

Faculty Matters:
Fall 2021 Online Examination Options and Alternatives



This May 3, 2021 session provided an opportunity to explore and discuss the different types of online assessments available for courses in Fall 2021 and how they compare to in-person examinations. Particular attention was given to preserving academic integrity in timed online assessments.

Below, Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) offers answers to the many questions attendees posed. Still have questions? Contact tls@mcgill.ca.

A. In-person or online

1. Can instructors who prefer to organize synchronous assessments assume that all students will be in Montreal for the Fall semester?

Yes, McGill students are expected to be in Montreal in the Fall.

2. Why are online assessments necessary in Fall 2021 if the plan is for students to be on campus?

With McGill's Fall 2021 "[realistic scenario](#)" in mind and the likely need for physical distancing, there may not be enough space available to hold all assessments in-person. As such, McGill must consider options for online assessments as well.

3. Will McGill rent off-campus facilities to hold in-person exams?

McGill will be setting up "assessment hubs" for in-person assessments using University space and perhaps rental spaces.

4. Isn't it early to be assuming distancing requirements for December 2021, which is eight months away?

For planning purposes, McGill is working with five possible scenarios for teaching and learning activities in Fall 2021. Read [more](#). Decisions about distancing will be made in accordance with provincial government health directives as they are announced.

5. Will it be possible to have synchronous, online exams held remotely within the typical exam / midterm periods (as opposed to in-class time)?

Yes, it will be possible to hold synchronous exams online, both as midterms and as finals during the final exam period.

B. Planning and implementation of all assessments

1. TLS recommends that instructors employ frequent, low-stakes assessments to facilitate student learning in a blended context. This approach can create stressful situations for students as they experience several assignments across multiple class. Does TLS have suggestions for balancing and coordinating these assessments?

Providing students with multiple practice and feedback opportunities is an important pedagogical practice in all learning environments. Such practice opportunities can be low-stakes (i.e., worth a small portion of students' final grade) or no stakes (i.e., have no grade value). In addition, feedback can be given by the instructor and/or peers; students can also do self-assessment.

Too many low-stakes assessments may increase workload and stress for students and contribute to fatigue related to too many requirements for course activities, especially for students taking full course loads. It is therefore recommended that instructors assign no more than one assessment in a given week, unless frequent assessments are linked to critical competencies or learning outcomes.

It is also recommended, where possible, that instructors consult colleagues teaching within the same programme so that they can coordinate assessments.

[Read more](#) about implementing low-stakes assessments.

2. Will there be provision of standardized times of assessments (e.g., some degree of coordination of things like midterms) so that students aren't overwhelmed with continuous assessment across their different courses?

Midterms will continue to be scheduled locally. It is recommended that coordination occur within units to ensure that students aren't overwhelmed with continuous assessments. The [Exam Office](#) will continue to schedule all final exams, be they in-person or online.

C. Planning and implementation of online assessments

1. Is it possible for Fall 2021 online assessments to have smaller windows of availability than the 48- and 72-hour exam windows of the past year?

Yes. Since students will be expected to be in Montreal, instructors will not have to accommodate time zone differences, and therefore, smaller windows of availability for online assessments (including finals) are possible.

2. How can instructors plan online assessments such that students do not feel pressured to use the entire time allowed, for example, if students are given extra time for online assessments?

This should not be an issue in Fall 2021 as instructors may now plan synchronous assessments. In other words, all students complete an assessment at the same time within a limited period (e.g., three hours). In this situation, the time limit is subject to the instructor's discretion. For online assessments, TLS recommends that instructors add a certain amount of time to allow for issues with electronic submission.

3. It is time-consuming to create good online exams that prevent academic dishonesty, and some students are still able to circumvent these efforts. How can instructors best address the increased time requirements of online assessments?

There isn't one "best" way to address the planning and implementation of online assessments. Approaches to online assessments will vary depending on course contexts and learning outcomes. We offer two examples, along with strategies for addressing time concerns.

- a. Essays/papers are the chosen assessment strategy. To promote academic integrity, students are asked to submit components of their writing in stages. See [pp. 17-20](#) of this TLS resource document for an example. Instructors concerned about the time involved in setting up a multi-stage writing assignment can save time by following the example and/or [consulting TLS](#) or other colleagues for ideas and support.
- b. Multiple-choice quizzes are the chosen assessment strategy. To promote academic integrity, the quizzes should have randomized questions within question sections in myCourses. The order of answers for each question can also be randomized. Instructors concerned about the time it will take them to figure out how to set up quizzes in myCourses can [read instructions in advance](#); if possible, ask a TA (or Remote Learning Assistant [RLA] if available in your Faculty) to set up quizzes; or seek [support from TLS](#).

