

# Common Forms of Assessment: Exams and Quizzes

## Can (or should) I give an Exam

Written by Ellen Watson

While the formal examination cannot assess all types of learning outcomes (such as those requiring students to perform, collaborate, or investigate), the truth of the matter is that examinations (and quizzes) are one of the quickest ways to assess how well your students have learned the course material. Per the [University Policies on assessment](#), instructors should use multifaceted (or varied) forms of assessment, but this does not mean exams are banned; it means you should use exams *with* other forms of assessment to develop a holistic picture of how students are comprehending the material. There is nothing wrong with using examinations and quizzes as evaluation tools provided (1) they fit your learning outcomes, and (2) students are prepared to undertake them.

To ensure an exam or quiz fits your learning outcomes, you may find it helpful to *map* your exam questions to your course (or module/unit) learning outcomes. Based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2006), this type of assessment map will help you identify (and review) your desired results, or learning outcomes, and ensure you are looking for acceptable evidence (the questions you ask). A simple way to create a map with an already completed course is to go through your exam and track which questions meet each learning outcome (and they may meet more than one) and how many marks each of these questions are worth; for an example, see the table below.

Learning Outcome 1 Question Numbers	Marks
1abc	12
3	5

Learning Outcome 2 Question Numbers	Marks
1d	2
5	2

Learning Outcome 3 Question Numbers	Marks
2	6
4	3

After you have this data, you can then remove questions that are unfair (i.e. they do not meet any learning outcomes<sup>1</sup>) and review to see that outcomes are assessed evenly (or an appropriate weighting is applied based on importance). In the example above, you can see that on this 5 question exam, learning outcome 1 is heavily emphasized while learning outcome 2 is less important. This is another way to bring your course into alignment! If you have not yet made your exam, decide how much of the exam you want each outcome to assess and then create questions based on these percentages. This mapping exercise can be particularly helpful for courses that have multiple sections so that professors can ensure they are consistent (and fair) in their assessment of learning outcomes without requiring the exact same questions. Many instructors choose to only map their final exams (or any other exams worth more than 30% of their course) as these are extremely high risk assessments for students. Whether you choose to map your exams or not, you must ensure that your exam does indeed assess your learning outcomes and not that you are giving an exam just to give an exam.

Once you have ensured that your exam is meeting your desired learning outcomes, it is time to ensure that students are *prepared* to take these exams. One way to prepare students for an exam is to provide them with reviews with questions they are likely to encounter; however, many students may expect the exam to look exactly like the review and will be frustrated when it is even slightly different. Beware. A second strategy is to provide students with no-risk (or low-risk) quizzes throughout the term; use formative assessment to *prepare* them for your exam questions AND review their knowledge at the same time. Try having students respond to a short prompt with a partner and then give them two good answers and a poor answer so they can gauge how they did. Another strategy could be posing a multiple choice question and having students respond (using a student-response system or other method) then reviewing the results and the correct answer. Finally, you might consider providing brief, online quizzes for students to voluntarily complete each week; responses to these will give you an idea of how many students are engaged, what students are struggling with, and areas you may want to re-emphasize. Each of these suggestions for formative quizzes give feedback to *the instructor* on how well students are doing and *the student* on how well they understand while also providing students with examples of what they can expect to answer in an exam (i.e. evaluative material).

So, to respond the question “Can (or should) I give an exam?”, the answer is yes provided your questions meet your learning outcomes and students are prepared for these exams.

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<sup>1</sup>According to the University of Alberta Assessment Policies (UAPPOL) only material covered by the course outcomes/objectives should be assessed.