

Using online multiple choice tests with social policy students

Gill Gillespie

This help sheet provides an introduction to using online multiple choice tests effectively for social policy students. It is based on the experience of using Blackboard although the recommendations are relevant for other Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). Users are recommended to seek assistance from their relevant IT service for specific applications.

Why use online assessment?

- A welcome and fun alternative to 'standard' exams.
- Speed and accuracy for student and teacher. In online multiple choice assessments immediate feedback is possible. This time-saving aspect is extremely useful, although it should be noted that users will need to adhere to appropriate institutional regulations with regard to feedback.
- Flexibility. Students can take an online test from any venue which allows them to access their VLE. The test can therefore be carried out in a relatively relaxed environment, reducing stress, which can be a major problem in the 'standard' exam conditions. Most VLEs allow the author to set times between which the assessment is available and highlight who is taking the assessment at any one time. This enables tutors to 'watch' when students are doing the test. Cheating may be minimised by presenting questions in random order whilst restricting time given to answer questions.
- Useful for students with varying learning needs. Tests are compatible with software needed by students with disabilities and if necessary, extra time can be allocated for groups of students with different learning needs.
- Students may have books and resources with them whilst conducting the test, providing the questions are challenging and specific enough to test the material needed.
- The performance data for each question can be obtained in a range of formats such as tables, graphs and statistics. This is useful for module and programme reviews as well as for quality assurance purposes.

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Online testing used as formative assessment

- Can provide students and tutors with on-going evaluation of their learning, knowledge and understanding as the module progresses.
- Can be positive and fun for students, encouraging learning.
- May also be completed individually or in small collaborative groups.

Online testing used as summative assessment

- When preparing questions check the assessment regulations with your institution, particularly where you might want to provide immediate feedback for students. Above Year 1 these may need to be approved by External Examiners. There may also be implications for large numbers of students undertaking simultaneous testing.
- Piloting the questions first is important to ensure that the intended outcomes can be achieved. If used for summative assessment that is part of the students' graded work, it is vital that questions are understood, at the appropriate level and a fair test of ability.

Creating an online test (based on Blackboard)



1. Log in to your local VLE

Select the 'Control Panel' option, then 'Test Manager' or equivalent, which is where you need to be to design, mark and amend tests.



2. Design the test

Click on 'Test Manager', then click on 'Add Test'. A 'Description' screen should appear. This text provides students with information such as:

- a. the dates and times when the test will be available.
- b. what part or percentage of the module assessment the test comprises.
- c. what to do if they encounter any difficulties. For example, if there is an interruption to the service whilst they are taking the test, you may want them to either email you or phone you for further advice and information.



3. Add instructions

On the next screen, usually entitled 'Instructions', it is useful to tell students:

- a. whether the questions will be presented in random order.
- b. the length of time the test will take and the approximate amount of time they should expect to spend answering each question (NB: for multiple choice ideally this should be 2-3 minutes).
- c. what happens after they have answered a question. For example, whether or not they will be provided with immediate feedback and if they will receive their final score at the end of the test.
- d. a word of encouragement such as 'good luck'!

▶ *Creating an online test (continued)*

▶ **4. Start entering questions**

It is essential to prepare your questions beforehand. The 'Test Manager' asks you for the number of marks you would like to allocate to each question. For example, you could mark the test out of 100, with 20 questions of five marks each.

▶ **5. What type of question?**

The 'Test Manager' asks you to define what type of question you want to ask students. For multiple choice questions click on 'Multiple Choice' and you will be asked how many choices you wish to give to students. Choose three or four to provide the students (and yourself!) with a reasonable variety of answers.

▶ **6. Entering choices**

Enter three or four choices you want the students to select from. You need to remember to tick the correct answer as requested, otherwise the system will default to the first answer. Once you've done this, there are two further boxes to fill in. The boxes concern the feedback you would like to offer the student. For incorrect answers try to provide an explanation of why the answer is incorrect, as well as referring them to the relevant part of the module materials, lectures or seminars.

▶ **7. Adding more questions**

Click on 'OK' and the system will ask you whether you want to add another question. Carry on until you have finished. This can take some time (allow an hour per 10 prepared questions) but, much like a small database, it is satisfying to complete!

How many questions should you add?

As mentioned in point 4 above, a 'standard' test may contain 20 questions with five marks each, making a total of 100 marks. This is slightly easier to deal with when weighting the final scores. There are other options, however, such as 50 questions with two marks each, although this could be argued to be slightly taxing, both on tutors and students! Ten questions with 10 marks each could equally be argued not to be taxing enough.

▶ **8. Final options**

After adding your questions, you have several options. For example, you can present the questions in random order. Checking this box ensures if people are taking the test together, they are unable to compare notes. A maximum time for the test may also be set. You should consider the implications of giving students too little or too much time to answer questions. Remember to pilot the test before administering the final assessment. Other options include determining the number of times that students are to undertake the test (for example, it is usual for summative examinations to only be offered once) and determining the type of feedback/answers you want to make available to them.

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▶ *Creating an online test (continued)*

▶ 9. Post the test

To do this you need to go to the 'Course Documents' section or equivalent, or any other section where you would like the test to appear for students. To post the test, click 'Add Test' and choose the test you've created. It will be invisible to students (but not to you) until the date you have identified for it to go live. Then you will need to go back into the test and tick 'Yes' under the 'Make the test available' option.

Results

After students have completed the test, go to the 'Gradebook' section of the VLE to see how your students have done. You will be able to see their progress by the icons on their tests (see picture). You may need to action some of the options to confirm marks or allow students to complete or re-take a test (for example, if there are genuine reasons for a technical interruption).



In Progress



No Information



Needs Grading



Grading Error



Completed



Denotes unavailable item

Range of online assessment formats available include:

- * Multiple choice questions
- * Fill in the blanks
- * Short answer free text
- * Free text box questions
- * Sequencing

Useful sources of further reading about online assessment:

- SWAP's themed page on assessment
www.swap.ac.uk/resources/themes/assessment.html
- JISC's 'Effective Practice with e-Assessment guide'
www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedagogy/assessment.aspx
- JISC Netskills unit on 'Designing online assessment'
www.netskills.ac.uk/content/products/accreditation/pdp/learn/units/ne05.html
- Scrolla – Scottish Centre for Research into On-line Learning and Assessment
www.scrolla.ac.uk
- TechDis's page on e-assessment
www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=9_1

For more details on the ELTE project visit the SWAP website
www.swap.ac.uk/projects
call 02380 599310 or email swapenquiries@soton.ac.uk

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