

Blackboard Tests

Recommended Deployment Options

Deployment Settings

Things switched from defaults:

- **Show description & instructions before test.** This is good UI hygiene.
- **Make available to students.** We'll set restrictions via Availability, below.
- **Set timer as desired; auto-submit to ON.** Without this latter switch, students are allowed to go over time arbitrarily; there's a flag in the Grading Center, but then instructors must handle/decide on those manually case-by-case.¹
- **Availability window to 15 minutes at start of class.** Note that students can start near the end of the Availability window and still get full time on the Timer after that. Make sure to set both start & end time: setting one without the other confuses Blackboard and causes errors.²
- **Set a password.** This forces a student to be present at the testing site, and not take it elsewhere while the test is available. Randomly choose a word, e.g., from Diceware.³
- **Availability exceptions: extra time for Accessibility students.** Fill in extra time as per student allowance on official paperwork (likely 1.5 or 2 times normal).
- **Show results, on specific date (next day): Score, correct, submitted, feedback.** Other options for when to release results are deficient in various ways. For final exams, just set to “----Choose----” with all checkboxes blank (feedback by request only).⁴
- **Test Presentation: One at a Time.** We're doing this for extra test-security purposes (makes it harder for students to share or screenshot the test in general). We need to inform them about the navigation bar in advance. For tests where questions are *all of the same type*, we can also set **Randomize Questions**.⁵

Settings Not in Use

Here are settings that we do **not** switch from the default, with reasons why:

- **Open test in new window.** I've seen students get lost trying to manage two windows open at once (e.g., accidentally click on the full-screen original and it obscures the popped-up new window for the test). Also, an active pop-up blocker will prevent the test from appearing.
- **Add a new announcement for this test.** Let's not clutter our announcements with too many items. Students should be aware of the test from prior scheduling.
- **Multiple Attempts.** In most cases this would be too generous, in my opinion.
- **Force Completion.** This prevents students from exiting & re-entering the test. The main effect is that in cases of technical disruption, students will be locked out of the test, and the instructor will need to cycle with them live or later, giving second attempts or makeups (a big time sink). Note that if we set a Timer, it still ticks down even when a student is disconnected, so there is no advantage to using Force Completion (tested 2020-05-17).
- **Due Date.** This is extraneous when we're using the Availability Date to limit access.
- **Test Presentation: Prohibit Backtracking.** This is not how normal paper tests work. I would want to encourage the idea of double-checking one's work.
- **Randomize Questions.** If your test is composed of all questions of the same type (e.g., all multiple-choice), then feel free to use this setting. On the other hand, if you have a variety of question types, and want them to remain grouped together by type, then a better idea is to use the "Create Random Block" option in creating the test, and not use this option in deployment.

Practice Tests

I give a single “practice test” before the first real test so students can become familiar with the interface. For this I modify the following settings:

- **Multiple attempts ON; allow unlimited attempts.** No reason not to allow this.
- **Availability several days.** Consider the week before the first real test.
- **Hide results completely from instructor.** This may encourage students to more freely test how the interface works.
- **Show results after submission.** So students can see the conclusion of the whole process.

1. Regarding time: In Spring 2020, the first COVID online term, to err on the side of generosity, I set midterm tests to 2 hours (double normal time), and the final exam to 3 hours (+50% normal). In later online terms I set the timer for midterm tests to 90 minutes, and the final exam to 150 minutes (+30 minutes each). The 90 minutes for midterms reflected the average time taken in Spring 2020 (I considered trying to abbreviate tests so they would fit in the one hour scheduled block, but saw no way to do that – e.g., the programming is longer granted we need full test drivers and testing, plus other possible technical glitches or loading time). Post-COVID, with in-person tests, I set the times to match the actual schedule blocks (1 and 2 hours respectively).
2. The 15 minute start window matches the cover of the long-used KCC exam booklets; and is a compromise for in-person testing where another class may be starting 10 minutes after the end of ours. Contrast: In Spring 2020 I set a very liberal (6 hour) availability window. Later I tried to be tighter for test security purposes; consensus seems to be that very long online availability and timers spawn a large amount of cheating (possibly among 25-50% of students; [see here](#)); so was setting availability to 20 minutes long to play nice with KCC schedule blocks (start and end on 10-minute increments). With in-person testing I've reduced it back to the classic 15 minute availability.
3. Passwords were not used in the fully-online context, where it would generally only create extra work in the process, to create and communicate them. A corner case would be when extending availability for a particular student in case of a makeup, a student who accidentally shut down the browser with time left but after availability window, etc.
4. Dates entered here will be updated in future semesters via the Date Management tool. Other options are deficient: “After Submission” would let students finishing early to easily send full answers to other students. “After Due Date” is not applicable, because we're not using due dates. “After attempts are graded” doesn't work if any students fail to submit the test (Blackboard suggests filling in zeroes for such students, but this corrupts the data, so I don't recommend it; see link below.)

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Tests_Pools_Surveys/Test_and_Survey_Options

Regarding final score immediate visibility: G.N. has suggested hiding the grade column in the grade center, then returning and making it visible with results afterward, but this creates an extra workflow step for the instructor, so I don't recommend it.

5. Up to Spring 2020 I did NOT use this feature, under the argument that this is not how normal paper tests work, and creates an additional UI road bump that can confuse students (e.g.: I've seen numerous students in M2 finals accidentally jump to the last question and submit the test in an incomplete state; and be unable to see how to move back to earlier questions to double-check or fill-in). As of Fall 2020, it seems consensus opinion is that this does help with test security. Also, the “One at a Time” option guarantees that answers will be saved as students proceed through the questions, which is not the case for the “All at Once” option (per OleMiss advice document).

We avoid randomizing question order when there are blocks of differing question types, for logical coherency – hopefully those are Random Blocks which themselves randomly pick and order questions within each subset.