

Open-book Examinations

What is an open-book exam?

In an open-book examination (OBE) students are permitted access to their notes and/or other resources. They can take place in-person or be conducted remotely. OBEs typically consist of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, or longer essay-style questions. **All questions should relate to learning outcomes.**

Open book questions should demand higher order cognitive processing from students (e.g. analysing, evaluating, synthesising and creating) rather than lower order cognitive processing (e.g. reproduction and description). **Questions should not rely on pure knowledge reproduction.**

Could existing exam questions for 2020 be used?

- In some cases it could be possible to re-purpose existing questions, maintaining the integrity of examiner-approved questions. Great care needs taken when adapting questions to ensure higher-order thinking is tested rather than recall (e.g. mitigating against a student's ability to google!).
- For essay style questions, open book questions could be broad in scope.
- If an open book exam is run using MCQs, effective use of randomising question order, using question pools and calculated formula questions could enable some existing questions to be used. Adaptive release might support the use of short answer questions.

Trinity does have the facilities to host synchronous (real-time) online exams. Minimising the number of such exams is desirable under current circumstances. Council-approved measures to enable this include:

1. Assigning some piece of work (an assignment or open-book exam) to be completed offline and submitted with a reasonable deadline in place of a final examination.
2. Scheduling real-time on-line examinations.
3. Scheduling in-person examinations. **This final option should be reserved only for those very exceptional cases where it is a requirement for professional or clinical accreditation and no alternative can be found.** We can of course not guarantee at all that any in-person examinations will be possible during the exam period, so every effort should be made to avoid these.

Can an open-book exam contribute to a student's degree classification?

Open book exams can contribute to a student's degree in the same way as a written examination would.

The key differences are:

- i) Place of examination (at home rather than in a hall);
- ii) Method of submission (typed submission via computer/VLE rather than completed with pen and paper);
- iii) Open use of resources and access to the web is allowed;
- iv) Invigilation is optional for open-book exams. There are currently schools in College using online open-book exams in final year (e.g. Pharmacy).

Major considerations

- How the questions are written.
- What the questions are examining (e.g. are you assessing the referencing accuracy in detail in an essay mode?).
- Whether the open-book exam is synchronous or non-synchronous (e.g. are they taking place 'live' or are students downloading/submitting assessments within a specific time window).
- Mitigating against plagiarism risk where open-book MCQs are involved (e.g. through adaptive release/timed question release).
- Mitigating against plagiarism of short answer/modified essay/long essay responses through TurnItIn submission.

Other considerations

Open book essay-style questions typically take longer to answer. It is recommended that students be required to answer fewer essay-style questions in the timeframe of an open book exam compared to a closed book exam, taking into account guidelines for module sizing (e.g. ECTS value). This does not apply to MCQs.

This document is not a statement of formal university policy, but a teaching and learning resource written from a pedagogical perspective. It is not intended to be prescriptive.

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