

Academic Skills: Online Open-Book Exams

When first presented with an open-book exam, you might think that you don't need to prepare because you'll have access to course materials during the test.

However, these types of exams require just as much studying and preparation as traditional in-person exams. Here are some tips to help you study and successfully complete your online open-book exam.

Before you start

Review key concepts and course materials.

- Review the syllabus for themes. Review course materials for key concepts.
- Clarify which materials you can access during the exam. For example, can you refer only to course materials? Or, can you use Internet sources?
- Ask the instructor for the exam structure and time limits. For example, can you have breaks during the exam?
- Start thinking about connections between themes and concepts.

Studying

Organize your notes.

- Use graphic organizers such as tables, mind maps or post-it notes to find connections between ideas and help you recall information.
- Organize your "open-book" resources to help you find information during the exam. Try colour-coding, using sticky notes or making a list of important page numbers.

Test yourself and teach others.

- Test yourself using the exam format (i.e. multiple choice, short answer, essay). Use old tests, create new questions or use textbook questions.
- Teach others the course material. Use examples and personal connections, and get them to ask you questions about the information.
- Identify learning gaps to focus on during study sessions.

Writing the test

- Log in early.
- Know how to troubleshoot or get tech support if an issue occurs during the test.
- Choose a comfortable place to complete the exam. Have all necessary materials easily accessible. Avoid disruptions — give your schedule to anyone you share the home with.
- Determine how much time to spend on each question. Consider the question types and how many marks each question is worth.
- Regardless of the question type, read the question very carefully and highlight key words such as analyze, examine, explain, develop and so-on.
- Use the cover-up method for multiple choice questions. Cover the answers, focus on the question and draft an answer. Then, reveal the possible answers to decide which choice is the best match.
- Use paper to jot down thoughts or create outlines.
- Save time to review your answers at the end of the exam.



Remember, academic integrity is important.

- Follow your instructor's guidelines for the exam.
- [Learn more about academic integrity at McMaster.](#)

Good luck!

