



# ENV KEEPS TEACHING TIP SHEET

## Final Exams in Remote Learning

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### 1. To time or not to time?

Instructors can still effectively assess students through exams, quizzes, and different types of assessments in an online environment. However, remote teaching does pose distinct challenges and requires instructors to be thoughtful in terms of how to design assessments that promote student learning and uphold academic integrity.

There are a few ways to approach [timed and untimed exams](#) and assessments:

#### 1. Timed, asynchronous exams

Students complete an exam within a set amount of time after starting it (advisable to give at least 24 hours window for time zone differences and other constraints).

#### 2. Untimed, asynchronous, take-home style exams

Students have a longer amount of time (e.g., several days to a week) to complete the exam. These tend to be open-ended assignments.

#### 3. Synchronous, scheduled exam

Students take the exam at the same time and complete the exam within a set amount of time.

### 2. Thinking about an untimed exam?

In general, the University strongly recommends giving students asynchronous exams, which do not have to be taken at the same time by all students. [Fall 2020 midterm and final exam scheduling principles are posted here](#) by the University's Keep Learning team. Consider alternatives to synchronous, high-stakes final exams. Some options for assessments include:

- [Summative assignments](#)
- [Open book exams](#)
- [No final exam or assessment at all](#)

Synchronous final exams are strongly discouraged at this time. UWaterloo students are located across different time zones and have variable access to internet and technologies, which can result in stressful and inequitable testing situations.

## 4. How do I handle a timed assessment, if I need one?

The handling of timed assessments in online courses is particularly challenging for instructors. The [Keep Learning](#) team has compiled the following tips for timed assessments:

- **Determine the completion time needed:** Test your assessments to check the actual time needed to complete them, including time for submitting or uploading work (e.g., photos of handwritten solutions). As a general rule of thumb, students need at least twice as long as a course TA to complete an assessment and at least three times as long as you. Adding 10-15 minutes as a buffer for technical glitches is appropriate for any tool. Uploads of scanned documents may take an additional 20+ minutes. Also take into account the variation in student reading speeds when determining the time needed.
- **Provide clear instructions and do a dry run:** Your students will feel more prepared, and the assessment will run more smoothly, if you provide them with instructions on how to complete steps, like signing up for time slots, and how to use the assessment tool. Doing a dry run with your students before the test/exam is also helpful to increase everyone's familiarity and to test out the instructions. If you require assistance, please contact [learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:learnhelp@uwaterloo.ca) or check the Assessing Student Work tab in the Tools and Technology table on the [Keep Learning website](#).
- **Provide a clear plan for technical issues:** Give your students clear and easy-to-access instructions about what they should do in the event of technical issues during an assessment, and their recourse if these issues prevent completion or compromise their writing of the assessment.
- **Plan for missed assessments:** Identify a process for when students miss an assessment due to technical issues and develop at least one alternative assessment when creating your tests/exams so you are ready to provide a make-up opportunity. If you included a grade reweighting scheme in your course outline, this strategy provides an alternative approach.
- **Address accommodations:** If you have a student registered with AccessAbility Services (AAS) who needs an accommodation involving course assessments, please work with AAS as early on as possible.



## 5. Academic integrity challenges

Although remote exams are open-book, remind your students of [academic integrity](#). You can try different things to encourage academic integrity. For example:

- Administer two or three versions of your exam.
- Randomize questions within tests/exams.
- For multiple-choice exams, draw randomized questions from a large question bank.
- Use Turnitin or plagiarism checker for longer exam questions.

If you are concerned with academic integrity, consider having students sign an [Academic Integrity Agreement](#).

## 6. Accessibility issues

You are still responsible for providing [academic accommodations](#) for students with disabilities. Standard practices might include allowing for extended time for exams and assignments.

Also consider students' access to technologies, such as computers, software, internet, etc. If you are having a timed synchronous test, prepare a back-up plan for those who find it difficult to be online at a specific time.

## 7. Communicating expectations

Once you have decided on a final exam strategy, communicate it frequently and in different ways with your students, so they know what to expect. Also communicate with TAs, so they are clear on expectations.

Increase your social presence and hold online office hours so students can connect with you and have opportunities to ask questions about assessments.

Set your students up for success. When students are learning remotely in different geographic locations and environments, it is even more important to give clear directions about your expectations for written assignments, group work, and assessments.

## 8. What resources are available?

This tip sheet is based on a compilation of resources:

- [Final Exams](#). Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo.
- [Exams and Quizzes When Teaching Remotely](#). Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Pennsylvania.
- [Online Assessment Strategies for Distance Teachers and Learners](#). 3P Learning.
- [Assessment and Remote Teaching: Options and Opportunities](#). Center for Teaching and Learning, Boston University.

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