If you want to give a blackboard quiz that counts for a significant portion of a student's grade, you'll need to address several issues:

- Minimizing cheating.
- Minimizing assessment lockups – making sure that students can complete the exam without too much technical difficulty.
- Minimizing the amount of work it takes you to deal with grading, special cases and student complaints.

It's vital to have a plan in place and to communicate expectations to your students. Most importantly, tell your students to read "Test-Taking in Blackboard," our guide for UO students, before trying to take blackboard assessments. Supplement this with instructions about where to find the test in the Bb site, what to do if they have problems, and a reminder that they are responsible for dealing with them, not you.

There are a lot of options and decisions. If you don’t have time to read this whole guide, here’s a summary of 7 particularly important tips:

1. Don’t copy and paste from Word into a test.
2. **Don't set Force Completion.** This allows students who are booted out by technical difficulties to resume without your help.
3. Keep tests short (30-45 min max expected time to complete), and instruct students to take the exam in one sitting with no breaks.
4. Give students a copy of or link to our "Test Taking in Blackboard" document.
5. Motivate students not to cheat, and to solve tech problems for themselves.
6. Get assistance from CMET Consulting, Room 19 Knight Library. See [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/cmet/consulting](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/cmet/consulting).
7. Read the Blackboard Instructor’s Manual.

**Designing to minimize cheating and other problems**

Blackboard quizzes are usually better thought of as analogous to homework than to an in-class test. Unless you are giving a blackboard quiz in a proctored computer lab (very unusual), you need to assume that any blackboard quiz is unproctored, and essentially open book / open note / open cell phone, with no real assurance that the
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A student who appears on the test was the one who actually took it. That’s not always a show-stopper. Some things you can do:

- Make your expectations clear to students. If collaboration is allowed, say so.
- Use multiple types of assessment so that cheating in one venue doesn’t affect all assessments in the course.
- Use randomization. Construct question pools and set blackboard to randomly select questions from the pool so each student has a different quiz. However, randomization can increase the probability of technical problems, so always combine randomization with disabling Force Completion.
- Set a time limit on the exam. Students who exceed the time limit can still submit it, but will get a “needs grading” icon and you can decide whether to accept their work.
- When students complete an exam, they see types of feedback you specify. For high-stakes assessments, consider giving only their score, and not the correct answers. Then after the quiz is due you can change the setting to display everything, which they will be able to see in View Grades.

Other non-cheating advice to consider as you design your syllabus:

- Add a link in your Blackboard site to http://libweb.uoregon.edu/inc/data/scis/blackboard/bbtesttakingguide.pdf and encourage students to read this before their first online quiz.
- Create incentives for students to solve their problems for themselves. What about a bit of extra credit for students who don’t need help dealing with your Blackboard quiz?
- Schedule tests with a reasonable test-taking window, preferably not due on Sunday. If the test is due Friday then a student who has technical problems is more likely to be able to get help during normal business hours.
- Offer a practice Blackboard test early in the term, to help students become familiar with the technology.
- Consider offering several tests and setting the grade center to “drop the lowest grade.” Do so by putting each test in the same category (perhaps “Quiz”), and then in the “Total” column including the category rather than the individual quizzes; when you include a category in a total you have additional options.

Building quizzes to avoid technical difficulties

Avoid pitfalls creating test questions (the test canvas):
Avoid bad HTML that will break student browsers when they try to take the test:

- As you compose test questions never copy/paste from Microsoft Word. If you do so, your questions will contain bogus hidden HTML. If you must compose using Word, first copy the text to NOTEPAD (losing all formatting) then copy from NOTEPAD to Blackboard.
• If you compose tests using Firefox, make sure you do not have the add-on “Browser Highlighter” installed.

Break single long assessments into multiple shorter ones. Instead of a 2 hr. test, have four ~30 minute sections, each implemented as a separate quiz.

Most instructors make use only of multiple choice, multiple answer, true/false, and fill in the blank type questions, since in those cases Blackboard can automatically grade them. Avoid calculated formulas. Note that essay, file response, and short answer questions are not automatically graded, and that if a student exceeds a test time limit then even for multiple choice the individual questions are graded but no exam total grade is automatically assigned.

If you assign long essay questions, make the questions “File Response” type rather than “Essay,” and tell the students to write their answers using a word processor, then attach the answer to the question. Don’t encourage them to copy and paste their answers from Word. Note that for long essays it is quite likely that the student will be disconnected from Blackboard while composing the answer, so will need to log back in before submitting the Word document (requires that you disable Force Completion). For short essay questions, students can compose their answers in NOTEPAD (on a PC) or TextEdit (Mac), then copy and paste from it into Blackboard.

Consider purchasing a copy of the Respondus 4.0 program for the PC. It makes it much easier to compose and manage large complex tests, question pools, and test banks. (http://www.respondus.com. A free 30 day trial is also available.)

