

Conducting Distance Exams - Suggestions

The purpose of this document is to outline a few suggestions for conducting assessment of students' performance under the current conditions of offering everything at a distance. It is important to clarify that there are no solutions that are cheating-proof, but there are ways to deter cheating and reduce the likelihood that students give into temptation. Additionally, suggestions outlined here can be used to ensure that a student's identity is verified. This document only pertains to courses that require exams. Other courses that are lab-based, project-based or have had sufficient assessment prior to going distance have more flexibility.

Option 1: Take-home exams

Under this model, the instructor writes an exam where the expectation is the students will work on it without a proctor. In this case, if there has been sufficient assessment of the student performance using proctored activities, no additional actions need to be taken. On the other hand, if this is a new approach dictated by the current situation, and there have not been enough proctored activities in the course, to ensure compliance with the Student Verification Policy, the instructor can conduct a brief interview with the student after they have turned in their exam to ensure that they are the one that has submitted the work. This interview may be through a one-on-one Zoom meeting. This model is suitable for courses that have a small number of students, and are encouraged for upper level courses when possible. TAs may also be leveraged to conduct such interviews.

Option 2: Timed and proctored exams

Timed exams can be conducted using Canvas. An alternative approach is emailing the students the exam, and giving them a fixed time duration to finish the exam, scan it and email it back (or submit via Canvas) by a certain time. It is assumed that under this model proctoring of the exam will be required. This ensures that the student's identity is verified and that they are proctored the entire time they are taking the exam. These exams may be conducted in the following fashion.

1. All students join via Zoom, and must have internet connection and a camera to join the meeting using video.
2. The instructor or TA can verify the student identity by comparing their picture in Canvas with the student's live image from the video.
3. Students may be asked to place a phone (with a video feed linked to Zoom) or a mirror behind them to make it easier to view their surroundings. This is only a suggestion and can't be a requirement.
4. The timed exam may be emailed to the students at the time of the exam or be entirely online, e.g., using Canvas.
5. The instructor and/or TAs will proctor the exam by watching the real-time video of the students working on the exam.
6. Periodically, the proctor will ask the students to turn their camera around to show that they are working alone, don't have a phone in their lap, etc. At that time, if they are suspicious of a particular student, they can put their video in focus and concentrate on their video as the students are showing their surroundings.

Possible issues and solutions

Students could potentially have another window open in their browser and be searching for answers, or even sharing their answers with other students.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Make it clear that any student caught cheating will, at a minimum, be penalized by a zero on the exam. You might want to include a few bullets about expectations for academic honesty on the front page of your exam.
2. Randomly selected students, in addition to those suspected of cheating, may be contacted, e.g., by phone and asked about their answers. If they are not able to explain how they reached their answers, they get a zero on the entire exam and an academic honesty case will be brought against them.
3. Have several versions of the same exam, with slightly different problems or questions in a different order.
4. Write a short exam to limit the time students have to search online.

Students may not have enough bandwidth to take the exam in real-time using Zoom.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Students may go to locations where there is better connection. The instructor needs to communicate with the students prior to the exam to assess if this option is reasonable.
2. For smaller classes, change the exam model to a take-home exam with an oral component.
3. Even if the connection is intermittent, it might be enough to monitor the integrity of the exam.

Students may not have a smartphone or a computer to use Zoom with video

Proposed Solutions:

1. It is a reasonable expectation that students enrolled in a technical school use technology and have a computer or a smart device.
2. Students with financial hardships or without access to technology required will be assisted by the school. Have them contact ACT for help.

How to handle large classes?

Proposed Solution:

We have a pool of TAs that can be leveraged to proctor exams. Large classes can be divided into smaller sections of 15-20 students with one TA proctoring each section.