exam with coursework

Multiple choice and short answer questions need to be converted to Blackboard Tests:

[Guidance on Blackboard Tests](#)

[Guidance on the options available](#) for take-home assessment can be found below.

The weighting and the timing of summer term assessments cannot be changed. If MDFs need updating to reflect any other changes or you have identified a need for time-limited exams please consult your SDTL and Teaching & Learning Dean.

Exceptions

There will be a limited number of exceptions:

In-person exams

A small number of programmes/modules will be able to run 'in-person' exams on campus subject to Government guidance (e.g. for PSRB requirements, or disciplinary pedagogies). These need to be designed so that they can be converted quickly to an online format should this be necessary.

Invigilated online exams

The University will not be investing in a University-wide online proctoring solution. Some schools are undertaking remote invigilation via Teams. While this practice can continue, it is resource intensive.

Oral exams

Some programmes/modules will require oral exams (e.g. language learning). These can be undertaken as 'live' online oral assessments or pre-recorded audio/video submissions.

Programme level approach

Consistency of assessment formats

SDTLs should consider the extent to which consistency of assessment formats should be planned across the programme(s). Whilst uniformity across the programme provides consistency for students, a diversity of formats allows for 'module personality' and gives scope to be more creative with assessments and test students' learning in different ways.

Communicating expectations

It is important to be open and transparent about the pedagogic rationale behind your approach to take-home assessment. Students should be provided with guidance about what to expect in a clear and timely manner.

Guidance to students should cover the following (where appropriate):

- when assessment criteria will be available and whether criteria will be generic (i.e. school/departmental/programme level) and/or specific to the assessment task
- expectations for referencing and acknowledgment of sources
- how to prepare in advance
- guidance on time management and indicative word count
- how and when marks and feedback will be provided.

You may consider one or more of the following to ensure consistency of messaging across your programme(s) and to foster a sense of community with your students through your communications:

- record a 'talking head' screencast, perhaps with a few points on a slide
- set up a FAQ discussion forum in Blackboard to encourage peer support (and reduce your inbox traffic!)
- host a virtual session and provide an opportunity for Q&A.

Guidance on [Working together to deliver effective and engaging student communications](#).

Student-facing guidance:

- Essentials: [Exams and assessments 2021](#)
- Exams: [Guidance for Students](#)
- Study Advice: [Blog post](#) and [video](#) on how to revise and prepare for take-home exams
- TEL: [Information about take-home exams and submitting work to Blackboard](#) (currently being updated for 2021)

Exam timetable

Take-home exams will be centrally timetabled.

Coursework will not be scheduled centrally and will therefore not appear in students' exam timetables. If you opt for coursework a programme level approach will be necessary to minimise bunching of deadlines around scheduled exams. Particular attention should be paid to Combined programmes and programmes where modules are delivered by one or more contributing Departments/Schools. You should also consider when coursework marks and feedback will be released to students. Releasing marks during the exam period could be distracting for some students.

Academic integrity and assessment design

In contrast to the tight timeframe imposed for Summer 2020, this year there is more time to respond to the de facto 'open book' conditions. There are many ways to promote academic integrity through assessment design, ranging from relatively quick and easy ideas to those requiring more time and creativity.

For example, **essay-based exams** which assess students' understanding and how well they can make an argument can be relatively straightforward to convert into a take-home assessment. This could be achieved through simply adjusting the assessment criteria to reflect access to reference materials and requiring submission via Turnitin. However, you could (where appropriate and workload permitting!) choose to capitalise on the take-home format to develop a more authentic assessment task². Customising questions or redesigning the task to make the assessment more context-rich, scenario-specific or current/topical makes it potentially more difficult for students to quickly look up answers online.

Exam questions, and in particular **multiple choice and short answer questions** may need to be reframed to move away from recall-based questions with questions that require students to apply what they have learned in new situations, analyse scenarios, interpret data in tables or graphs, or extrapolate their knowledge in other ways. You could also use short-answer questions to request a rationale for the selection of the multiple-choice responses.

To reduce opportunities for **collusion**, you could create question pools and randomise questions and/or provide students with different data sets for personal interpretation. However, you will need to consider how you will ensure questions are of comparable difficulty.

Useful resources

- *Multiple Choice Questions: More Than Just A Test of Information Recall* (online resources for you to access via [UoRLearn](#) in your own time).
- [Embedding a culture of academic integrity through programme design](#) (briefing note and audit tool for tutors seeking to embed academic integrity in their teaching)
- This [paper](#) by Sally Brown and Kay Sambell (August 2020) provides guidance on how to use this opportunity to create more authentic tasks.

² Authentic assessment tasks are those which more closely resemble the ways in which skills and knowledge are used in the real world e.g. analysing a case study and making recommendations from the point of view of a particular stakeholder; undertaking statistical analyses of a publicly available dataset; reviews and annotated biographies which require students to engage with literature; completing an in-tray exercise. See [An A-Z of Assessment Methods](#).

