

# Reviewing Your Syllabus for Effective Online Assessment: Quick Steps You Can Take Now to Enhance Options and Flexibility

**Why review your syllabus now?** The unexpected move to online teaching in spring 2020 prompted a dramatic increase in reports of suspected academic integrity violations during online exams. *Making a few modest changes to your syllabus now will give you time and options this semester to design assessments that fit your course learning objectives and promote academic integrity. Taking these steps now will reduce the risk of discovering and reporting cheating in your course – a time consuming and stressful experience for instructors and students alike.*

## What should your syllabus review include?

1. **The number of assessments & their grade value:** Using more frequent low-stakes assessment prompts students to keep up with work, reinforces learning, and reduces the temptation to cheat. Allowing students to drop the lowest homework, quiz, or exam grade they receive similarly reduces the stakes associated with each assessment.
2. **The timing of assessments:** Spreading assessments out over the course of the semester will give you the time you need to innovate as you design each assessment – and to evaluate and grade student work.
3. **Enough but not too much detail about the format of assessments:** Build in some flexibility for yourself while giving students sufficient information to understand how their work will be evaluated. For example, you might specify that there will be a short weekly assessment worth 10 points that will consist of a quiz in some weeks and a homework assignment in others. And you can provide a grade point breakdown for each type of assessment used in the course without locking yourself into the specific format you will use in exams if you do plan to give them.
4. **Plan to supply rubrics** so that students clearly see how they will be evaluated. Students can also be encouraged to evaluate their own performance. If your evaluation and their evaluation don't match, then you have the opportunity to explain why so that students can do better on their next attempt. This practice not only enhances integrity, but it also enhances student resilience.
5. **Turnitin syllabus language:** If you intend to use Turnitin to check for plagiarism, be sure to include recommended [Turnitin syllabus language and procedures](#). *Using Turnitin without following these procedures can invalidate suspected academic integrity violations.*
6. **Course-specific academic integrity language:** Spell out your [course-specific expectations for students](#), including what work is collaborative and what work must be performed individually. You may want to remind students that rules you set for in-person assessment also apply online and to warn them about the potential risks of using websites such as Chegg and Course Hero that charge fees or require uploading of course materials in exchange for access to their content. A warning about these types of websites is included the CLASS flier "[What Students Need to Know About Academic Integrity.](#)"
7. **Consider [this research from Inside Higher Ed](#).** Key takeaway—solid teaching increases academic integrity. (Thanks to Dr. Peter Vanable, Dean, Graduate School, for pointing out this resource.)

## What should I keep in mind as I review my syllabus with an eye to assessment?

The strategies below are recommended by the [Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence](#) (CTLE) and the [Center for Learning and Student Success](#) (CLASS), which oversees academic integrity policy and case administration. Additional specific ideas are available on the Academic Continuity Resources page on [Alternatives to Traditional Exams](#) in Answers and on the CLASS website pages devoted to [Promoting Academic Integrity in the Classroom](#) and [Syllabus Recommendations](#).

## Syllabus Checklist for Traditional Exams and Other Assessment Alternatives:

1. **Where possible, replace traditional exams with assessments that require students to explain their thinking and learning**, for example, creating a concept map explaining connections across course content from multiple weeks or units or making a video explaining how they arrived at the solution to a problem.
2. **When you do use traditional exams,**
  - a. **Ask students to show all the steps they took to develop their answer or to explain how they arrived at their answer.** Letting students know they will have to show and explain their thinking encourages them to learn more deeply while also giving you better tools to evaluate their work and ensure it is their own. You do not need to grade every part of each answer. You can grade all, some or none of these steps and explanations. You can also use them after an exam to evaluate how - and how well - students are meeting course learning objectives or to confirm that students did their own work.
  - b. **Make the exam specific to your course, course content and teaching style by requiring students to describe and reflect upon key arguments you made in lecture or theories or constructs central to specific readings.**
  - c. **Design and administer quizzes and exams in Blackboard or another platform that allows instructors to implement strategies that reduce the risk of cheating**, such as a required 15-minute exam sign-in window, random question or answer order, and making only one question visible at a time.
  - d. **Limit exam length time** so that students will not have enough time to complete the exam successfully if they need to consult outside sources or look up answers to most questions. Use Blackboard functionality allowing students with accommodations to receive extra time confidentially rather than allowing all students multiple hours or days to complete exams.