

# Best Practices for On-line Testing in Blackboard Learn

## Instructors

### Before Creating On-line Tests

---

Before using on-line tests for the first time, [attend a CCIT faculty training class](#) on Blackboard Assessments. While many aspects of Blackboard's on-line testing are intuitive, the importance of test grades in most classes and the variety of situations students may encounter make it important to understand the available options and their implications.

### Building Your On-line Test

---

1. Familiarize yourself with the various **options that apply to each question type** that you plan to use in your test. For example, some question types allow you to randomize answers, and some provide for possible partial credit for selected answers. Understanding the available options and their implications for grading the questions will help avoid confusion and issues for you and your students.
2. To help your students identify and solve technical issues before actual on-line tests begin, **prepare a practice on-line test**. Make the practice test as similar as possible in the settings and types of questions you will use in graded tests. You might even include questions about the on-line testing environment itself to reinforce student best practices. Make it a requirement for your students to take the practice test in the same location and circumstances they plan to take the graded tests. Have them report any problems or issues that they encounter while taking the practice test to you.
3. After you create an on-line test and have selected deployment options, **take the test yourself as a student**. This serves two important purposes. First, if you don't make a perfect score on your own test, you should check the questions you missed to ensure that the correct answers are indicated. Second, you will be sure that all your questions display properly in the browser. If possible, take your entire test using more than one of the supported browsers. This is especially important if you copy and paste text into your test questions and/or answers (see Step 4 below), embed images or special characters in the test editor, or use an equation editor in composing the test.
4. When creating questions, **copying text from Word documents** or other formatted sources can create problems when "unseen" formatting codes are carried over with the visible text. Such codes can interfere with the proper display of questions and answers when students take the test. If text needs to be copied into tests, use a text editor such as Notepad as an intermediate step. Or contact [ITHELP@clemsun.edu](mailto:ITHELP@clemsun.edu) for information on the Respondus test authoring software which can convert test documents into a form that is ready for use with Blackboard.
5. If you have your students take your test in the classroom with you, it is possible that some students may have technical issues with their computer at that time. If it is not possible to provide alternate computers in the room, you will want to **print a few copies of the test** as a

“Plan B” so they can still take the test at that time. Follow the instructions in the [Printing a Blackboard Learn Test from Respondus](#) document to print your Blackboard test.

6. Once students have begun taking a test **you should not make changes in the test** other than to correct typographical mistakes. Other changes will create inconsistencies in grading and can even corrupt the test to make it inaccessible by other students.
7. It is a good idea to insert a copy of the “**Best Practices for On-line Testing in Blackboard Learn for Students**” in your syllabus and/or test instructions to serve as a reminder to them how to avoid typical technical problems.

## **Recommended Settings for Test Options**

---

1. Note that regardless of any release dates or timer settings you select, you must also select the **Yes** radio button for **Make the link available**. This is what makes the link for the test available to students.
2. If you are concerned about students possibly using other programs on their computers while taking your test, such as another web browser or chat windows, or if you want to prevent students from copying and pasting into your test or printing/saving a copy of the test, contact [ITHELP@clemsn.edu](mailto:ITHELP@clemsn.edu) about the **Respondus Lockdown Browser** which can “lock down” the students’ other options while taking an on-line test.
3. We strongly recommend unselecting the **Force Completion** checkbox for tests. If a student inadvertently exits or is timed out of a test s/he cannot return to complete the test. This feature does not serve as a good substitute for an enforced timer.
4. Unless this is a practice test in which the instructor will not view the grades, **do not** select the checkbox to **Hide Results for this Test Completely from Instructor and the Grade Center**. If you choose later to view the students’ test attempts, changing this option will automatically delete all previous “practice” attempts.
5. You have the option to have test questions presented to students **All at Once** or **One at a Time**. Our recommendation is to select the **One at a Time** option. This option requires the student to save each answer as they move from one question to the next. This can help a student avoid losing their work if their test session is interrupted.
6. Unless you need to have the students see their test in a new, separate browser window, select the **No** radio button for **Open in New Window**. If you change select the **Yes** radio button for this option, inform your students that they should disable all pop-up blockers on their browser before starting the test.

