Blackboard Online Testing Tips for Instructors

Blackboard's Assessment features provide a basic method to build online assessments using different question types, the ability to import question pools, and the ability to manage certain testing and feedback options. Blackboard separates the processes of creating and deploying a test into two different stages. The following tips and recommendations are made for test creation and test deployment (items such as test availability and test presentation) to assist in minimizing common problems experienced by faculty and students, student experience tips to help with test taking and submission, and academic honesty tips to prevent plagiarism and dishonesty.

Test creation

The following tips apply to test creation and settings. It is a good idea to title each quiz or exam with a unique identifying name. For example, instead of Test 1, try a topic or chapter-based name. When you are creating the test, remember the description and test instructions will be viewed by students taking the exam.

Test availability options

Make the link available

When deploying a test in a content area, it is necessary to make the link available. Blackboard will not make the test available unless this is selected. Limit the time it is available by selecting **Display After** and **Display Until** date/time restrictions.
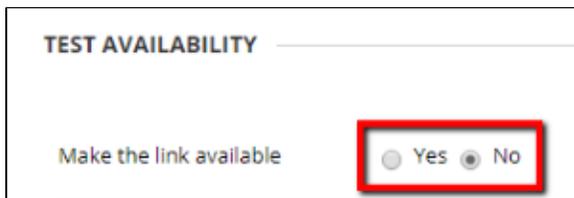
Multiple attempts

If a student has issues with losing Internet connectivity, a practical recommendation is to allow two attempts for the exam. This step will avoid locking them out of the exam if their Internet connection is lost. If a student completes the exam more than once, their score will not be overwritten, rather, you can choose which score to accept from the Grade Center: the first attempt, last attempt, highest grade, lowest grade, or an average of all attempts.
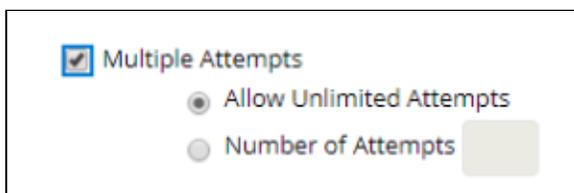
Force completion

This option is not recommended. If checked, the **Force Completion** option will clear the student's saved answers should they exit the test or lose their Internet connection. Leaving this option unchecked will allow a student to reenter the exam, reducing the chance their answers are lost if disconnected during the test.

Set timer

You can set a timer to limit the time students might spend looking up answers. Blackboard does not force a submission by default at the end of a timed test but gives a warning as to how much time is left. The timer starts the first time the test is launched, and when the student leaves the test for any reason, the clock keeps ticking. If the student goes over the allotted time they will not get an automatic score. Instead, an exclamation point will appear in the Grade Center so the instructor can deduct points for going over the allotted time. If you select to enable the **Auto-Submit** option, the test will be automatically submitted when the time expires.

Test length tips

We recommend that your tests not last more than 45-60 minutes due to connectivity issues. If a large amount of material must be covered, give several shorter exams. Many students' Internet service will time-out before they finish an exam, and their answers will be lost. If giving a short quiz, we generally recommend to display questions all-at-once; this will reduce the number of times a student must hit the submit button. They can still save each individual answer and then submit when complete.

> ⚠ The **Set Timer** option does not automatically stop or submit the test when the time is up. It only lets the instructor know how many minutes over the time limit it took the student to complete the test. However, if you also enable the **Auto-Submit** option, the test will be automatically submitted when time is up.

Display after and display until

This setting allows you to establish a window of time when the test is available for students to take. We recommend that you make the test available for at least 24 hours, but some faculty have found that distance learning students may need a larger window of time due to work or other responsibilities.

Password

You can set a password for a test if you want a student to take the test at a different time (e.g. a make-up exam). A password is also a way to help prevent cheating in online tests.

Self-assessment options

Include this test in Grade Center score calculations

Blackboard allows you to create practice tests or self-assessments that are not included in the student's final grade. If you are using a test as a self-assessment, uncheck this box in the Test Options.
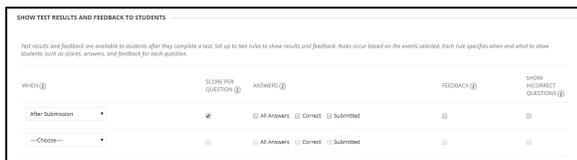
Hide results for this test completely from instructor and the Grade Center

Blackboard provides options for self-assessments, and this option is offered as a way to completely hide results of practice tests. This option is probably unnecessary in the case of practice tests, which are not included in the Grade Center unless you feel the possibility of you viewing results will prevent students from taking a practice test.

SELF-ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

If this test is a self-assessment, choose to include or hide the scores in the Grade Center. NOTE! If an instructor decides to include the test in the Grade Center after it was hidden, all prior attempts will be deleted.

☑ Include this Test in Grade Center score calculations
Grade Center items excluded from summary calculations are also excluded from weighting. Also note that if some weighted items are included in calculations and other weighted items are not, grade weight calculations will be skewed.

☐ Hide results for this test completely from the instructor and the Grade Center
If this option is selected, the instructor will not be able to see any student grades, view answers, aggregate results, or download result details. To protect student privacy, this choice cannot be reversed later without deleting all attempts.