Points to consider when designing take-home assessments

<p>Learning outcomes</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with the learning outcomes your exam is designed to test. The take-home assessment (and assessment criteria) should align with these outcomes. • Consider which (if any) of your module learning outcomes have already been assessed to avoid over-assessment.
<p>Orientation of task</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use this opportunity to re-frame assessment tasks to reflect the open book environment. This is an opportunity to ‘design-in’ academic integrity by creating questions/tasks which rely less on information recall and more on application and synthesis of knowledge. • Ensure students are given appropriate support to enable them to succeed. This is particularly important if you are introducing an unfamiliar task.
<p>Inclusivity & accessibility</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take proactive and anticipatory account of the diverse needs of your students and the different circumstances they find themselves in. For example, if your assessment relies on texts that have no e-book versions consider how you will ensure students who cannot visit the library are not disadvantaged. • Use the online and in-person exam paper specifications provided for the creation of take-home exam papers alongside tools, such as Blackboard Ally and the Microsoft Accessibility Checker, to ensure papers and assignment briefs are accessible for students who rely on assistive technologies.
<p>Workload & assessment equivalence</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear guidance for students about how much time they should spend preparing for (e.g. planning their approach, conducting research, revising etc.) and undertaking the exam or coursework, along with an indicative word count. • Take account of equivalence of effort on the part of the student. It is suggested that you estimate equivalence based on notional learning hours and estimated student effort.
<p>Assessment criteria</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure assessment criteria/rubrics reflect the ‘open book’ assessment conditions and orientation of the task. For example, criteria that reward the ability to recall information could be weighted less heavily than those that reward students’ ability to use information. • Ensure assessment criteria are based on what you expect to be achievable given the assessment format. For example, what degree of depth do you expect given the time available?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to <u>develop students' assessment literacy</u> and make sense of standards and criteria.
<p>Moderation</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult External Examiners on your timeline for preparation of papers/assignment briefs and seek feedback in good time to allow amendments to be made in advance of the <u>exam paper submission deadline</u>. • Support colleagues to ensure consistency of approach and academic judgement. Pre-marking calibration exercises where a sample of scripts are marked together would be particularly useful in constructing a shared understanding of standards and quality given that the 'take-home' exam format is relatively new.

Guidance on the options available for take-home assessments

Options	How does this work?	Pedagogical considerations
Take-home exam: 23 hours	Students have a 23-hour window of availability in which the exam is available to view or download and complete.	<p>Provides consistency for those students who undertook 23-hour take-home exams in Summer 2020.</p> <p>Unlike online exams with a strict time-limit, this window offers time for students to reflect and refine their answers.</p> <p>Steps should be taken to promote academic integrity through assessment design.</p> <p>23-hour exams can promote unhealthy student behaviours (such as going without eating or sleeping). Guidance to students should make clear what is expected and how long you expect students to take answering the questions. Assessment criteria and marking should be based on what you expect to be achievable in the expected time taken.</p> <p>Whilst this format can be used to convert essay-based exams, you could capitalise on the opportunity afforded by the take-home format to create more authentic assessment tasks which provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and its use/applicability in real-world contexts.</p>
Take-home exam: time-limited within a rolling 23-hour window of availability	Students have a 23-hour window of availability in which the exam is available to view or download, but once started students have a limited amount of time to complete the exam.	A time-limited assessment is perhaps the most familiar format for students (pre-pandemic) and will actively encourage students to revise ahead of the exam. However, you need to be mindful that time-limited exams may exacerbate students' feeling of anxiety in this current context. Therefore, use of this format is limited to modules where there is a clear need to impose a time limit to preserve the academic integrity of the assessment.

	<p>Technology for delivering this online - The University has taken out a 12-month licence for Gradescope (part of the Turnitin suite of products) from February 2021 which will cover the main Summer examinations and resit periods. Gradescope allows for 'time limited' exams to run within the 23-hour online format.</p>	<p>This is likely to apply mostly to exams where there is a tendency for there to be a single (or limited) best solution(s) such as in certain mathematical³ and technical subjects (e.g. accountancy, modern languages).</p> <p>While the time-limit reduces opportunities for looking things up online, the 23-hour window provides opportunities for student to collude/compare answers. Therefore, you should still take steps to promote academic integrity through assessment design.</p> <p>Parameters for the use of Gradescope:</p> <p>Students will be allowed an additional 30 minutes at the end of every time-restricted exam where there is a requirement to scan and upload documents once they have completed the paper (this will not apply for exams where no uploading is required – for example, for multiple choice tests).</p> <p>Schools have the opportunity to extend the duration of a time-limited exam by up to 50% of the original length of the paper that was stated in the module description, to take into consideration possible connection issues or interruptions.</p> <p>Students who would usually be granted reasonable adjustments (e.g. extra time for exams) will have that time added to the duration of the exam, as well as the additional 30 minutes for scanning and uploading where applicable.</p>
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³ Iannone, P. (September 2020) [Assessing Mathematics at University: Covid-19 and Beyond](#). *London Mathematical Society Newsletter*, Issue 490, p34-40. Contains suggestions for questions suitable for open-book exams that also foster conceptual understanding.

