

# Take Home Assessment

## What is take home assessment?

- Take-home assessment require students to complete a task and submit their work within a strict time limit while working off-campus. Students are allowed to consult their own notes, course texts and other materials.
- Electronic routes (e.g. QM Plus) can be used across the assessment life-cycle – from electronic submission to electronic feedback and return of grades. The overall condition – students working unsupervised, with a time limit – can include various methods of assessment such as case studies, take home exams and projects.
- Assessment tasks, and time limits, can be devised to serve the course requirements. The timetabling of take-home assessments is the responsibility of the schools; therefore measures should be put in place to ensure that that students are not unduly burdened with a number of assessments at the same time.
- Scheduling take-home assessment requires an awareness of various factors, including requirements for accessible assessment; responsibilities at home; part-time employment, and a consideration of other submission deadlines.

## What are assessment conditions?

- It is useful to bear in mind that what is sometimes referred to as an assessment method is, in fact, only the condition in which the assessment takes place and thus only one of several choices to be made in assessment design.
- The term ‘take-home assessment’ mainly describes the conditions under which an assessment will take place – it does not describe the method by which the students will be assessed.
- Assessment conditions establish the parameters of assessment but within each of these assessment conditions a number of assessment methods may be used. Reflecting on the purpose, timing and assessment mix should help with decisions regarding assessment conditions.

## Advantages

- The time period, and the ability to access materials, may allow students to better demonstrate their knowledge, abilities and use of sources.
- If the course’s learning outcomes emphasis higher order cognitive skills (argument, application, comparison, critique etc.) and the use of sources, a take-home assessment may allow for a more authentic assessment of these.
- For some programmes, take-home assessments more closely resemble the work activities where students’ knowledge and skills will ultimately be used.
- Take home assessments can require fewer adjustments for individual students. For instance, take-home assessments can accommodate students who would need additional time in a traditional exam, and students can use their own computer equipment with support software.
- When submissions are word-processed and electronically submitted they are more legible than hand-written scripts, and can be marked by two academics simultaneously. With student permission, past answers can be anonymised and shared as exemplars.

### Challenges of take-home assessment

- Students need to provide their own workspace and computer equipment.
- Adequate support should be available (both technical, and for clarification in case of factual errors in questions etc.) for the duration of the take home assessment.
- Take-home assessments carry an increased risk of unauthorised collaboration between students.

### How students might experience take-home assessment

- Students may find a take-home assessment less stressful than a traditional exam (see Weber, McBee and Krebs, 1983) for various reasons (familiar location, access to materials, additional and more flexible time).
- Different formats and lengths of take-home assessment might confuse students; therefore each assessment task should be accompanied by clear guidance. The risk of unauthorised collaboration can affect student perceptions of fairness.
- If take-home assessments are being considered for an existing course it might be worthwhile consulting students on the course to gauge enthusiasm and to identify concerns or misconceptions.

### Reliability, validity, fairness and inclusivity of take-home-assessment

- Questions should be designed to demand higher order activities from students, and checked by colleagues for possible misinterpretation (and approved by the department and external examiners if required by departmental practice).
- Criteria should be established in advance and shared with students. Written instructions should be carefully prepared so as to minimise student stress and queries during the assessment period.
- These should include: word-count (setting a word-count can communicate expectations, help with parity and keep marking workload reasonable); preferred referencing systems, and the policy for late submissions.
- Formative assessment should help prepare students for the summative take-home assessment work, in terms of question type and assessment method.
- Take-home assessment can help reduce the need for specific adjustments for individual students.

### How to maintain and ensure rigour in take-home assessment

- Submissions should be double marked or moderated in accordance with departmental practice. The intended learning outcomes of a course are often written such that they reflect what students will have learned by the end of the course; however, as take-home assessments are timetabled by the department, students may be assessed during the term.
- Therefore the marker should be careful to assess them in relation to what they are expected to know at that particular point in time. Individual markers should take steps to avoid the problems which affect batch marking, such as the 'halo' effect where one or two positive characteristics of a student overly influence the marker.

