

How to prepare yourself for open-book assessments

This document is specifically written for assisting students to prepare for open-book assessments. It aims to provide you with an overview of what an open-book assessment is and practical tips on how you should prepare yourself for taking open-book assessments.

What is an open-book assessment?

Open-book assessments...

- allow you to **access different learning resources and reference materials** (e.g., self-study notes, course readings, research articles, or webpages) when answering the questions
- are **less about memorising** things and recalling them, but **more about demonstrating higher-order thinking skills**, such as application of critical reasoning skills in response to a problem-based or real-life scenario constructed from what you have learnt in the subject
- could be **more challenging** than conventional examinations as open-book assessments often place a stronger emphasis on higher-order abilities such as application, evaluation, and analysis
- tend to be **less predictable** and less reference can be obtained from past exam papers

To give you a feel, here are some common examples of open-book assessments:

- **In-class assessment** that allows you to access relevant resources they have prepared in advance when answering the question within a relatively short duration, e.g., 2-3 hours
- **Online assessment** that usually comes with a fixed start time when the assessment questions are released online and require a fixed end time for you to submit the answers online
- **Take-home assignment** that is similar to other continuous assessment tasks and allows you to conduct independent inquiry on the assessment questions and complete your answers within an extended period, ranging from several days to several weeks, at a place of your own choice

In short, open-book assessments require you to:

- understand the materials learnt thoroughly rather than just recalling or summarising them
- familiarize yourself with the knowledge and concepts and apply them in different contexts
- be ready to locate critical contents effectively during the assessment
- prepare beforehand in terms of study and related skills, such as revision planning, notetaking

How should I prepare for open-book assessments?

To prepare for open-book assessments, below are some general tips on planning ahead, note-taking, final preparations, answering techniques; and some that are more specific to online open-book assessments, namely, time management, and online work and submission.

General Tips

Planning ahead

- ✓ Review the subject syllabus and **check the learning outcomes**
- ✓ **Be prepared to study the concepts in the subject** and do not assume all answers can be found easily
- ✓ **Study and clarify the rubric, if available** and the grading criteria
- ✓ **Beware of and avoid common errors**

Answering techniques

- ✓ **Look for hints and clue-words** in the questions (e.g., compare, analyse, interpret, evaluate, discuss, prove, and justify)
- ✓ **Check if there is a page range or word limit** for the answers to know the expected efforts
- ✓ **Focus on essential notes**, otherwise it is hard to locate useful information
- ✓ **Paraphrase or summarise** instead of copying paragraphs directly from your reference materials

Time management

- ✓ Always **be aware of how much time you have left** and estimate how long you should spend on each question
- ✓ **Consider attempting questions that you can answer without notes first** to save time for the questions for which you need to search your notes
- ✓ **Aim for concise answers** with adequate supporting evidence
- ✓ **Allow time for reviewing your answers** before submission

Online submission

- ✓ **Check how you should submit your work**, e.g., via email or the learning management system
- ✓ Avoid uploading your answers in the last minute in case there are technical problems
- ✓ **Perform anti-plagiarism check**, e.g., via Turnitin, before submission, if required

Note-taking

- ✓ **Adopt a systematic approach and annotations** for note-taking
- ✓ Make sure **your notes** are easy to read
- ✓ Carefully **select your resources and organise your notes** to help you find information quickly
- ✓ Use post-it notes and highlighters to mark useful information
- ✓ **Include only essential information**

Final preparations

- ✓ **Keep your study notes in a safe place** and have them ready for the assessment
- ✓ Set up a place without distractions
- ✓ **Avoid studying overnight or until the last minute** before the assessment
- ✓ **Make sure the tools** you need (e.g., strong and stable internet connection, battery life, webcam, stationery) work properly

Specific Tips

Online work

- ✓ Check your computer and make sure the hardware and software work properly
- ✓ **Keep a hard copy of your study notes** so that you can refer to them easily while typing your answers
- ✓ Get connected to the internet before the assessment starts
- ✓ **Keep saving the drafts of your work** to avoid accidental loss
- ✓ Contact your instructor or tutor immediately if you encounter any technical problems