

Blackboard Tests – Best Practices for Instructors

Giving your tests and quizzes on Blackboard can be convenient and timesaving, both for yourself and your students. However, it is essential to understand the available options and their implications. This guide outlines some best practices to consider when giving a Blackboard Test.

Giving a long test? Break it up! Let's say your test is designed to take a few hours. Consider breaking it into smaller exams taken in sequence. This accomplishes a few things: It makes the test seem more approachable because it is in "bite-sized chunks," and it helps students avoid reaching the time-out lengths of the Blackboard server (3 hours) and their Internet Provider.

Long essay question? Use an Assignment. If your test has one or more long essays, think about using the Assignment tool instead. Essay questions force students away from the test for an extended time while they compose their answer, increasing the risk of a time-out problem. With an Assignment, students can simply submit their essay file(s) when they are ready. Though you lose the ability to enforce a time limit, you can batch download student Assignment submissions and use the in-line grading feature to markup and comment on submissions.

Random answer order. When deploying the test, you can, of course, display the questions to each student in random order. However, you may also choose to show the possible answers per question randomly. So, for example, each student may see a different combination of answers A, B, C, D for a multiple-choice question. When it comes time for the class to review the test, be sure to focus on the correct answer rather than the exact letter/number choice because it will be different for each student.

Before building a Test, make Question Pools. If you're concerned about cheating, sure you can randomize the order of the questions per student and even randomize the order in which answer choices appear, but an even mightier feature is a Question Pool. Once you create question pools, which can be organized by topic, difficulty, or chapter, for example, you can deploy a randomly chosen subset of questions from those pools for each student. This way, each student receives a unique test attempt that assesses the same comprehension.

Display all the questions at once. In the Test Options, you can choose to have all questions displayed on the same page or to present one question at a time with which you can allow or disallow students from going back to questions they already answered. If you display them all at once, though, there are fewer clicks for students, and it is easier for them to refer back to questions and re-check answers before submitting.

Do not use Force Completion! It may seem appealing to "force completion" of your Blackboard test. After all, you *do* want to force students to complete it in one sitting. However, Force Completion can cause more problems than it solves. With Force Completion on, students who, for example, lose internet connection, mistakenly close their browser, or hit the Back button in error can't re-enter and continue the test. The only recourse is for you to clear their test attempt and allow them to start over. To ensure students complete a test within a time limit, we recommend using a Timer with Auto-Submit on, which allows students to re-enter a test should they lose connectivity, but automatically submits it when the timer expires.

Auto-Submit Caution. If you add a Timer to a Test, you can then turn on Auto-Submit so that a student's answers are submitted as soon as the timer expires. The Timer becomes a real time limit, which may be one of those dream features, but a question of caution: Have you considered the student correspondence and requests for more time that may result? It may yet be a helpful tool, though an alternative may be setting up a point deduction policy for going overtime.

A large class with diverse needs? Use Test Availability Exceptions. Let's say you have one or more students approved for extended test-taking time or students observing a religious holiday who need to take a test late. Test Availability Exceptions allow you to set differing Test Options for specific students.

Give feedback when and how you want to. Blackboard offers a two-triggered approach to giving test feedback to your students. For example, upon their submission, you may choose for students to see their score per question, all the possible answers choices, the correct answers, their submitted answers, auto-feedback text from you, all of the above just once, or somewhere in between. Then, you can set up a secondary trigger to show more of the above options on a specific date or once you grade all submissions.

Check your Test for mistakes before making it available to students! Preview the test as a student before your students take it. It is a bad practice to change the landscape after some, but not all students have opened the test. If you need to make changes, wait until all students have taken the test, then inform your students, make the changes, and use the "Update and Regrade" feature in the test page which re-grades the test, taking into consideration the changes you made.

Consider running a practice test. Each semester, you may wish to offer your students a practice test. This is not to test knowledge, per se. Instead, this is so you can use similar settings that you would use in a real test to check whether your students can submit the test for your review successfully. It could take the form of a pre-test or an existing knowledge quiz at the beginning of the semester!

Prepare students. Ensure that students have ample notice and clear instructions for the test. Inform them of the test settings and policies such as whether the test is timed, possible penalties for working after time expires (if you are not using Auto-Submit), how many attempts they have, or whether questions will be automatically or manually graded. Also communicate how you will address technical interruptions in student's test-taking to ensure that if an issue comes up, you can handle it swiftly and fairly.

Access log. Once a student takes your Test, you can see an Access Log of when they saved answers to specific questions and the approximate time spent on each question. It can prove useful, for example, if a student lost connectivity for a period of time and then reports that to you as a reason for a retake or extension. It may also be useful for you to see what questions took the longest for a particular student, especially when you wish to suggest remediation for a topic or two.

Item Analysis. In addition to the Access Log, you can analyze the test questions themselves after students take the test. From either a Test or Pool, you can run an Item Analysis report which shows statistics on student's performance overall and on individual questions. This information can help you equitably re-grade a test or improve test questions for future classes.

Consider referring your students to [Blackboard Tests - Best Practices For Students \(PDF\)](#).