Choose appropriate test administration settings:
Set test options when you deploy the test. You can change them later by clicking the menu next to the name of the test (in the content area) and choosing “Edit the Test Options.”

• Set “Make Link Available: Yes”
• Never set “Force Completion” on a test. Students accidentally interrupt a test much too often, and need to be able to continue without your intervention.
• Consider “allow unlimited attempts” (or at least 2 attempts). Students may accidentally submit a test before they are done, and it will reduce problems if they can try again at least once.
• If you use a timer, consider turning “auto-submit” on. If you use auto-submit, student’s work will be submitted automatically at the end of their allotted time. If you do not use auto-submit, students will still be able to submit their test after the end of the time limit, but students who go over the allotted time will be marked as late and will not be automatically graded. The grade in
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the grade center will always record the start and completion date even if you don’t have a timer (if you allow multiple attempts, you may want to consider the time taken to be the time between the first start and the completion you actually grade, even if they are different attempts).

• If you need to use either “Display After” or “Display Until” to limit test availability, always specify and click BOTH. But rather than “Display Until” consider instead setting a password for the test. If you use a password you can tell individual students who need to complete a makeup.
• Use “All At Once” presentation for short tests (e.g. 10 multiple choice questions), but “One at a Time” allowing backtracking for longer tests. Don’t combine “One at a Time” with randomized question order.
• If you are allowing multiple attempts or giving the test without randomization, show correct answers only for self-assessments.

To avoid loss of grades, after a test has been released to students avoid any and all configuration changes (e.g.: changing point values, changing names of exam, moving the exam from one blackboard folder to another, changing names of exams in Grade Center, adding or subtracting questions, etc.).

Grading

Scores in the grade center show as “-” if there is no data. For a normal column, just click the “-“ and a box will open where you can enter a score. You can do the same thing to override the grade that blackboard automatically assigns for a quiz attempt. Click the upside-down chevron in the cell and choose “View Grade Details” to see everything about this student’s grade.

If a student grade shows up as green "!” mark in the Grade Center, then Blackboard has recorded a complete attempt, but for some reason can’t automatically grade it. Perhaps the test includes an essay question, or perhaps the student exceeded the time limit on the test.

A page with a pencil means Blackboard thinks the student has started but not completed the last attempt, perhaps because the student accidentally logged out or had trouble submitting. The student should try to complete the quiz by going back into it. If you view the attempt, you will see any work saved so far. In a few cases you may want to clear the attempt and let the student start over. When you open an attempt that Blackboard says “needs grading,” you’ll see all of the answers the student gave, and points for any question that Blackboard was able to score. Change point values for individual questions as appropriate then click Submit; Blackboard will compute a total.
When you grade an essay exam manually, avoid using Microsoft Internet Explorer. Essay questions where the student has ignored your advice and has copied from Word are likely to cause you serious problems. Firefox is your best choice in this case.

“View Grade Details” shows all attempts that a student has made to take a test, and lists both the date started and the date last saved or submitted. Open the attempt to see individual answers (e.g. to grade an essay question), then Edit Grade to assign a grade to the attempt.

### Dealing with special cases

Don’t assume that all problem reports are legitimate. From a recent discussion on the BLKBKD-L listserv:

Yesterday, a student who I trust came to me to discuss technology issues. When I mentioned how many students were experiencing crashes during Blackboard exams, she told me something alarming. She reported that many students who aren’t ready for the exam will open an exam and never complete it. The students report back to the instructor that Blackboard had crashed on them and that they were not able to retake the exam. Then the instructor either resets the exam or gives them a paper test. Thus, the student has acquired the additional study time they sought. The student also reported that word is circulating among students of this method of getting an extension on a Bb exam.

Try to structure things to avoid special cases. For example, a faculty member at another school was frustrated with the number of students who claimed to have difficulty taking tests. His solution (posted in the same discussion thread):

One of our faculty members reported that he tells students at the beginning of the semester that if they never have to have a test reset, they will be given a bonus (can skip one quiz, extra points, etc.). Once he instituted this policy, he has not had to reset any tests. I thought this was brilliant!

Remind students that if they have an attempt in progress they can re-enter it to continue from where they last saved their work without your help.

Encourage students to seek technical help from the Library Computer Help Desk (Knight Library Learning Commons) rather than asking you.

If a student really does get stuck and can’t continue a test, you may have to clear a locked attempt, though turning off “force completion” will reduce the frequency. To do so, click the “View Grade Details” for the student, then click “Clear Attempt” for that particular attempt.

[This file was last updated 29 Dec, 2011 by JQ Johnson. It is available online at http://libweb.uoregon.edu/inc/data/scis/blackboard/bbtestconstruction.pdf]