

>> Preparing for Online Exams



Available online at: <https://ufv.ca/asc/student-resources/>

Online learning is different from classroom-based learning. It changes the way professors teach and assess course content and requires students to adapt the way they learn and study. Read the following tips to help you prepare for your online exams.

Plan Ahead

Online learning demands more individual responsibility from students. Be proactive in planning ahead and make sure that you have identified important deadlines well in advance.

- ✓ Carefully read the course outline to understand what you “need to know.”
- ✓ Start studying at least one week before the exam.
- ✓ Meet with an [Academic Success Centre](#) peer tutor to help you create a study plan.

Get Tech Ready

Of all of the things you have to worry about on exam day, you don’t want technology to be one of them! At least one week before the exam, make sure that you have a reliable technology set-up and a plan for troubleshooting issues on the day of the exam.

- ✓ Check ahead of time that the internet signal and connectivity are reliable in your exam location.
- ✓ Install any specific applications or a particular web browser that you might need.
- ✓ Visit UFV’s online toolkit at ufv.ca/online/toolkit for tips on how to set up your computer for optimal online learning. Use the [Online Learning System Checklist](#) to check your set up.
- ✓ Ask your professor what you should do if you experience technical glitches during the exam.

Study Strategies

Online exam formats might be different from what you’re used to with classroom-based exams. Know ahead of time exactly what to expect from the exam format. Questions to consider include: Is the exam open-book? Will each question be timed? Will you be able to skip and return to questions? Can you change an answer after you have submitted it? Knowing these details will help you to adapt your study plan to match the format of your exam and will reduce your stress during the exam.

Open-Book Exams

An open book exam might seem easy because you’ll have access to all of the information you need at your finger tips. Don’t relax just yet! With an open-book exam, you still need to know the

course content and prepare for the types of questions your professor is likely to ask. Keep in mind that an open-book exam is more likely to focus on your ability to analyze and apply course content rather than your ability to remember and repeat course content.

- ✓ Create practice exam questions as a way to study. Practice answering these questions without referring to your course material; working with course content from memory will deepen your understanding and help your brain encode relevant information. The less you need to refer to course material during the exam, the more time you will have for preparing and writing your exam answers.
- ✓ Organize your materials. Create your own study guide and notes to use during the exam. The process of compiling this information will help consolidate your learning. During the exam, you'll have easy access to information which will save you time. For example, if you expect to have to compare and contrast two theories, try creating your own table or a Venn diagram that summarizes key similarities and differences. Be sure to include references to page numbers in case you need to look something up in more detail during the exam.

Timed Exams

There are a few different formats of online timed exams. Some timed exams are open to students over a set period of hours or days, and the clock starts once you begin the exam. Other exams may be given live during class time in Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate. In some cases, instructors may time individual questions during exams and ask that students keep their webcams on in order to maintain academic integrity.

- ✓ Study to match the exam format. Develop practice exam questions and replicate the exam conditions for yourself during your study time. For example, if the exam has individually timed questions, try to complete practice questions within the time limit. If you feel uncomfortable completing an exam with the camera on, try studying in front of your camera or have a Zoom study session with a classmate to get used to the feeling.
- ✓ Take steps towards effectively managing exam stress. Read the advice provided in the following section.

Writing the Exam

When writing an exam at home, you may not have the same kind of controlled environment that you do in the classroom. Set yourself up for success in your remote study location:

- ✓ Eliminate distractions, such as your cell phone, from your study area and make sure the people you live with know that you will be writing an exam and need quiet, uninterrupted time to focus.
- ✓ Be in your designated space at least 15 minutes before the exam start time. Gather any materials that you need.
- ✓ Keep your exam browser open at all times. Closing the browser might delete unsaved answers and you may even be denied access to re-enter the exam.
- ✓ Save your answers regularly if the system does not save them automatically.

Time Management

Timed exams might show a timer at the top of the webpage. If there is no timer, write down the time that you started and keep an eye on the clock. Read all instructions carefully. If the exam format allows, scan exam questions so you can budget your time accordingly and give yourself time at the end for review.

If you are writing an exam where each individual question is timed, be sure that you still take the time to read each question carefully. Pick out the key words that relate to course content and start planning your answer from there. Avoid the urge to jump right in to answer the question – this can cause you to waste time going in the wrong direction or to miss important parts of the question.

Answering Questions

Read each question at least twice, the first time to get a general understanding and the additional times to make sure you catch any extra details. Identify all parts of the question prompt and do your best to address each part in your answer.

For short answer and essay style questions, the structure of your answer is important. Demonstrate your understanding of the material in a well-organized and grammatically correct response that can be easily understand by your professor. Spend some time before you start writing to gather your thoughts; it may be helpful to create a rough outline or bullet list of the key points you want to include.

Manage Exam Stress

Exams can be stressful, and writing an exam online may feel even more stressful. One way to reduce stress is to be well prepared – take the time to study and prepare yourself for the exam format so you feel more confident going into the exam. Technology can be another source of stress, so be sure that you have taken the steps to be tech-ready for your exam.

Breathing will also help you reduce stress and regroup when you feel overwhelmed. One breathing technique to try is box breathing: inhale for four seconds, hold that inhalation for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, and hold that exhalation for four seconds. Repeat this technique as many times as you need to feel centred. It's a good idea to use a breathing technique at the start of an exam to reduce stress and improve focus and during the exam when you encounter a challenging question. If you have time at the end of the exam, do another round of controlled breathing before checking over your answers.

In a timed exam, you might not feel like you have the time to practice breathing, but be assured that the benefits of being clear-headed and centred will outweigh the few seconds of time you spend focusing on your breath.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity means being honest, fair, and responsible in your academic work. Be sure that you understand ahead of time what is and is not permitted to do during your exam. The temptation to cheat may be greater when writing an exam from home, but it just isn't worth it! Educate yourself on the consequences of cheating and take steps to eliminate distractions and temptations, such as leaving your phone in a different room. Know [UFV's Student Academic Misconduct Policy 70](#). For more information on academic integrity visit, ufv.ca/aim or email aim@ufv.ca.

Additional Resources

Preparing an Exam Prep Inventory (Simon Fraser University)

<https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slcl/learning/exam-prep/exam-preparation-inventory>

Resources on Successfully Taking Different Types of Exams (Simon Fraser University)

<https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slcl/learning/exam-types>

How to Succeed on University Tests and Exams (University of Waterloo)

<https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/resources/tests-and-exams>

Managing Open Book Exams (Kwantlen Polytechnic University)

https://media.kpu.ca/playlist/dedicated/88033/0_el1rt9jh/0_ls7plI4x

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