OPEN BOOK ONLINE EXAMS

What are Open book exams?

Open Book exams allow you to have resources and material available to consult during the exam. This might seem like an easy option since you won't need to remember as much as you would for a closed-book exam; however, because you can easily find factual information in your books or online there will be more emphasis on **synthesis of information**, **critical thinking, how you structure and express your ideas and use evidence to support them.** Understanding material is therefore important and should form a large part of your preparation. If you don't prepare and revise but rely instead on looking up information on the day of the exam, you will spend most of the time looking for information which will not give you sufficient time to submit a well-written answer.

"Question formats that generally translate well to an open-book context include:

• Scenario-based, application-based or case-based questions.

• Questions requiring students to apply their critical reasoning skills in response to a trigger scenario

• Questions requiring students to consider scenarios from a professional/ patient/alternative perspective e.g. an expert advisor or key decision maker).

• Questions replicating real-world conditions or drawing on legal or administrative issues, clinical or professional standards, industry regulations or ethical considerations.

• Questions requiring interpretation or application of qualitative or quantitative data, evidence or frameworks." (8)

Trinity's open book exams

Trinity has proposed two types of open book exams (8):

- **Take Home Offline Exams**

"Take-home exams are open-book exams that are given a longer deadline to submit the answers. These could have a deadline set in the same day or over a number of days." (8)

- **Online Exams**

"Real-time online exams refer to a timed exam offered remotely, where students interact continuously with the online platform. These are not invigilated and so are effectively open book."

What are the requirements? From your lecturer or course material, establish:

- What type of exam will it be (e.g. MCQ, short answer, essay)?
- How much time will you have to complete the exam?
- What topic areas will be covered?
- Do you need to reference and what style?
- How long the answers should be (e.g. is there strict word limit)?
- When and how the exam will be handed in (e.g. Turnitin)?

Revise as you normally would for your modules!

How should I prepare?

You still need to prepare for the exam. You should prepare for an open book exam just as you would a traditional exam. Having resources available may save you time in memorising information; however, you still need to know how to apply the information efficiently and correctly. (5)

Plan

- Start revising as you probably will not have long between the time you get the questions and when you have to submit your answers. Create a timetable for your revision.
- Try to identify topics or areas that will be assessed. Look at your module outline, module learning outcomes, past exam papers etc.

Focus on the important things

- What did the lecturer highlight in lectures?

- What do you need to be able to explain for each topic e.g. concepts, theories, processes etc. What is the best way to explain these? (7)

Be organised

Organise your notes and resources. You will need to be able to locate information quickly on the day so:

- Set up a system for ordering your notes e.g. by module, topic, lecture etc.

- Maybe use separate folders for each one.

- Organise your books/notes beforehand to help you locate key information quickly and easily [2].

Find and highlight information in advance. Some tips:

- Think of what information you'll need to have quick access to.

- Mark important information with sticky notes, paperclips or other way.

- List equations, key terms, and dates towards the beginning as this information can be tricky to recall and will likely show up on the exam.

- Mark pages using multicoloured sticky notes or highlighters. Use different colours to indicate different areas of focus or topics. You can flip through your book and easily spot the highlighted sections during the exam.

- Notes in the margin can help find important information or ideas.

- Use index cards for quotes, evidence, etc. that you want to include. Have references listed.

Practice active revision

Understand the material.

- Take notes on readings, lectures etc in your own words so that you clarify your thinking and hone your critical thinking skills [3].

- If you have any sample questions, practise answering them. [3] Ask questions of the material you're studying and write answers to them.

- Study groups can be good for discussing topics so that you think about them from different perspectives and get practise at expressing your ideas [3]. Even in the current situation it might still be possible to form online groups through Teams or other platforms.

- Revise by explaining out loud topics, concepts, issues, theories, etc.

- Use diagrams, charts, tables etc to organise the information to help you make sense of it and to establish connections.

Prepare for the day

Technology – advice from IT Services

- Test your access to any relevant online services or websites so that you won't have any password issues on the day.

- Pick a comfortable and quiet spot where you can use WiFi without any issues and that has access to an electrical plug (in the event you'll need to plug in your laptop).

- Setup well before the start of the online exam; if you are using a laptop, then ensure it is plugged into electrical power.

- Limit distractions on your device by turning off notifications or anything else that may disrupt your concentration during your exam.

- Make sure you can access the relevant online service or website and login. Be aware of the Blackboard browser support advice, or similar advice for the service you will be using.

- Test your webcam or mic to make sure they are working correctly. Consider the camera & mic on your smartphone as backup, if necessary.

- If you are taking an 'open books' exam, then consider using separate web browsers (e.g. Chrome, Firefox) for carrying out the exam and for carrying out research.

- If you are sharing WiFi in your house, then it would be worthwhile to ask others to restrict their use of online services that would require a high amount of WiFi while your exam is in progress.

- Establish a contingency plan.

Important -- What to do if you have an issues on the day

Document everything. If you encounter technical issues on the day of the exam or during the exam, then it is important to document the problems in detail. Take screenshots of errors, note the times of any incidents and record what actions you took. See

https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/working-remotely/students/ for more advice on issues with WiFi, using your phone to hotspot etc.

Other Distractions

Think of other possible sources of distractions such as pets, children, noise, or other.

Put a plan in place to minimise them as much as possible.

How to do well

For essay-style open book exams

You will be asked questions that require more explanation such as "Explain how X applies to Y situation" or "What implications does X have on Y current event?".[1] (5). You should:

- apply information to the specific question asked (7).

- demonstrate genuine understanding of the material.

- be able to interpret and think critically.

- present an organized and well written answer.

- reference correctly.

For MCQs

These could be timed exams and you will need to work as you would for a normal MCQ exam so time is a factor and you may not have time to look up information.

- Check if they are negatively marked or not.

- Work quickly through the problems.

- Answer the questions you know first.

- Mark those you don't know to come back to later.

- Read each question carefully and see if you can answer without looking at the choices.

- Then choose which answer you think is correct.

- Think about words like 'never, only, sometimes, which of these, which one' etc. as they can help guide your choice if you're unsure.

- Eliminate ones that you think are not correct to narrow the possibly correct options.

- When you've answered the ones you do know, go back to those you were unsure of.

- Keep an eye on the time!

What not to do

Do not collaborate with other students. The assessment is to examine your knowledge and getting assistance from others is not acceptable.

Do not copy and paste information from sources (7). Think critically about the information and write in your own words.

How do you take the exam?

Develop a good mental state:

- If you're feeling anxious, practise some relaxation exercises to calm down and help you perform better.

Use test taking strategies during the exam:

- Have all your notes to hand and any online resources available.

- Read all the instructions and guidelines carefully. As this might be your first time taking an open book or online exam you need to be very clear about the requirements and time that you have to complete the assessment in.

- Answer any questions you can without notes first. This will save you time by allowing you to get through certain questions without fumbling with your notes. This also gives you more time with the questions where you might have difficulty and need to consult your notes (5)

- If you're really struggling with a question, leave it and come back at the end of the test when you've had time to calm down and gather your thoughts. (5)

Review your answers, if there's time:

- Re-read your answers checking for grammar, spelling, referencing etc

- Re-phrase if you think it will improve your answer

- Check information that's easily mixed up, like dates, names, vocabulary, and equations.

- Try to improve weak answers in the remaining time. (5)

References

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