

## Open Book Examination- A Boon for Students' Evaluation in the Current Covid Scenario

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### Abstract

Covid-19 Pandemic has put the entire academic field into a real test. With exams being cancelled due to fear of getting infected, there is a need for a new way of assessing students. As all physical ways of reaching universities and colleges have been put to a stop, and online classes being started, there is a need for an alternative type of students assessment.

Open book examination can be an alternative and the relevance of it now is more than before. This kind of examination allows students to take notes, texts or resource materials into the exam hall. They test the ability to find and apply information and knowledge, so are often used in subjects requiring direct reference to written materials, like law statutes, statistics or acts of parliament. In other words we can say Open book examination is an assessment method designed in a way that allows students to refer to class notes and summaries or a "memory aid", textbooks, or other approved material while answering questions. An open book exam can also mean that students are provided with the exam questions prior to sitting the formal exam or are to complete as a 'take home' exam. Open book examination is usually done for courses like Law, Science, Technology and Medicine.

**Keywords:** Open Book Examination; Students' Evaluation; Covid Scenario

### Introduction

Covid-19 Pandemic [1] has put the entire academic field into a real test. With exams being cancelled due to fear of getting infected, there is a need for a new way of assessing students. As all physical ways of reaching universities and colleges has been put to a stop, and online classes being started, there is a need for an alternative type of examination.

Open book examination can be an alternative and is not a new concept, but the relevance of it now is more than ever. This kind of examination can be explained as it allows students to take notes, texts or resource materials into the exam hall. They test the ability to find and apply information and knowledge, so are often used in subjects requiring direct reference to written materials, like law statutes, statistics or acts of parliament. In other words we can say Open book examination is an assessment method designed in a way that allows students to refer to class notes and summaries or a "memory aid", textbooks, or other approved material while answering questions. An open book exam can also mean that students are provided with the exam questions prior to sitting the formal exam or are to complete as a 'take home' exam [2].

### In which fields or professions open book exam is used?

Open book examination is usually done for courses like Law, Science, Technology and Medicine. But it is not restricted to the course alone but also to what kind of questions are asked and how students can be evaluated. Ultimately, it boils down to what we want them to attain at the end of the course. If a course expects students to memorize the information given to them, and reproduce it in the exam, an open book examination is unsuitable. On the other hand, if a course expects students to be able to process new information, an open book examination is more appropriate. If a course aims to test understanding through exposition, open book examinations are not suitable; if it aims to test understanding through application to novel situations, then open book examinations are suitable [2].

### How is open exams usually conducted?

Open book exams should be devised in such a way that it evaluates the students' ability for logical and critical analysis. It should not be where the person just knows the summary and is able to answer by locating the answer from the material available to him.

The questions should be set in proper order. Meaning to say that they should be based chapter wise and simple to answer. It should not make students take more time to search for an answer. With this the questions should be straight forward and clear to understand. While preparing questions, the faculty setting the paper should use simple language which is easy to understand and should not confuse the students. They should be in a position to analyze and answer in a précised manner so that they save time. Examinations should be conducted in larger venues like auditorium because students will need larger desk space to keep their textbooks and notes for references. The time frame given for the examination should be much longer than the traditional examination as they will need to spend at least five to ten minutes to search for the answers. Here the invigilator acts more as a facilitator and helps the student write the exams at ease without cramming for answers [4].

### Why are open book exams conducted?

Open book exams discourage the idea of merely rote learning and reproducing in the paper. It gives room to students to understand, analyze and write an answer. Students are used to the traditional ways of examination and in over a period of time can forget the subject matter. But with this, they can retain more knowledge as cognitive skills are developed through this method.

Open book examination gives the teacher an opportunity to evaluate a student in various aspects. It's not just what the students have learnt but what they have learnt to apply on a practical basis. These examinations test the skills of problem solving and critical thinking which is actually missed in the traditional examination system.

It clearly distinguishes between passive and active memory. Active memory helps retention of knowledge much more than passive memory which helps in the overall development of the students [2].

### Structure of questions framed for open book examination

Open book exams test the ability to find and use information for problem solving, and to deliver well structured and well-presented arguments and solutions. Open book exam questions usually require to apply knowledge, and they may be essay-style questions or problem solving or delivering solutions.

The style of question depends on the faculty or school setting the exam. Questions in open book examinations need to be devised to assess the interpretation and application of knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking skills, making use of case-based exam questions that require students to apply critical reasoning skills in response to a trigger scenario.