### How to limit possible misconduct in take-home assessment

- Changing questions each year prevents previous cohorts of students from sharing their work.

- Requiring students to work with a recent source, or with specific course content and activities, limits opportunities for finding pre-existing content and tasks can be linked to a previous completed assessment to prove authorship (and to create a developmental feedback process).
- If students are not permitted to consult staff members during the assessment period, then it is important to check that all departmental staff, GTAs etc. are aware of this, and know both the assessment timing and (ideally) the questions. Online submission can include a text-matching tool such as Turnitin and students can be asked to submit a declaration of academic integrity (or similar) with their completed scripts. Teachers can also contact the EL-learning Unit (ELU) for further guidance if they are planning on setting a take-home assessment using technology.

### Accessible assessment in take-home assessment

- There are practical design issues to consider when using take-home assessments to assess students who are either physically impaired; have mental health difficulties; specific learning differences, or Autism Spectrum Condition.
- Wherever possible design issues should be addressed in the initial course design phase. In all cases the experiences of individual students can be diverse. You should always consult the student's inclusion plan as well as speaking to the student directly.

### Physically impaired students

- A physical impairment may not always be visible and may include, for example, students who experience severe pain after a prolonged amount of time writing or sitting. Where this is the case the student may need longer to complete the assignment.
- Teachers should also consult the student's inclusion plan to see if there are any comments regarding specific support.
- Students working at home are likely to have their own resources and structures for support but this should not be taken for granted.
- Students who have just moved into new accommodation may be awaiting the delivery/installation of equipment and it is a good idea to double-check with students that they will be able to complete the assessment.

### Students with specific learning differences (SpLD)

- When writing, students with SpLD can experience difficulties in sequencing and ordering information. Reading can be slow or they can find that they go over the same information several times without realising the error. Searching for the right word can also interrupt the 'flow' of the essay and result in poor expression.
- Strategies such as providing students with deadline reminders or breaking large chunks of work down into smaller pieces with associated deadlines will aid with time management. Providing students with the opportunity to have regular meetings with their teaching/support staff and the opportunity to submit essay/dissertation outlines can be useful.
- This will also help students to avoid producing 'wordy' assignments, which although containing the correct information, do not answer the questions, or veer from the topic as they have misread or overlooked key words in the question.
- Teachers should also ensure that they mark work for content and understanding rather than structure or standard written English, except where these may significantly impede meaning.

Providing reading lists in advance is good practice so all students can have the opportunity to start reading new material early.

### **Students with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)**

- The term 'Autism Spectrum Condition' (ASC) is used to describe the range of the autism spectrum, including Asperger syndrome. Word limits should be set but also explained to students with ASC.
- Teachers should also make explicit what a finished essay/report/dissertation should 'look' like. This should include the format as well as content, and what is expected from an academic piece of work of this kind.
- Students should have the opportunity to be able to discuss and demonstrate progress with their teacher/support staff. Similarly, if possible, students should have the opportunity to discuss drafts of their work.
- Teachers should be aware however that some students with ASC may lack the language required for articulating feelings and not think to ask for help, teachers should therefore be proactive in providing opportunities for students to ask for such help.
- It may be necessary to be explicit about what is reasonable when asking for help, being clear about when and where to meet, how long can be devoted to the meeting and listing the topics that will be covered in the meeting in writing.

### **Students with mental health difficulties**

- Students with mental health issues may need help to break down large projects into small chunks with associated deadlines. Students can be supported by encouraging them to draw up a timetable so that they can best organize their time. Where students have difficulty with sustained concentration it might also be helpful to encourage them to include time for rest breaks in this timetable.
- Where possible, and if appropriate, additional time should be allowed, as per normal course procedures to complete the written work. This is because the side effects of medication can include drowsiness and difficulty in concentration. Teachers should be aware that over the duration of writing a take-home assessment the student's mental health difficulties may fluctuate with 'good' and 'bad' periods.