Test feedback

Multiple choice, true false, matching, and other question types which can be automatically graded can be set to provide immediate feedback to students. Feedback options include Score, Submitted Answers, Correct Answers, and Feedback that you added when you created the test. If you are concerned about revealing correct answers before the entire class has completed the test, select **Score only** and then return to the **Test Option** area once all students have taken the test to select other more detailed feedback options.

SHOW TEST RESULTS AND FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS					

Test results and feedback are available to students after they complete a test. Set up to two rules to show results and feedback. Rules occur based on the events selected. Each rule specifies when and what to show students such as scores, answers, and feedback for each question.

WHEN ⓘ	SCORE PER QUESTION ⓘ	ANSWERS ⓘ			FEEDBACK ⓘ	SHOW INCORRECT QUESTIONS ⓘ
After Submission ▾	☑	☐ All Answers	☐ Correct	☐ Submitted	☐	☐
—Choose— ▾	☐	☐ All Answers	☐ Correct	☐ Submitted	☐	☐

Test presentation

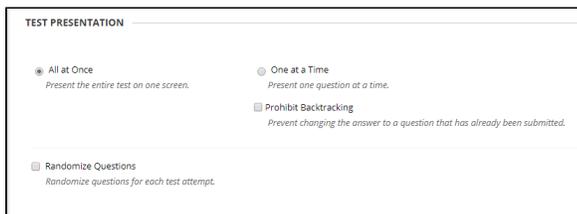## Presentation mode: all at once or one at a time

Present questions one at a time. This will assist with timeout issues because students will be required to submit each question and then asked to confirm their submission, continually sending data to the server each time.

Randomize questions

If you randomize the questions, students will be shown the same set of questions but in random order. Do not use this option if you have sequential questions or questions that build on one another. If you want questions within the exam to be randomly selected from a set of questions (making it unlikely that any two exams will be identical), develop a larger pool of questions and use the **Random Block** question type when you create the test. Avoid this option if you are using question by question display.

> ⚠ When using randomized questions from pools, keep the overall test relatively short.

TEST PRESENTATION

◉ All at Once
Present the entire test on one screen.

○ One at a Time
Present one question at a time.

☐ Prohibit Backtracking
Prevent changing the answer to a question that has already been submitted.

☐ Randomize Questions
Randomize questions for each test attempt.

Student experience tips

Time frame

Provide a reasonable time frame for students to take the test. We recommend that you provide at least a 24 hour time frame and not require students to take the test all at the same time. Students could experience errors or other problems if all your students are hitting the server at the same time for the same test. This also applies to requiring students to take the online test all at the same time in a lab setting.

System requirements

In terms of system requirements, Firefox has been a more reliable browser when using Blackboard. It is recommended that you convey this to students and suggest that they use Firefox for test taking. In addition, you can recommend students with internet trouble to take the test on campus, or you can even set up a proctored test.

Time outs and server limits

The Blackboard server reserves a certain amount of memory for assessment features. Because this memory is "limited," the server will time out after 20 minutes if it detects no activity while taking a test, thus "kicking the student out of the test." To avoid this problem, it is recommended you keep the exam time under 1 hour. When giving a final or other long test, break the test into multiple shorter sections. For example, create two assessments of 50 questions or less and a separate exam for essay questions.

For essay exams, we recommend to not require over 20 minutes for each response in order to avoid timeout issues. Alternatively, you may use the File Response question type and ask students to compose their essay in a word processing program and then attach the file. Using the Assignment Manager with time and date restrictions is also another method for essay exams. To help with timing out and other student issues, avoid creating extremely large exams with complex questions and answers. Train students to save their exam every 15 minutes or so; this will help prevent test loss if an issue does occur.

Logging out

Students should always log out of Blackboard. Simply closing the window will not end the session, and the above problem with Blackboard kicking a student out of the test remains. For instance, if the student was working on Blackboard and decided to take a five-minute break before taking their test and just closed the browser window, then this will more than likely not end the BB session. Later, they come back, login to Blackboard again, and now they have two (or possibly several) active sessions going. So, they start taking their test, and five minutes in the session times out and they get kicked out of the test. Train your students to always fully logout of Blackboard using the **Logout** button in the top left corner.

Academic dishonesty

There is no guaranteed method of preventing cheating when giving online exams. Requiring students to take a proctored mid-term and final exam is one method to discourage academic dishonesty, but there are alternate methods which may be more appropriate for online education. In addition to including Missouri State's Statement on Academic Dishonesty on your course syllabus, the following considerations are intended to provide practical ideas on discouraging dishonesty:

- Consider drafting a Code of Honor contract for students to sign. Clearly define academically inappropriate behavior, your expectations for students, and identify reasons to be honest.
- Vary the type of assessments used throughout the class making it difficult for students to get constant help.
- Design discussion and test questions that can not be answered easily unless the individual has done previous work in the course.
- Use several short quizzes rather than one or two tests to discourage getting help with testing.
- Design open book test questions that require students to demonstrate their understanding rather than simple 'hunt' for the correct answer.
- Require that term papers and other assignments be submitted in stages (outline, introduction, rough draft, etc.). Ask students to submit an actual source or the first page of each source for their paper. Make it a common practice to ask students questions about their paper. Students will be more cautious if they know their instructor will be asking question about their sources.
- Use monitoring tools in Blackboard to track student activity or lack thereof. Monitor the amount of time a student is working within the class and let them know if you notice a change in behavior.