Devising clear and unambiguous questions to limit student confusion and time spent interpreting the question so students can spend their time making use of their textbook or memory aid to effectively answer the questions. Questions should be devised that require students to apply and make use of the information from their textbook or notes rather than simply requiring them to locate and re-write this information. Designing questions and overall exam paper with the learning outcomes in mind i.e. what skills and knowledge are you assessing?

The assessment can be done with the help of devising rubrics based on Bloom's taxonomy. Questions can be assessed with the kind of category it belongs to. For example if it is a knowledge based question it can be given 1 - 2 marks each. If it is based on understanding it can be given around 3 - 4 marks each. If it's based on analysis and evaluation 6 - 8 marks can be awarded. In this way students can be evaluated easily [5].

### Distinction between open book and closed book examination

Open book examination is there to improve students' ability to process the information learnt. It tests how they can apply it to new context, how they improve it, etc. It tests the skills of critical thinking and problem solving of a student. The student need not memorize any written material. It is less stressful than the closed book examination. Preparation time is much longer than closed book as students will need to clearly understand the concepts and practice applying those to various situations. They should also be in a position to search for those answers in the given time frame and not hurry up to complete the exam. It is essential that they keep the notes organized and neat. Having cues also is useful.

Open book basically judges a student's ability to analyze and write a reasonable answer for a question. At the same time it is difficult to ensure that all students are equally equipped regarding the books they bring into the exam with them, because the stocks of library books may be limited and also some books may be expensive to students. It is not based on information stored which needs to be reproduced on a sheet of paper. Teachers act as facilitator in this kind of exam. Teachers should be able to guide them to write an answer which evaluates their logical and reasoning skills which is not so in closed book exam. It is beneficial for students' cognitive development. It makes the student apply the knowledge imparted and write with understanding which is not so in closed book. Teachers have to design rubrics which are to be used for open book exam. Marks allotted may not be uniform like closed book. Unlike closed book exam teachers cannot give the same marks for every question asked.

Open book exam needs larger venues and desks because students will require space to keep their study material, unlike in closed book exam. It is time consuming as students have to search for answers. These kinds of exams put more work on the path of teachers as well as the students as paraphrasing what is learnt is not enough. They need to solve old question papers to have a better idea of the exam. Though in closed book exams students do solve old question papers, it is not mandatory as having enough knowledge can make students capable of answering questions well.

Closed book examination is there to test how much of the information content the student has been able to store in his or her mind. Closed book tests the amount of information stored in a student's brain. So, it's mostly based on rote learning. Over a period of time the student may forget what is learnt. Teachers' task is quite easy as they have to only teach in class and provide notes, they need not focus on analytical and reasoning skills so much. There is already a list of books enlisted in the syllabus which is meant for the usage of students to pass the examination. They need not read extra books for references unlike in open book examination. So, it is cheaper and not so expensive.

This kind of examination is also good for the cognitive development of the student. Preparation for closed book examination means long hours of learning concepts and understanding in order to remember those points. In closed book examination a student's memory is

only tested, as to how much he/she has been able to recollect and answer. Closed book examination evaluation is easy as there is already a set of marks allotted for each question. Correction becomes easier and simple.

Closed book examinations can be conducted in any classroom or auditorium; they don't need extra space as students are not allowed to bring any written material along with them. Closed book examinations make most students just memorize all that is learnt without properly understanding them. In closed book examination solving old question papers is done only for the sake of revising and remembering the lessons learnt and not with the intention of life long learning [6].

### Guidelines to prepare for open book examinations

Students need to be encouraged to write the exams with an open mindset as most students are only used to closed book examination and may not know what to expect. The faculty should facilitate in critical and analytical thinking skills by encouraging them to read more reference books and prepare notes.

Open book examination does not judge memory recollection but it evaluates application of what is learnt. So, students should be encouraged to learn for understanding than remembering.

Organizing the study material well so that students don't overload information is important. Tab and label any tables of contents or indices of books. Even colour-code the tabs for quicker access is a great option. Teachers can facilitate group discussions and practice sessions during class hours which will help students learn in a better way [2].

### Conclusion

Open book examination at this time when the whole world is going through a pandemic is a blessing. Though there are technical glitches and challenges, it's high time this is implemented across institutions for easier evaluation and assessment of students skills. This will also give students and faculty a new experience of assessment and practical impartation of knowledge. Usually with closed book examinations we see students just memorize and once the exam is completed tend to forget what is learnt. With open book examination system students will surely have more knowledge and understanding of subjects as it improves their logical and analytical skills. Hence open book examinations is a boon for students evaluation in the current Covid-19 Pandemic crisis.

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