		If students are affected on the day by circumstances beyond their control (e.g. significant connection issues, illness or interruptions) this will be managed by the Extenuating Circumstances process.
Coursework	<p>Students submit coursework by a set date. The format of the assignment could be varied (e.g. essay, case study, literature review, report etc).</p> <p>For 2020/21 all coursework should be submitted online via Blackboard, except in a small number of cases where online submission is technically not possible or is not consistent with the fair assessment of the work.</p> <p><u>Guidance on how to convert physically submitted assignments or in-class tests to online submission</u></p>	<p>A longer time frame provides opportunities for students to integrate and demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and gives ample time for students to reflect and refine their answers.</p> <p>Whilst this format can be used to convert essay-based exams, it also lends itself to the creation of more authentic assessment tasks which provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and its use/applicability in real-world contexts.</p> <p>Coursework will be subject to the fifteen working day turnaround time feedback policy, whereas for take-home exams generic feedback will need to be released to students at the same time as, or shortly after, the corresponding marks are released.</p>

Supporting your students

Developing students' assessment literacy

Module convenors are encouraged to consider designing-in activities (if these do not already exist) to enable students to develop familiarity with the assessment formats and to clarify expectations. The suggested activities outlined below may also provide additional opportunities for student-student or student-tutor interactivity.

Interpreting assignment briefs/ exemplar exam questions

You can provide students with opportunities to interpret the assignment brief/exemplar exam questions in pairs and/or small groups and encourage them to ask questions and seek clarifications. Using synchronous tools for the groupwork and asynchronous tools such as discussion boards to field the questions and provide answers is an effective combination of approaches that results in co-created FAQs that all can share.

Engaging with exemplars and assessment criteria

You can provide opportunities for students to work in pairs and/or groups to assess and comment on exemplar answers/assignments using the same assessment criteria that will be used to assess them. Activities of this kind have been shown to develop students' understanding and internalisation of assessment criteria, which can then be applied to their own work.

Formative assessment with peer feedback

You can provide opportunities for students to practice preparing answers to exemplar questions/assignment briefs without a summative mark being awarded. Students can provide peer feedback using the same assessment criteria that will be used to assess their summative work. This provides students with opportunities for formative feedback as well as developing their abilities to assess themselves.

Peers can email each other drafts for comments, share documents using their university OneDrive or use a shared virtual space within Blackboard. For example, use of Peermark tool within Turnitin, or allocating students to a Blackboard Group to upload draft assignments to a discussion board for feedback. It is important when undertaking this kind of activity to remind students of the differences between collaboration (in formative work) and collusion (in summative work). For example, sharing answers or ideas in the 23 take-home exam window is not permitted and would be considered as academic misconduct.

[Blackboard: Groups – Getting Started](#)

[Turnitin: Creating A Peermark Assessment](#)

Academic Integrity and the use of Turnitin

You should ensure that students are fully aware of expectations relating to academic integrity. Please note that the [policy on Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct](#) will

be reviewed by a subgroup of DELT early in 2021 and consideration of online assessments will be included.

Activities to develop understanding of academic integrity

The [Academic Integrity Toolkit](#) contains guidance for students and tutors. You can, of course, simply refer students to the guidance as a whole. However, students are more likely to engage with materials when they have more specific and targeted recommendations from their tutors. This toolkit contains [teaching and learning materials](#) (handouts, activities, PowerPoint slides and video tutorials) that you can adapt and use in your own teaching.

In addition, a self-paced Academic Integrity course developed by Epigeum Learning can be made available to your students via Blackboard. Contact the ADE team for further details.

Given submissions will be submitted through Turnitin where appropriate, it can be helpful to allow students to practice submitting draft work via Turnitin so they can access and interpret similarity reports. Exploring similarity reports in partnership with students as part of interactive sessions can also provide a useful opportunity for developing their understanding of how they use sources in their work.

For more information see here: [Turnitin Similarity Report – Getting Started](#).

Support for you

Any questions?

- Pedagogical Considerations: CQSD-ADE@reading.ac.uk
- Technology Enhanced Learning: [IT Self Service Portal](#) or it@reading.ac.uk

[Take Home Exams: Information for staff](#). This page provides information about:

- Recommended settings for Take Home Exam submission points
- Take Home Exams on your Blackboard course
- Take Home Exams Practice Course
- Guidance on marking exams
- Guidance on Tests
- Guidance to students (currently being updated for 2021)

[Guidance on the use of Gradescope](#)

Reading list [Summer Exams 2021: Take-home assessment](#) contains links to:

- general guidance on adapting assessment for the current context
- guidance on take-home exams from other universities (for tutors and students)
- selected pedagogic research literature on take-home exams
- discipline specific resources on take-home exams.