



Open-book Examination

What is Open-book Examination?

Open-book examinations are similar to traditional examinations. The major difference is that in open-book examinations, students are allowed to bring their textbooks, notes or other reference materials into the examination situations. Teachers may also assign a standard set of teaching materials or may inform a standard set of examination questions to their students before the examination, so that students can prepare themselves in advance with the assigned resources.

Structure of Open-book Examination

There are various ways of arranging open-book examination in a course. The following approaches are some examples:

1. Students are allowed to bring or to have access to resources and references during an examination.
2. Questions are given to students prior to the examination and students use the aid of their prepared resources in the examination.
3. Another format can be setting the examination in a take-home format. Take-home questions can be handed out to students. These take-home questions can be essay questions, short answer questions and multiple choice questions. Students then have to return the examination paper within a specified period of time without getting help from other people.

Y	Declarative	CHARACTERISTICS
Y	Functioning	
	Take Time to Set	
Y	Take Time to Answer	
Y	Take Time to Correct	
	Take Time to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
Y	Can substitute with Computers	
Y	Passive	
	Active	
	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly Y =Yes

Advantages of Open-book Examination

- Less demanding on memory (regurgitation of memorized materials) because it is no longer necessary for students to cram a lot of facts, figures and numbers for open-book examination
- Provides a chance for students to acquire the knowledge during the preparation of gathering suitable learning materials rather than simply recalling it or rewriting it



- Enhances information retrieval skills of students through finding their efficient ways to get the needed information and data from books and various resources
- Enhances the comprehension and synthesizing skills of students because they need to use these skills to reduce the content of books and other studying materials into simple and handy notes for examination

Disadvantages of Open-book Examination

- Difficult to ensure that all students are equally equipped regarding the books they bring into the exam with them, because the stocks of library books may be limited and also some books may be expensive to students
- More desk space is needed for students during the examination because students often need lots of desk space for their textbooks, notes and other reference materials
- Sometimes students may spend too much time on finding out which parts of the books to look for answers instead of applying the knowledge, practical skills and reasoning ability
- A lot of students are unfamiliar to open-book examinations. They must be provided with clear procedures and rules.

How to design a good Open-book Examination Assessment?

1. Set questions that require students to do things with the information available to them, rather than to merely locate the correct information and then summarize or rewrite it
2. Make the actual questions straightforward and clear to understand. Students usually read the questions quickly because they often want to save their time for searching answers from textbooks and notes
3. Arrange a bigger venue to hold the examinations because students may need larger desks for examinations
4. Make sure there is enough time for students taking the examination. The length of open-book examination is usually longer than the traditional examination because students need extra time for searching information and data from their notes and textbooks.
5. Set up the appropriate marking criteria for open-book examinations as the aspects to be assessed in open-book examinations may be different from those in traditional examinations. For example, the assessment criteria may have to weigh more on the application of knowledge, comprehension skills and critical thinking skills, rather than recalling knowledge from textbooks and notes.

Marking Rubrics

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Comprehension:	Demonstrated complete knowledge of concepts or principles of the course; showed a thorough and excellent understanding in interpretation of the content from textbooks, notes and	Reflected most of the knowledge or main points of concepts or principles; showed a good understanding in interpretation of the content from textbooks, notes, and other learning materials	Showed partial knowledge of some points of the concepts or principles; showed a basic understanding in interpretation from textbooks, notes, and other learning materials	Showed minimal knowledge of concepts or principles; showed a poor understanding in interpretation from textbooks, notes, and other learning materials



	other learning materials			
Synthesis:	Demonstrated excellent ability to look at an issue from different dimensions, and generated innovative ideas apart from searching from textbooks	Showed good ability to investigate an issue from various dimensions; attempted to generate ideas apart from searching from textbooks	Showed fair ability to look at an issue from different dimensions, but mostly base on the resources from textbooks	Showed very limited ability to investigate an issue from different dimensions
Application:	Demonstrated competent ability to elaborate and reflect on what they have learned and applied it in the context of the questions	Attempted to elaborate, but mostly summed up what they have learned and applied it in the context of the questions	Showed a general description of what they found from textbooks; attempted to apply what they have learned in the context of questions	Showed a poor understanding of what they have learned and failed to apply it in the context of questions

Web Reference and Resources

- Race, P., Brown, S., & Smith, B. (2005). 500 Tips on assessment. Routledge Falmer Taylor & Francis Group: London and New York.
- Open-Book Exams, Cornell University
<https://lsc.cornell.edu/how-to-study/studying-for-and-taking-exams/open-book-exams/>

Tips for Students

- How to Prepare Yourself for Open-book Assessments, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
https://www4.comp.polyu.edu.hk/~xiaohuang/docs/Open_Book.pdf
- Preparing for Open-Book Exams, University of New South Wales
<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/preparing-open-book-exams>
- Preparing for Open Book Assessments, University College London
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/assessment-success-guide/preparing-open-book-assessments>

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