Blackboard tests: Recommended settings for high-stakes assessments (including exams)

Updated: 23 February 2017

1. About this guide

This guide covers how to configure the recommended settings for high-stakes assessments (including exams) in Blackboard.

The guide does not cover in detail how to create tests (the Blackboard term for quiz-type assessments). For further help on this, see Blackboard’s Help for Instructors (https://help.blackboard.com/en-us/Learn/9.1_SP_14/Instructor/110 Tests Surveys Pools/010 Create Tests and Surveys). A link to Help for Instructors is also available on the Help tab in Blackboard.

This guide is maintained by the TEL team; please contact tel-help@bristol.ac.uk if you require further help or support.

2. Recommended settings for high-stakes assessments

Tests in Blackboard can be set up in different ways, and there are many options available both for creation and deployment. All settings should be carefully considered prior to running high-stakes assessments. In the following sections you will find detailed explanations of what these settings do, and how they should be configured.

3. Set up a new test

a) If you are creating a new test, go to the content area (in the menu of your Blackboard course) where you wish to put the test (or create a new content area). You may want to set this as not available to users until the exam is ready to be delivered.
b) From the Assessments menu, select Test
c) Click on Create to create a new test
d) Enter a name for the test, and any instructions, then click Submit
e) You will then come to the Test Canvas screen. Here you can either create new questions or use some from a pool (or another test)
f) When you have all the questions you need, click on OK at the bottom right. You will now come back to the Create Test page. Select your new test and click Submit
g) You will now enter the Test Options screen. Here you can edit the details of your test and make it available to students.

If you wish to edit settings of an existing test, find it in the relevant course content area, click on the drop-down menu next to the name, and select Edit the test options
4. Set up exam options and deploy test to students

Once in the Test Options screen:

a) Name: Edit the name and description as required

b) Open Test in New Window: Select No

c) If you are ready for students to access the test then ensure that Make the Link Available is set to Yes

d) Add a New Announcement for this Test: No

e) Multiple Attempts: We recommend that you use this option, and Allow Unlimited Attempts. Since all attempts are recorded, it is not particularly valuable to restrict students to a single attempt, and makes it harder to manage if a student needs to be granted extra attempts

f) Score attempt using: Select from the drop-down list which attempt to record in the Grade Centre

g) Force Completion: This is a particularly important option in Blackboard tests – if you select this, then students must finish the test in one go. We strongly recommend that you do not select Force Completion as this means a student leaving the test for any reason will not be able to re-enter it.

h) Set Timer, Auto-Submit: Using the timer is recommended, as it provides an individualised timer for each student, and also records the time of the test submission. However, we recommend that you have Auto-Submit set to OFF, as turning it on can cause problems if you have to grant a student additional time for any reason, and doesn’t give any extra information about the time when the test
Blackboard tests: Recommended settings for high-stakes assessments (including exams)

...was submitted. If the Set Timer box is left unchecked the test won’t be automatically submitted by the system. This means that invigilators will need to take the start time of the exam and tell the students when to submit the exam. Please note that the timer doesn’t have a pause option, in non–invigilated exam students should be instructed to complete the test in one go as they won’t be able to resume the test and restart it later.

**Note 1:** Exams shouldn’t contain more than 50 questions at a time. Large exams should be split into multiple separate exams, with a maximum of 15/20 questions each. Access can be scheduled via the adaptive release feature. If the exam consists primarily of essay questions, consider using the assignment submission instead. With long essay questions it is also recommended that students complete the work in a separate programme, such as Notepad, and the copy and paste it into Blackboard.

i) Display After, Display Until: The recommended times are half an hour before the start of the exam and half an hour after the end of the exam, to allow students to get logged in, and to finish later if an issue arises.

j) Password: select this option and enter the password below. The password will need to be communicated to the students in the examination room.

**Note 2:** If you don’t want to use the password, another way to make access more secure is to create the test in a separate content area in the main menu and hide the content area until the start of the exam.

### Section 3 & 4: Due date and self-assessment options

k) Test availability exception: This functionality allows you to change the schedules for students who need special arrangements. Click on Add User or Group and then select the student(s) who needs to have extra time or to take the test at a different time. You may also set up a sub-group in ‘Group’ called **extra time** if that’s easier. You can change/edit the following exceptions:

- Number of attempts
- Timer
- Availability
- Force completion
- Restrict location

l) Due Date: Not required

m) Self-assessment Options: Select **Include this Test in Grade Centre Score Calculations**

### Section 5, 6 & 7: Test feedback and presentation
Blackboard tests: Recommended settings for high-stakes assessments (including exams)

n) Show Test Results and Feedback to students: Select from the drop-down list the option that applies, eg on specific date or after attempts are graded, or until after the academics have checked the item analysis report. This will prevent the students from seeing grades immediately after they have submitted the tests.

Note 2: You should hide the relevant column in the Grade Centre until you are ready to release the score to the students. To do this, find the column in the Grade Centre (accessed via the Control Panel), click on the drop-down menu at the top of the column, and select No for “Show this column to students”. The column should have a red diagonal line icon, indicating it is hidden from student users.

o) Presentation Mode: Select All at Once if you want the questions to appear on one screen (appropriate for fewer than 15 questions), otherwise select One at a Time.

p) Prohibit Backtracking: Leave unchecked

q) Randomise Questions: Select if you wish to randomise questions; this is generally recommended if students are sitting close to each other.

Note 3: Grade Centre statistics are unaffected by choosing to randomise questions; however, when you download the results (in the standard format of “by user”) to a spreadsheet, it puts them in the order students take the questions (ie if they were given question 7 first then their first question and answer in the spreadsheet is for question 7). The way to resolve this is to select download by “Question and User”; this downloads the results in a format that will allow analysis of particular questions with minimal manipulation (eg a filter).

r) Click on Submit. The test is now available for students.