Take-Home Exams

In a Take-Home Exam, students answer an examination paper (e.g. short-answer question, calculations/problems, extended written responses) offline and then upload their completed paper by a specified deadline. There are 3 core principles to Take-Home Exams:

1. The exam is completed in a location of the student's choice, with full access to resources (both online and offline)
2. The exam is non-proctored (i.e. there is no invigilation)
3. The time limit for the exam is extended from a matter of hours (as with a typical exam) to day(s).

What are the advantages of take-home exams?

In a systematic review of the literature on Take-Home Exams, Bengtsson (2019) outlines a number of advantages to this form of assessment. These include:

1. Promotion of meaningful learning rather than memorisation
2. A positive learning experience for students
3. Effectiveness in testing higher order thinking skills (e.g. analysis, synthesis of material)

What are the challenges associated with the use of take-home exams?

In Bengtsson's (2019) review, the biggest challenge associated with this form of assessment was that it is not possible to prevent breaches of academic integrity, such as collusion. Strategies for mitigating this challenge might include, for example:

1. Different versions of an exam paper assigned to different students– e.g. for exam papers that contain presupplied data, you might choose to create different versions of your exam paper each containing slight variations of data, and then assign students to do one of them thus ensuring not all of them are attempting the same paper
2. Include an element of unique narrative – include in your exam paper a requirement that the student provides a unique element of narrative to explain their thought processes, how they came to a particular conclusion etc.
3. Use Turnitin to assess originality - completed exam papers would usually be submitted into a SurreyLearn submission folder where Turnitin can be activated. Please note: Turnitin can only accept electronically written responses (e.g. word-processed documents, Powerpoint presentations etc. and not drawn or handwritten submissions)

What types of questions should I use?

As students will have full access to online resources as well as books and their notes whilst completing the Take-Home Exam, questions may need to be reframed to require different learning strategies, whilst still assessing the same learning outcomes.

What follows are some suggestions for reframing questions for Take-Home Exams. There are obviously many different disciplinary variations in the focus of any exam and all disciplines cannot be covered here.

Short answer and extended written response questions should assess analysis or application of course material rather than simple recall of content. A good Take-Home Exam will assess students' ability to find, synthesise, and use information in order to solve novel problems or present coherent arguments.

Suggested question formats include:

1. Essay-based questions
2. A set of calculation problems
3. Presentation of a problem-based scenario or real-world case, asking students to apply their understanding of the course material to present a solution
4. Presentation of data or analysis output, asking students to interpret the data and discuss what the data show, to discuss the relevance of the data in the context of a particular topic, to discuss what factors might influence the nature of data collected, how you might test for alternative interpretations, etc.

How many questions?

Take-Home Exams are still time-constrained assessments, yet students will likely have longer to complete the paper than a typical in class test / exam / online open-book exam. However, rather than setting more questions for a Take-Home Exam, it is easier to think differently about the expectations of the level of students' responses. For example, if in a typical written exam a student completes 2 essay questions in a 2-hour exam, a Take-Home Exam with a 36hour time limit might still retain 2 essay questions, but with greater expectations about students' synthesis of material and coherence of argument than would be expected in a typical written exam.

You can also set word limits for different types of question in a Take-Home Exam in order to set some constraints on what students can submit.

Using SurreyLearn for release and submission of Take-Home Exams

For Take-Home Exams, the exam paper(s) would normally be released via the Course Materials area of your module in SurreyLearn and via the addition of release conditions on those materials (or the folder containing the materials) to release the exam to the students at a set date and time. To accept submissions, an assignment folder would also need to be created in the SurreyLearn Assignments tool within in your module and be set to open and close at the required times. Once the submissions are all in, marking can be performed in the same way as for coursework submissions via SurreyLearn.

For solutions to other specific challenges such as an assessment which can only be completed in hard copy, for example handwritten or drawn responses, please see the assessment section of the Covid-19 FAQs in SurreyLearn.

Further resources

Bengtsson, L. (2019). Take-home exams in higher education: A systematic review. *Education Sciences, 9,* 267.

https://student.unsw.edu.au/open-book-and-take-home-exams