Best Practices for Blackboard Assessment Creating - Instructors

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Scheduling the Assessment

- **An open Blackboard assessment is not recommended when students are not allowed to reference outside materials or discuss material with other students, as it can be difficult to monitor or restrict student behavior.** If you wish to use Blackboard's automatic grading and assessment design features, you may find it more useful to schedule the use of a computer lab for students to take a Blackboard assessment where they can be monitored. Keep in mind that it may not be possible to provide alternate computers if any of those in the lab setting experience technical issues, so it is a good idea to bring a few printed a few copies of the assessment as a means to allow students to continue their assessment.
- **Avoid having a large number of students take a Blackboard assessment at the same time.** If too many students start taking an assessment at the same time, their connection to Blackboard may have inconsistent results; some students may receive a message saying they have already completed or submitted their assessment and an Instructor will need to manually reset the student's assessment Attempt. Large assessments can also cause technical issues if too many students submit their assessment at the same time, sometimes resulting in students needed to retake an assessment or only saving the automatic grade and not the student's answers.
- **If not acting in a proctored setting, use the Display After and Display Until options to establish a window during which different students can access the assessment.** It is recommended to make the assessment available for at least 24 hours if it is not intended to be taken during a specific period. Another popular method is to divide the class into sections and have each section take the assessment at a different time; similarly, if you are proctoring the assessment, you can have each section in a separate room.

Design and Set-Up of the Assessment

- **A good starting point is to familiarize yourself with the various test settings, question types and options available when creating assessments in Blackboard; understanding the options available and their implications will help to avoid confusion for you and your students**. For instance, do not select the option to *Hide Results for this Test Completely from Instructor*unless you genuinely will never want to see the students' entries or grades; turning this option off later will clear all previously entered values and students will need to retake the assessment. You should similarly make your students aware if you have selected the option to open the assessment in a New Browser Window, as students will need to disable pop-up blockers beforehand or they will be unable to take the assessment.

> More detailed information can be found in JHU's Tests and Surveys documentation

- **When filling out the contents of questions and answers in designing the assessment, it is recommended that you avoid cutting-and-pasting directly from Microsoft Word, LibreOffice, LaTeX, or other high-level text editors, as this can introduce unintended formatting that can confuse Blackboard.** Instead, copy the text content first to a lower-level text editor such as Notepad, Vim, or StickyNotes, which will remove the formatting characters. Similarly, avoid using non-alphanumeric characters such as #, /, *, %, &, +, -, or / when naming questions or assessments, as these can confuse Blackboard.
- **Once you have finished setting up an assessment, but prior to making it available to students, try taking the assessment yourself (or have your Teaching Assistants take it) to be sure the questions are functioning as intended, with the answers correctly configured, and to make sure all of the content displays properly in the browser.**This is especially important if the questions contain images or special characters, or make use of the equation editor.

> Information on Creating a Guest Account so you can take the assessment yourself.

- **For purposes of consistency and stability, all modification to assessment questions, including wording, answers, and point values, should be made before the assessment is deployed to students.**Once the assessment has been made available to students,

no further changes should be made to any part of it except in emergencies – such as a typo in the wording of a question that would change the intended answer. As much as possible, avoid making any changes to the:

- Name of the exam
- Number and content of questions
- Number and content of answers for any question
- Assessment settings

Attached files Changes to any of these settings could corrupt the test and invalidate existing attempts. Further, be aware that grading will show the updated content, not necessarily the content a student saw. You will need to compare the time of the change with the time the student submitted the assessment in order to determine which content the student was able to view when answering a question. It is better to create a new assessment for those students who have not yet taken the uncorrected assessment and transfer the answers and grades over.

> As of Blackboard Learn 9.1SP11, you can edit, delete, reorder, and change the point values of existing questions. see Blackboard's help on Editing Tests and Questions

