

Best Practices for Testing in Blackboard

Giving your tests and quizzes on Blackboard can be convenient and time-saving, both for yourself and your students. However, it is essential to understand the available options and their implications. Here are some things to think about and some settings to consider when giving a Test on Blackboard.

- 1. Giving a long test? Break it up!** Let's say your test is designed to take a few hours. It may be a good idea to break the test up into several mini-tests. For you and the student, this accomplishes a few things: It makes the test seem more approachable if it is consumable in "bite-size chunks;" It also accounts for various time-out lengths both on the Blackboard server side (3 hours) and on the Internet provider side. Yes, answers are auto-saved periodically, but adding this layer of insurance is a good idea.
- 2. Long essay question? Perhaps use an Assignment.** If the test you're giving has one or more long essays, you may wish to post this question using the Assignment tool instead. Doing this does a couple of things for you and the student: you can batch download them from the Grade Center; and the student doesn't have to first type it up in Word and then copy and paste it into a Test, they simply submit their Word document. Though you lose the ability to enforce a time limit, the best part of using an Assignment is the use of in-line grading for markup and commenting back to the student.
- 3. Display all the questions at once.** In the Test Options, you can choose to have all questions displayed on the same page or present one question at a time with which you can allow or disallow students from going back to questions they already answered. If you display them all at once, there are fewer clicks for the student, and it becomes easier to refer back to previous questions and re-check their answers before they submit.
- 4. On the Test Options Page, do not use Force Completion!** Yes, it may seem appealing to "Force Completion" of your test on Blackboard. After all, you do want to *force* your students to complete a test in one sitting. That said when you enable Force Completion students who, for example, lose internet connection, mistakenly close their browser, or hit the Back button in error will not be able to reopen and continue the test and must contact you to reset it. Alternatively, you can use the Timer with the Auto Submit feature enabled in which Blackboard automatically submits the student's test when the timer ends.
- 5. Auto-Submit Caution!** If you add a Timer to a Test, you can then turn on Auto-Submit so that a student's answers are submitted as soon as the timer expires. The Timer becomes a real time limit, which may be one of those dream features, but a question of caution: Have you considered the student correspondence and requests for more time that may result? It may yet be a helpful tool, though an alternative may be setting up a point deduction policy for going overtime.
- 6. A large class with diverse needs? Use Test Availability Exceptions!** Let's say you have one or more students approved for extended test-taking time or someone who needs to either take the test early or late. Using Test Availability Exceptions on the Test Options page, you can set differing rules for different students. For example, you can set the time frame(s) during which the test is available amongst groups of students or individuals.

7. **Give feedback when and how *You* want to.** Near the bottom of the Test Options page, you can use a two-triggered approach to giving test feedback to your students. For example, upon their submission, you may choose for them to see their score per question, all the possible answers choices, the correct answers, their submitted answers, auto-feedback text from you, all of the above just once, or somewhere in between. Then, you can set up a secondary trigger to show more of the above on a specific date, after the due date, after the availability date, or once you grade all submissions.
8. **Random answer order.** When deploying the test, you can, of course, display the questions to each student in random order. However, you may also choose to show the possible answers per question randomly. So, for example, each student may see a different combination of answers A, B, C, D for a multiple-choice question. When it comes time for class review of the test, you should focus on the *correct answer* rather than the exact letter/number choice because that will be different for each student.
9. **Before building a Test, make Question Pools.** If you're concerned about cheating, sure you can randomize the order of the questions per student and even randomize the order in which answer choices appear, but an even mightier feature is a Question Pool. Once you generate sets of questions, which can be organized by topic, difficulty, or chapter, for example, you can deploy a randomly chosen subset of those questions for each student. This way each student would have a different test that could assess the same comprehension.
10. **Check your Test for mistakes before making it available to students!** Preview the test as a student before your students take it. It is a bad practice to change the landscape after some, but not all students have opened the test. If you need to make changes, wait until all students have taken the test, then inform your students, make the changes, and use the "Update and Regrade" feature in the test page which re-grades the test, taking into consideration the changes you made.
11. **Consider running a practice test.** Each semester, you may wish to offer your students a practice test. This is not to test knowledge, per se. Instead, this is so you can use similar settings that you would use in a real test and check whether your students can submit the test for your review successfully. It could take the form of a pre-test or an existing knowledge quiz at the beginning of the semester!
12. **Access log.** Once a student takes your Test, you can see an Access Log of when they saved answers to specific questions and the estimated time spent on each question. It can prove useful for cases such as a student having lost access to the internet for some period, and report that to you as a reason for a retake or an extension. It is also useful for you to see what questions took the longest for a particular student, especially when you wish to suggest remediation for a topic or two.
13. **Item Analysis.** In addition to the Access Log, it may be useful for you to analyze the test questions themselves after students take the test. From either a Test or Pool, you can run an Item Analysis report which shows statistics on student's performance overall and individual questions. This information can help you equitably re-grade a test or improve test questions for future classes.

Consider referring your students to the companion document: [Taking a Test on Blackboard](#).