

Diversify and Protect Online Assessments

Best practice in assessment, necessitates variation, security, and shifts in methodology. For example, since using the modular design involves focused content, each module should have assessment before the student moves on to the next module. This is for your benefit as much as the students, especially as the course escalates in difficulty/complexity over time.

Module assessment should to some degree vary. Using multiple choice quizzes for every assessment may be not be wise considering the objectives of the course, plus it gets really boring very quickly. So mix up your assessment methods. Consider group work, research, papers, discussions, essay, and other methods.

Best practice also tells us to give students the opportunity to fail on occasion without points. This is called reinforcement. Self-tests are a good example—a set of 5 to 10 questions they can take prior to a high stake exam. They get a score, but it doesn't count against their grade.

Lastly, exam security is a must. Security starts the first day of instruction with a clearly defined set of rules in the syllabus. The penalties for failure to practice academic honesty should be clearly defined. Faculty can also highlight academic honesty prior to each exam. Despite the repetitive narration on honesty, faculty should also design their course exams to be more secure.

1. Use question pools and sets
2. Randomize questions
3. Use reasonable time limits
4. Limit access to one question at a time
5. Use automatic controls to close the test
6. Deny access to test results until the entire class as completed the exam
7. Be aware of the release settings used to score scores, questions missed, answers, etc., following the test period
8. Change the wording in several key questions each semester so that student responses are going to be recognizably different from the previous terms (and keep an eye on these answers)

Respondus Lockdown Browser is another partial solution to cheating during examination. However, it can be frustrating for students to use and with the availability of browsers on secondary devices, easily defeated.

In review, each module should have some type of assessment on content and learning objectives. Variation is highly recommended but create the variation using a common rhythm across the course. When feasible, reinforcement exercises should be used, as a minimum, before high stake exams. And always think about the security of your assessment tools.