Tips and Strategies for Taking Online Exams

In *E-Learning Companion: A Student's Guide to Online Success,* Fourth Edition, Ryan Watkins and Michael Corry provide some suggestions on how to succeed in online exams. Several sources have adapted them and applied them to their institutional experiences, and we have done the same.

Before the Exam: Prepare

- ***Read and understand the quiz/test/exam guidelines:*** Information should be available in your course outline and/or on OWL (check in Lessons, Resources and Announcements). If you don't know something about the assessment, be sure to ask your instructor.

- ***Be sure you can answer these questions***:

    o   Will the exam take place at a specific date and time, or can you take the exam at any point during a particular window of time?

    o   How much time will you have to complete the exam?

    o   Are there any other important "need to know" factors outlined by the instructor?

    o   If you are a student with a disability who receives accommodations, how will you access them during the exam?

    o   Who do you connect with if you need technical support and how do you do that? (See chart below)

- ***Know the Rules Up Front:*** Don't be complacent about the format. Take time to find out any details you can about the format and how it will be set up online. It's one less thing to worry about on exam day. Where will you log in to the exam? Will you be able to navigate around the exam while you are taking it, or do you have to do one question (or one group of questions) at a time and are not able to return to them later? It's also helpful to know how many questions there are on the exam so you can plan your time effectively.

- ***Check your computer, battery, and connectivity:*** Avoid last-minute problems. Whether you're using your own computer or one you have borrowed, check that it has all the correct hardware and software well in advance of the exam and that it all works. Update your computer and any software you will need for the exam. If possible consider having a second browser available, in case you have a browser problem. If your exam is using ProctorTrack, Firefox is the preferred browser. If you are using a laptop, make sure you have charged the battery and have the charger cord at hand. Check your internet connection and move closer to the router if need be.

- ***Study the class materials***: Even if the exam is "open book," it's still important to study and review just as if you were taking the exam in a classroom.

- ***Determine when you will take the exam:*** You may have to take the exam at a specific time; however, if the exam will be available for several hours (or even a few days), choose a time that

presents the least potential for distraction, interruption, and stress. Keep your time zone in mind if you are not in London. Remember that Western is in the EST zone.

- **Gather all that you'll need to take the exam:** If you can have materials such as notes, books, or writing implements with you, be sure that they're set to go. It's a good idea to have water and any small snacks that may want at hand. Check to see if you need identification and passwords to log in to the exam and have them ready.

- **Limit distractions such as music and/or other screens:** Turn off your cell phone. You may even want to wear noise-cancelling headphones to help you concentrate, or ear plugs if you don't have noise-cancelling headphones or if they are not allowed.

- **Let family members or roommates know you will be taking an exam and an approximate time you will be done:** This can help them plan other, less-distracting activities while you are testing.

- **Consider putting a "Do Not Disturb – Exam in Progress" sign on your door or your desk**.

- **Use the bathroom before your exam starts**: If you find you need to take a washroom break during the exam, be aware that this will trigger a flag in a ProctorTrack exam. Make any absences as quick as possible. If you need a rest, or a moment to stretch, try to stay in view of the screen during a ProctorTrack exam.

- **Take a deep breath**: Once you're logged in, take a moment to relax and get focused.

During the Online Exam: Focus

- **Don't leave the exam page**: If you are permitted to search the web, refer to other documents on your computer, or check other websites for information, do not use the same tab or copy of the browser as you do for your exam—you may lose all your work. Instead, open a second copy of your browser (or, choose a completely different browser), then conduct your search. Whenever possible, have only one tab open in the browser you are using for your exam.

- **Technical problems?** Don't panic. But do seek out support. Refer to the support chart below, and contact them detailing the exact problem that occurred, the time it occurred, and any error messages you might have received. Follow their instructions, and try to stay calm. Technical problems are common and are usually easily solved.

- **During your exam:** Whenever possible, have only one browser and one tab open. Avoid using the browser back and forward buttons—instead, use the navigation buttons or table of contents in the exam. Close applications that you will not be using before beginning. Remember to save throughout your exam (exams on OWL are automatically saved every 5 minutes).

- **Check your work before you submit it**. Ensure that every answer is complete and appears as you intended (if you are able to navigate freely around the exam). Review the accuracy of your answers, as well as your spelling and grammar.

- **Follow instructions about how to submit your exam:** This might be as simple as clicking "submit," or there might be additional steps to take (like scanning a paper document or

uploading a file). Let your instructor know about issues submitting immediately, and send your intended answers in an attached document if possible.

- ***Manage your time:*** Make sure you can see a clock and keep track of your time. On paper, it's easy to flip through pages and re-read questions over and over again. Online, that can be slow and awkward. You'll need more time for navigating around the exam, if it is allowed. If it's not allowed, you'll need to structure your time even more. You won't be able to skip the hard stuff, or get hung up on one question for too long. Consider setting a maximum amount of time for each question and be prepared to select your best guess and move on if you are not 100% sure of the answer.

- ***Use scratch paper, if it is permitted***: As questions are presented on a screen, you may not be able to see all the information on screen at one time. Having and using scratch paper will allow you to jot down details, formulas, etc. while you look at other areas of the screen.

After the Online Exam: Review

- ***Ask yourself how you can improve on the next exam.*** Did you have everything you needed at hand? Do you need to share any concerns with your instructor? When you get the results, be sure to follow up and find out where you went wrong and where you were successful.

- ***Did your study strategies work?*** Did you miss any subject areas? If it was open book, did you have helpful notes to answer questions more efficiently?

- ***Did your plan for taking the exam online prove successful?*** Did you have any technical or logistical problems you could prevent next time?

- ***Write down your observations and keep them in mind for the next time you take an exam.*** Remember, test-taking is a skill like any other. That is also true for online test-taking. You will get better with practice and learn what works best for you.

Type of Issue	Who to Contact	How to Contact
ProctorTrack	Western Exam Support	Look for the WesternExam Support Chat tool in your OWL course
OWL issue/error	WTS Helpdesk	By phone, email or online ticket: https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/index.html
Zoom	WTS Helpdesk	By phone, email or online ticket: https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/index.html
Questions about exam content	Your instructor	Check with your instructor about how to get support during your exam.
Other exam platforms (Gradescope, WeBWorK, etc.)	Your instructor	Check with your instructor about how to get support during your exam.
General computer issue	WTS Helpdesk	By phone, email or online ticket: https://wts.uwo.ca/helpdesk/index.html