## Information for Your Students Taking an On-line Test:

---

1. The next section of this document contains the **Testing Best Practices for Students**. It is a good idea to **insert a copy of these in your syllabus and/or test instructions** to serve as a reminder to them how to avoid typical technical problems.
2. Remind your students that **they must click the “Submit” button** at the end of the test for it to be completed. Also let them know whether they should expect to see their grade displayed after submitting the test, or if this will be delayed until essay questions are graded or until all students have completed the test.
3. If you choose to present your questions all at once, instruct your students to **periodically save their answers**. They can click the **Save** button next to each question as they select answers or scroll to the end of the page and click the global **Save** button. This will save their work thus far but allow them to continue to other questions and even change earlier answers up until the time they click **Submit**.
4. While Blackboard does not have a **Time Out Limit**, some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) may disconnect a student’s session if it appears to have been inactive for a period set by the ISP. ISPs do not recognize typing in a text box as being active. Clicking the **Save** button is recognized as an indication of an active session. Students who are taking a test and appear to be inactive more than the time provided by their ISP provider may be disconnected.
5. **Blackboard will generate some generic instructions** based on options you select, such as a time limit. But instead of depending on these automatic notes, your instructions to your students should clearly state all constraints and options. For example, let them know if only one or multiple attempts are allowed, if backtracking is permitted, if there is a time limit, and what they should do if they get knocked out of the test.
6. Specify to your students what your policy is regarding **how and when they should notify you of apparent technical problems with their test**. Also specify what alternate options are available if they encounter problems.
7. If any of your students report technical issues while taking an on-line test, please contact [ITHELP@clemsun.edu](mailto:ITHELP@clemsun.edu) as soon as possible if you wish for CCIT to investigate. While we cannot guarantee identifying or verifying technical issues during a student’s test session, **we have access to data logs for about three days** after any test session.
8. **Blackboard Outages:** Please be mindful (and wary) of giving exams at times that are susceptible to Blackboard outages. Scheduled outages are posted on the Blackboard login page. Note that maintenance can be performed on Blackboard at the following times without prior notice: Monday through Friday, 3:00 am - 7:00 am; Friday evening 10:00 pm through Saturday morning 7:00 am. Also note that Blackboard servers restart daily at 4 am. While sometimes this outage may only last a few minutes, CCIT recommends not giving online exams or quizzes around 4 am. (All times are Eastern.)

## Testing Best Practices for Students

---

### Before Taking an On-line Test:

1. **Use only supported browser versions** when taking on-line tests. Supported browsers are listed on Clemson's Blackboard login page.
2. Before starting an on-line test, **close all other software programs on your computer**, including the browser that you plan to use to take the test. Re-start your browser and log in first to Blackboard without logging into any other Clemson sites. This will help identify your test session in the system logs if you encounter technical issues.
3. **Disable all pop-up blockers**. The steps for this will vary among browsers. If you have questions, call the Support Center to get directions on how to check your computer and browser settings for pop-up blockers.
4. **Use a hardwired connection** rather than your wireless connection to the Internet to take an online test. Make sure that when you connect your network cable to your computer you also disable the wireless receiver so that it does not override or interfere with the wired connection.
5. If your computer is connected to the Internet through an **ISP cable modem that is shared among a number of users** (such as at an apartment complex), you will likely experience problems with on-line tests. Questions may be slow to display and your connection may be lost briefly, which will cut off your test session. You should try to find a computer for your on-line tests that is on a more stable connection.
6. Make sure you **do not have more than one browser window opened to Blackboard**; this can cause problems submitting your exam.
7. Make sure your **computer is up-to-date on Windows patches and that it is virus and spyware free**. If you are not sure of the reliability of your PC or are having problems, use a campus lab computer.
8. **Blackboard Outages**: Please be mindful (and wary) of taking the exams at times that are susceptible to Blackboard outages. Scheduled outages are posted on the Blackboard login page. Note that maintenance can be performed on Blackboard at the following times without prior notice: Monday through Friday, 3:00 am - 7:00 am; Friday evening 10:00 pm through Saturday morning 7:00 am. Also note that Blackboard servers restart daily at 4 am. While sometimes this outage may only last a few minutes, CCIT recommends not taking online exams or quizzes around 4 am. (All times are Eastern.)
9. CCIT also recommends **clearing the cache on your computer** before starting a test to mitigate potential problems.

