Preparing for Online Exams

The Myth About Online Exams

You may think an online exam will be "easier" than a regular exam because you'll usually be able access to your resources and study notes. However, your lecturers know this and design exams with this in mind. The exams test your "critical thinking" skills, rather than things you could simply look up in your notes, or online. For this reason, no matter what type of online exam you are sitting, you must be very well-prepared.

Taking the Exam

Don't sit your exam anywhere you're likely to be distracted by anyone, or anything. If you can't achieve this type of environment at home, see if you can take your exam at a friend's house, or in a silent zone of the library.

The Exam Environment	Other things to consider
o An uncluttered desk. o Comfortable chair. o No background noise. o Reliable internet connection. o Reliable computer with updated Operating System. o Your student number and log-in details.	o Get dressed, as if you are going to a physical exam space. Be comfortable, but not TOO comfortable. o Stay hydrated and eat a healthy meal beforehand. o Turn off your phone/iPad and remove your Smart Watch. o Have good, clear memory aids available if you're allowed them (check your course outline)

Types of Online Exams

Just like regular exams, online exams might be: multiple choice, short answer, extended response, or a combination of all of these. However, you need to also be aware of HOW your exam will be conducted. There are three main types of online exams – and you prepare for them will vary depending on these features:

General Online Exams

These exams usual require you to log-on at a specific time and respond to a set of questions within a specific time frame. For example, the exam might start at 10am on Monday and finish at 12pm – for all students. You generally cannot modify the start and finish time.

Short Release Exams

Sometimes you will be given a set amount of time (such as 2 hours) from the minute you click the link the start the exam online. That means, you'll be told to complete it by a given date but can commence it at any point leading up to that date. The moment you start the exam the 2-hour time frame begins, and you cannot exit the exam and finish it later.

Extended Release Exams

You may be given a number of days to complete an exam. These types of exam often require detailed, researched and referenced responses – but the time frame to complete it is quite short and might only be 24 or 48 hours.

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Preparing for General Online Exams and Short Release Exams:

The best way to prepare for these types of online exam, regardless of whether they are multiple choice or written response questions, is to have an effective memory aid. Don't assume you'll be able refer to a semester's worth of course content, find the answer you need and apply it. Study as you would for a regular, unseen, closed-book exam.

To help you recall information:

- Put information (summaries, dot-points, concept maps) in your own words.
- Draw mind-maps and diagrams, flow-charts, and other visual aids (the fewer words on the page, the better).
- Colour code your notes based on course themes.
- Practice verbalising your notes/course content. If you can't explain complex ideas to someone else, you might not understand them well enough.
- If you're using a memory aid, condense all of your notes to a page or two so they are simple triggers for concepts you already understand.

During the exam:

- Read every question closely so you don't overlook important phrases or misinterpret what is being asked.
- Take a moment to calculate how much time you should spend on each section of the exam, or each question.
- Make sure you understand the structure of the exam – do you get marked down for incorrect answers? Can you go back and change answers? Are multiple answers per question required/permitted?

Preparing for Extended Release Exams:

- Make sure you know the types of sources you will need to refer to (textbooks, journal articles) and that you have them at hand or know where to find them.
- Don't rush your reading/research – read carefully and make notes just as you would with a regular assessment.
- Spend time scaffolding your response rather than writing without a plan.
- Take time to consult referencing and style guides where appropriate so you don't lose marks unnecessarily.
- Use all the time possible to commit to planning and responding. This means taking time off work or other responsibilities while you undertake the exam.
- Pay close attention to spelling and grammar. Academic literacy is important in these types of exams.

For all online exams, try to avoid:

- Writing study-notes word-for-word from lecture slides/course readings.
- Having too many detailed notes that will be difficult to sort through in an open book exam.
- Relying on key-word searches in online documents to find answers – critical thinking will be required, not just facts.
- Assuming that notes you've taken but not reviewed for a number of weeks will still make sense to you.
- Thinking a memory aid will save you! You may not always be able to use one – you should know the content without it!