4. How can instructors quickly grant students Special Access to online assessments?

Instructors can grant Special Access to students to assignments and quizzes in myCourses. [Read more](#) and follow these [instructions](#).

5. How can instructors annotate student submissions in the Assignments and Quizzes tools?

Instructors can annotate student submissions in the Assignments tool using the [annotation feature \(additional information\)](#). Instructors can [add feedback](#) per question directly in the Quizzes tool.

6. Can Question Pools for quizzes from a previous year be transferred to an upcoming semester?

Yes, question pools can be [imported from the question library](#).

7. Can we force students to upload voice comments on the myCourses Quizzes tool or is this considered an infringement on their privacy (similar to not being able to force students to turn on their cameras)?

Voice is not considered the same as video in terms of privacy protection. Instructors can require voice submissions if a learning outcome is deemed best assessed with a voice assignment. Students who have particular challenges with voice submissions should signal these challenges to the instructor early to see if a suitable alternative can be found.

8. When should you start building a Question Library for quizzes?

Start building a question library as soon as you begin creating pools of questions.

9. Will McGill provide the resources and funding (e.g., TA hours) to adequately support online assessments?

Instructors are encouraged to speak with their unit heads or Deans to find out about available resources, such as TAs.

D. Academic Integrity

1. Is there research/data that suggests academic integrity is more of an issue online vs. in-person?

While there is some research literature that suggests there is no increase in cheating in online courses, differences in context and populations make it difficult to generalize. Breaches of academic integrity are different in the online context; for example, there may be more use of unauthorized third-party sites and sharing of answers. (The Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary offers more details and references. Read [more](#).) Assessments designed with these differences in mind can reduce the possibility of students engaging in these behaviours. The best defence against academic integrity breaches is sound assessment design—for online and in-person assessments.

2. Will McGill and TLS support more online proctoring tools in Fall 2021, such as webcam monitoring software?

McGill does not support webcam monitoring software because instructors cannot require students to turn on their cameras for equity and privacy reasons. As such, online proctoring is not allowed without special permission. Read [more](#).

3. Is it possible to limit students' internet access during online assessments?

Instructors can use [Respondus Lockdown Browser](#) to prevent students from accessing the internet while doing an online assessment. Respondus Lockdown Browser is an appropriate tool for **in-person*** assessments that are completed on a desktop or laptop computer. It locks a student's computer into a quiz on myCourses such that students cannot navigate away from the quiz, open other browsers, or access files on their computer. However, students who have devices (e.g., a phone or tablet) in addition to their computer are still able to access the internet on that other device.

*Instructors cannot control internet access when students are doing assessments off-site.

4. How can I determine if my course material is on Chegg? How do I remove it?

Instructors can look for their course material on Chegg via a Google search. Type distinct elements of course material into the Google search bar and add "site:chegg.com". Fill in Chegg's [Copyright Takedown Request](#) form if you find your material on Chegg and would like it taken down.

E. Text-matching Software: Urkund/Ouriginal

1. How can instructors evaluate text-matching results to identify potential academic dishonesty?

Urkund/Ouriginal reports text similarities. Instructors must analyze reports to ascertain if the text matches suggest academic dishonesty. If academic dishonesty is suspected, instructors should contact the [Disciplinary Officer](#) for their unit. Each matched source needs to be evaluated separately. Read TLS' [Urkund/Ouriginal Documentation for Instructors](#) and [Text-Matching to Teach Students What Constitutes Plagiarism and How to Avoid It](#).

2. Will text-matching software be integrated into myCourses Quizzes, in addition to the Assignments tool?

Currently, the text-matching software is only integrated within the Assignments tool in myCourses. McGill has asked the vendor to integrate text-matching with the Quizzes tool. No date for integration is yet available.

3. Does Urkund/Ouriginal work with non-English submissions?

Urkund/Ouriginal's cross-language text-matching feature detects text submitted in English, French, Swedish, German, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, and Danish, as well as special characters.

4. Can instructors upload their own material to Urkund/Ouriginal or student submissions from previous years?

Yes, instructors may upload their own material to Urkund/Ouriginal. However, they can not submit student work from previous years.

5. Can Urkund/Ouriginal be used to examine a graduate thesis or dissertation?

Yes, students can submit theses and dissertations through the myCourses Assignments tool.