## Clearing your Browser Cache

### Internet Explorer

1. Click the **Tools** menu.
2. Then select **Internet Options**.
3. On the **General** tab in the **Browsing History** area, click **Delete**.
4. Select all of the checkboxes.
5. Then click **Delete**.
6. Click the **Content** tab.
7. In the **Certificates** area, click **Clear SSL State**.
8. Then click **OK**.

### Mozilla Firefox

1. Click the **Tools** menu.
2. Select **Clear Recent History**.  
**Note:** On a MAC computer, the option will be **Clear Private Data**.
3. Then select all of the checkboxes in the **Details** area.
4. Then click **Clear Now**.

### Safari

1. Click the **Safari** menu.
2. Select the **Empty Cache** checkbox.
3. Then click **Empty**.

## While You Are Taking an On-line Test:

1. Make sure you **don't use your browser's back, forward and refresh buttons** during a test. This can interrupt your test and knock you out of the test. To move from question to question, users should only use the arrows within the testing window or the **Question Completion Status** list of questions.
2. **Do not double-click the start button on a test** while waiting for it to load. This can cause multiple instances of the exam to open, leading to some confusion.
3. **Make sure you are aware of your time while taking an on-line test.** If your instructor sets a time limit, Blackboard will try to display a warning 1 minute before the time limit expires, but browser settings may prevent this warning from appearing. If your instructor sets a time limit in Blackboard, when you click open a test the clock will start and will not stop regardless of whether you save it and reopen later. It certainly may be prudent to have a back-up timer of your own. If you should get knocked out of an on-line test you should log back into Blackboard as quickly as possible to resume the test.
4. **Instructors may set a limit as to when an on-line test is available**, often referred to as the "test window". The link to open or re-open your test is only visible during this window. If your test also has a timer, you will not be ejected from the test at the end of the test window, but if that window has closed you will not be able to re-enter the test if you are knocked out of the test after that time, even if your timer has not expired. Start early enough during the test window so that you can complete the test before the window expires.
5. **If you are disconnected from your test session** for any reason, you should close your browser, re-start the browser, and go back to the test in Blackboard. If your instructor permits, you will be returned to the test question you were just viewing. If your instructor selects the **Force Completion** option, however, you cannot re-enter a test. In such a case you must contact your instructor first regarding this.
6. If the exam has been selected to show all questions at once, **you should periodically save your answers.** You can click the **Save** button next to each question as you select answers or scroll to the end of the page and click the global **Save** button. This will save your work thus far but will allow you to continue to other questions and even change earlier answers up until the time you click **Submit**.
7. If test questions are presented one at a time, **only click the "next question" arrow once**, even if the response is slow moving to the next question. Each question is saved automatically by Blackboard as you move from one question to another so there isn't any reason to hit **Save** before moving to the next question. That would just add an extra delay between questions.
8. If you are typing an answer in a text box, be aware that **neither Blackboard nor your browser saves text as you type it.** One option is to click the **Save** button next to the question frequently so the text you have typed so far will not be lost. Another option that perhaps is more secure is to type answers to essay questions first in Notepad, save it there, and then copy and paste the answer into the test's text box.
9. If your instructor presents test questions one at a time, **s/he can also choose whether to allow students to "backtrack"**—that is, to go back to previously answered questions. If backtracking is permitted, you can go forward and backward to adjacent questions at any time using the test

navigation arrows or to any question at any time using the **Question Completion Status** window. However, if backtracking is prohibited you can only move forward one question at a time, and you can only get to the end of the test to the **Submit** button by advancing through all questions one at a time. If your test has a time limit, you will need to keep this in mind in case you need to skip several questions to reach the end and click **Submit** before time expires.

### **After Taking an On-line Test:**

1. **After you submit your test**, the information you will see next depends on the settings your instructor has selected. You may only see a confirmation that the test was submitted with no additional information. You may see a grade for the test if the instructor turns that on, if no test questions have to be graded individually, and if no time limit has been exceeded. If any questions require the instructor to assign a grade individually, you will see an exclamation mark (**needs grading**) instead of a grade. If you exceed a specified time limit, and you have not submitted the test, you will see a pencil and paper icon indicating that your attempt is Still in Progress. If you have exceeded the time limit, but submitted your test, you will see a green exclamation mark for the grade. If you have questions about this, you should contact your instructor.
2. **If you are not certain that your test submission was acknowledged at the end, contact your professor immediately.** Technical issues can be studied from system logs for only about three days following taking a test, and only if students log into Blackboard immediately after opening their browser.