

An  Quick Guide to

Preparation and Conducting of Remote Oral Exams

An **oral exam** is an exercise over the course of which a student must provide proof of what they've learned or make use of certain skills to solve a specific problem, by way of a well-supported answer or oral reasoning, presented in front of one or more evaluators, or a larger audience. (Legendre, 2005, p. 653). Oral exams are often preceded by a preparation period during which students are permitted 15-20 minutes to write down their response to one or more questions or perform a task. **There are two major approaches: 1) the "traditional approach"** where an evaluator prepares and asks exam questions and **2) the "innovative approach"** where the student takes the first

seven minutes of the exam to demonstrate, using their own methods, that they have learned the required material. The instructor investigates and tests this in the second half of the exam.

The oral segment is intended to drill down into certain elements, justify a certain method, explain one's reasoning, etc. It can be used to complement another type of evaluation (a written exam, laboratory, team project, etc.) to test students' learning on an individual basis.

Challenges of Remote Oral Exams

- Spontaneous exchanges are more difficult.
- Slower interactions.
- Greater difficulty showing written work.
- Possible technical difficulties.

Does it take long?

- 15-20 minutes per student.
- The traditional approach requires significantly more preparation time than the innovative approach.
- Immediate corrections.
- Possible to evaluate 3 students / hour.

What about plagiarism?

- Have a wide variety of questions (6 students per question).
- Communicate clear objectives before the exam. This reduces question-sharing.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages

- Can be used to evaluate the acquisition of a wide variety of learning targets.
- Is a learning experience.
- Reduces grading time.
- Measures the degree to which course objectives were reached with a high level of accuracy.
- Allows for questions to be rephrased in cases of misunderstandings.
- Real-life method of evaluation.
- Allows students to correct themselves.
- Innovative format works well with large groups.

Disadvantages

- Conventional format requires more preparation time.
- Conventional format is cumbersome for large groups.
- Anxiety-inducing format for students.
- Can be an ideal arena for cognitive biases.
- Can put students for whom English is not their first language at a disadvantage.
- Doesn't cover a lot of content.

Eckert, G. (2017). Pourquoi utiliser un examen oral et comment le mettre en œuvre ? in Valentine Roulin et al. (Éd.), Comment évaluer les apprentissages dans l'enseignement supérieur professionnalisant ? De Boeck Supérieur, p.77-89.

References :

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- Center For Teaching and Learning SDU: https://e-learn.sdu.dk/bbcswebdav/courses/E-learn_Support_Center/Nyhedsbrev_2020/April2020/PDF_Oral_Exams_online_guide_April2020.pdf.
- Daele, A. (2014). Préparer et mener un examen oral: <https://pedagogieuniversitaire.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/preparer-et-mener-un-examen-oral>.
- Guide on oral exams from TU Delft in the Netherlands: <https://brightspace-support.tudelft.nl/remote-assessment-oral-exams/>.
- Guide from Aarhus Universitet, in Denmark: https://tdm.au.dk/fileadmin/tdm/NYT_INDHOLD_2019/Aktiviteter_for_Arts/Guide_Oral_exam_in_Zoom.pdf.
- Guide from the SDU, in Denmark: https://e-learn.sdu.dk/bbcswebdav/courses/E-learn_Support_Center/Nyhedsbrev_2020/Maj2020/PracticalGuidanceforOnline%20OralExams.docx
- Legendre, R. (2005), *Dictionnaire actuel de l'Éducation*. (3rd ed.). Montréal, Guérin, 1584 p.

STEPS FOR HOLDING REMOTE ORAL EXAMS

Before the Exam

- Identify and share with your students the educational objectives that will be tested in the oral exam.
- Create a matrix of educational objectives vs. Bloom's taxonomy levels (in line with course objectives). Be specific with students about what they should be able to do to do well in the oral exam (educational objectives that will be tested).
- Develop questions for Level 1 of Bloom's taxonomy levels as listed in your matrix and their expected answers.
- Prepare an evaluation grid (with clear and precise evaluation criteria) and hold on to it afterward. This can be used to give student feedback.
- Set a schedule and allow for 10-15 minutes between each student to provide a cushion for any technical issues.
- Inform students, in writing, of exam procedures and other information (schedule, duration, evaluation grid, name of co-evaluators/jury, platform, recording★, camera activation, use of pencil and paper or whiteboards, access to documentation, ...). Take a picture of the environment where the presentation will take place, including any materials and send it to them.
- Ask students to be in the waiting room a few minutes early. In case of lateness or absence, they should give notice as soon as possible.
- Prepare students for the oral exam (examples of questions) and make sure they are familiar with the platform to be used (Zoom, MS Teams, ...).

¹https://www.enseigner.ulaval.ca/system/files/taxonomie_cognitif.pdf.

During the Exam

- Invite a 2nd neutral person to co-evaluate (reduces the risk of bias).
- Introduce this 2nd person to the student at the beginning of the exam.
- Record the exam (especially if a 2nd person could not be present) for the purposes of grade appeals.
- Remind the student of the exam time remaining,, instructions and educational objectives "To do well in this exam, you need to demonstrate that you know... and are able to ...".
- Reassure the student that they can ask to have a question repeated, rephrased or skipped.
- Ask the student if they have any questions before starting the exam.
- Pick a question, draw a card from a group of questions at the same level; if multiple subjects can be developed, the student can also choose which they prefer.
- Reassure the student by letting them know that there are no trick questions during the evaluation.
- In case of panic, postpone the evaluation or give the student time to collect themselves by moving on to the next student.
- The exam lasts about 15-20 min. In the innovative format, students take the first 7 minutes to demonstrate that they have met the educational objectives. In the conventional format, the 1st question can be an ice-breaker, giving the student some control. E.g., In your opinion, what is the most important thing you've learned?
- When the student has sufficiently answered the question, move on to the next. "Thank you, that's all we need for now, let's move on to another question..."
- If the student is going in the wrong direction: "That's not what I wanted to explore with this question. I'll rephrase."
- Once the exam has ended, send the student back to the waiting room. Deliberate before giving them their result. If results will not be provided immediately, let the student know when they will receive them.

After the Exam

- Make sure that the student is no longer in the virtual exam room and confirm they are in the waiting room.
- Discuss with your co-evaluator (if applicable) and finish filling out the evaluation grid.
- Bring the student back and provide them with their mark and any feedback.
- Construct your feedback to show the student:
 - 1) What they did well. "Your answer to question X was very clear. You showed your understanding using Y";
 - 2) What they did not do well. "For question X, your answer wasn't clear. That's why I rephrased it, but you weren't able to show me that you are able to..."
 - 3) Give the student some advice for their next steps. "I'd suggest that you revisit section X in the manual, class notes, redo exercise Y, come see me to go over..."
- Ask the student if they have any questions or things to add.
- Delete the video recordings when the period for grade appeals has ended.

★ Ensure that your institution's policies allow for oral exams to be recorded.

Confirm that your department/institution's policies allow for these strategies to be used before implementing them.

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