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## OFF CAMPUS

# Reassessing the misconceptions around open-book exams

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Allowing students to take books and other study materials into exam halls might seem questionable to some but open-book exams might have the potential to become the norm given the evolving educational landscape.

Open-book exams are often perceived as less challenging simply because resources and information are readily available to students under exam conditions. However, the issue lies with the kind of exams students already sit for rather than our expectations of the outcome. Memorising facts may lead to good scores in traditional exams, but does it truly help students learn beyond the words of a textbook? Unfortunately, open-book exams are often undermined because of the misunderstandings surrounding them.

### Open-book exams are easy

Having access to resources does not make open-book exams an easy option. The answers to such exams require effective understanding and proper usage of available information. Often conventional exams may turn out to be easier compared to open-book exams if students are only required to write out information from rote learning. On the contrary, open-book exams are all about efficiently locating and applying necessary information, making it more difficult than closed-book exams.

### Studying for open-book exams is not required at all

It is important to study for open-book exams just as it is for other types of exams. A lack of preparation may confuse the students as a considerable amount of time may be wasted when looking for the relevant information. In addition, not preparing well enough and leaving gaps in understanding of the course content may lead to lower scores if teachers identify

improper application of information.

Consistent preparation and developing better answering techniques are required which cannot be executed without adequate preparation.

### Copying straight from the books is all one needs to do

Most people argue that taking materials in the exams leads to students copying the exact words from books. However, there is little truth to that as copying full texts from the materials is plagiarism which is a punishable offense in most exams. Materials are there to assist in forming answers to conceptual questions and copying answers may lead to heavy deductions in exam scores.

### Students are allowed to bring whatever material they want

Many believe that students can bring any material they want to an open-book exam. However, there are often strict guidelines about what resources are permitted. These restrictions ensure that students rely on their understanding and analytical skills rather than skimming through an overwhelming amount of information during the exam. Typically, materials that are allowed are limited to textbooks, class notes, and specific reference materials approved by the instructor.

Open book exams may seem less rigorous at first glance, but it can prove to be very challenging as such assessments effectively shift the focus from rote memorisation to deeper comprehension and critical thinking. By addressing the misconceptions, educators, and students together can create an environment where open book exams will serve their true purpose, that is, meaningful learning.

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## A QUICK GUIDE TO SKIMMING EFFICIENTLY

### Identify key elements

Look for headings, subheadings, bullet points, and bold or italicised text, as these often highlight important points.

### Read first sentences

Start by reading the first sentence of each paragraph. This often contains the main idea giving you a quick overview of the excerpt's content.

### Focus on keywords

Scan for keywords or phrases related to the main ideas. This helps you grasp the essential points without getting bogged down by less critical details.

### Skip unnecessary information

If something doesn't seem immediately relevant to your purpose, skip it. Focus on sections that are directly related to what you need.

### Adjust speed based on content

Some texts might require slower skimming for better comprehension, while others can be skimmed more quickly.

### Summarise as you go

As you skim, try to mentally summarise what you're reading. This helps reinforce the main ideas and ensures you're catching the most important information.



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