Assessment Length, Time, and Attempt Limits

- **Blackboard recommends Instructors avoid creating assessments with more than 50 questions at a time, especially if those assessments also involve random sets of different types of questions across multiple pages.** When creating a large exam, it is important to remember that students typically complete objective questions (such as multiple-choice problems) quickly and take longer on subjective questions (such as essays); if a student experiences technical issues during an assessment it is typically on the subjective questions. Consider separating your planned assessment into multiple separate assessments, one for each question type, or in groups of 10 or 20 questions each, and scheduling access to them using the Adaptive Release feature; this will reduce the impact of any technical issues students may encounter and provide better Blackboard performance. If your assessment will consist primarily of essay questions, consider using the assignment submission function instead. You may also wish to recommend to your students to do their work in a separate program, such as Notepad, and then copy the answer into Blackboard to avoid losing their work if they lose their internet connection.
- **Force Completion is an assessment setting that requires students to complete an assessment in a single Blackboard session.**If you have enabled the Forced Completion setting on the test, the student will not be allowed to re-enter the assessment. The Instructor will have to clear the student's attempt and the student will have to retake the assessment. If the Force Completion setting is not enabled, the student will be able to re-enter the assessment and continue from where the student last used the Save feature. While this is seen to be useful in preventing students from taking unintended extra time on an assessment, it increases the potential for technical issues. When the Force Completion setting is enabled, any technical issue is magnified by the need for the student to regain access to the assessment. There are a large number of possible causes a student can lose access to an assessment Attempt, including:
  - Clicking any Blackboard option outside of the assessment
  - Double-clicking any buttons in the inside of the assessment
  - Resizing, moving, minimizing, or maximizing the browser window
  - Use of the mouse scroll wheel
  - Loss of internet connection (the primary cause for most students)
  - Loss of electrical power
  - Time-out of Blackboard Session
  - Errors when saving or submitting the assessment
- **If you need to limit the amount of time a student has available to work on the assessment, rather than enabling Force Completion, consider using the Set Timer option, which will create a timer that keeps track of how long each student spends on the assessment.** The count will start when a student first enters the assessment and will continue counting even if the student leaves the assessment or is temporarily removed from it by one of the above-listed possible causes; this allows a student to return to an assessment in the event of a minor technical issue while also not allowing the student to pause in the middle of an assessment for unauthorized review of the material. The Set Timer option also features an Auto-Submit setting which can be used to force an assessment to be submitted once time has run out. If Auto-Submit is not set to ON, the timer will notify the student that time has expired, but will still allow the student to continue; it will also notify the Instructor that time was exceeded, but not how far through the assessment the student was at the expiration time.
- **If you must use the Force Completion option, consider setting the allowed Attempts to 2.** This allows a student to return from a technical interruption without losing record of their previous work and, if a student completes an assessment more than once, you will be able to view the student's answers for both Attempts and select which grade to accept as all of the student's Attempts will be saved.
- **If the Blackboard server detects a lack of assessment activity for an extended period, often as little as 20 minutes, it may close a student's Blackboard session, which will remove them from the assessment.** Assessment activity to Blackboard means clicking on "Save", "Next Question", or "Submit" options. Auto-saving is a feature introduced recently in Blackboard to help prevent inactivity timeout. However, it does not apply to essay type questions.
- **The length of a Blackboard login session is 3 hours, so this should be considered the maximum time for a Blackboard assessment. It is also a good practice to give students a few extra minutes to account for unanticipated technical issues or slow load times.**

Once A Student has finished Taking an Assessment

- **During the set-up of the assessment, an Instructor can set differing amounts of feedback to be displayed to students once an**

assessment is submitted. As this feedback can be set to automatically include the correct answers to questions, you may wish to consider whether, based on the different times students will be taking an assessment, you wish to display all of this information to a student upon submission of an assessment. Keep in mind you can change the display to include all of the correct answers after all students have submitted the assessment so that students may go back and review at a later date.

- **Although Blackboard scores fill-in-the-blank question automatically, it is recommended to review the scores for these questions as some variants of an answer that an Instructor may find acceptable, such as with additional spaces, capitalization, or slight spelling differences, will be rejected by Blackboard.**

> As of Blackboard Learn 9.1SP11, fill-in-the-blank questions have improved their matching capability, see Blackboard's help on [Fill in the Blank Questions](#)

- **To ensure proper investigation of potential technical issues in submission of assessments, considering having the students take a screenshot of the Blackboard Submission Report, which displays after a student has successfully submitted an assessment. This Submission Report will include the names of the student, the assessment, the course, and the date and time of the assessment submission.** On submission of an assessment students will occasionally receive a "Submission in Progress" or "Test already submitted" message with no results displayed. This is referred to as a "Submission Lock" – for an automatically graded assessment, the grade may still be available in the gradebook, even though a student has not received notice of successful submission. Check in the Grade Center for the student's attempt to see if the test results were actually saved. If not, and you have required Force Completion, you will need to clear a student's assessment attempt, and the student will have to retake the assessment.

Suggestions for Preparing Students to Take an Assessment

- Recommend your students read the companion document to this one, [Best Practices for Blackboard Assessment Taking](#).
- Have a standing policy on how technical interruptions in student assessment taking will be addressed in order to ensure that if an issue comes up it can be handled swiftly and fairly – and post the policy on Blackboard to make sure students are aware of and can easily locate it in an emergency.
- Similarly, be sure to inform your students of your policy on the test options you have selected, such as whether assessments will be timed, the possible penalties for working after time has expired if you are not using the auto-submit option, how many attempts they will receive, and whether questions will be automatically or manually graded.
- Make sure students are aware of the timeline and procedures they will need to follow for Blackboard-based assessments, including the period during which the assessments will be available, where in the course site they will be located, the length and type (essays, multiple-choice, etc.) of the assessment, how many attempts they will have, whether outside materials will be allowed, and what to do if they encounter technical issues in attempting to take the assessment.
- Remind students that they should save their work after every question, and even during on longer types of questions. In some cases, such as multi-page assessments, Blackboard will automatically save work, but this cannot always be relied on.
- Schedule a demonstration of Blackboard Assessment taking during Lecture or Recitation. Don't assume that students, especially older or distance-learning students, will be familiar with how to take online assessments.
- The best way to prevent most technical issues with Blackboard assessments is to prepare a practice test with similar options settings and question styles, so that students can be sure they have correctly configured their computer and environment before taking the actual test. Have your students report any issues encountered during the practice assessment to you as one of the questions; you could even make the subject of the practice assessment the Best Practices for Blackboard Assessment Taking document!