



BEST ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTORS

We have heard from several instructors that some of their students have been kicked off Blackboard or gotten "Access Denied" error messages during their online tests. There are a number of different ways to combat this problem.

1. Turn off the "force completion" option. There has been some confusion about what this option does. This does not force the test to close at the end of the time limit. The "Auto-Submit" option under the timer does that. It does not prevent students from taking multiple attempts. The only way students can take multiple attempts is when you have checked that box. Some poorly worded language in Blackboard makes it sound like if this option is not checked, a student can begin an assessment, save it, and go back and work on it later. This is actually not the case and we are working to eliminate this language from Blackboard. All that unchecking "force completion" does is to allow the student to go back in and complete the test if they have been inadvertently kicked out. If you set a timer, it continues to run from the time they first start the test, so if they are kicked off and "force completion" is not checked, they will be able to go back in and work on the test but the time that has elapsed since being kicked off will count against them.
2. Give the exam one question at a time. If you present all the questions at once, the student may appear to be "idle" to the Blackboard server or their internet service provider and they may be disconnected.
3. Limit the size of your exams. Large exams take a very long time to load, particularly if they are randomized. Students are more likely to be timed out of their Blackboard sessions on a 60-minute exam than on a 30-minute exam. If you have very long exams or exams that contain a lot of questions, consider breaking these into several smaller exams given one after the other. If you want to control the order in which these multiple exams are taken, you can do that with adaptive release.

4. Be cautious with the use of random question blocks and randomized tests. Although there are academic reasons for using randomization, this can create a problem in that each version of the exam in a randomized test is created in java memory only. If the java session for the user dies during a random exam, their particular test no longer exists anywhere, and will be unrecoverable. Random questions presented one at a time also increase the server response time for students so that it takes longer for each question to load into their browser and may shorten the amount of time they actually have available to answer each question. If you do use random question blocks or randomized questions, be sure to follow the best practices above for limiting test size and unchecking “force completion”, and be absolutely sure you are not using BOTH random test blocks and random test questions.
5. Remind students to save often, especially during essay and short response questions. The server does not recognize typing in a text box as activity, and if students do not save periodically while composing these answers, they could be timed out for inactivity. Students should save at least once every 15 minutes, whether they are done typing the answer or not.
6. Post the “[Best Practices for Students](#)” in a prominent place in your Blackboard course and encourage your students to read it. This will help reduce student problems resulting in timeouts and “Access Denied” errors.
7. If you choose to check the “force completion” box, use your best judgment when resetting tests. Keep in mind that not all students are honest, and they may go in to peek at the test questions ahead of time or begin a test they were not prepared for, and then “claim” they were kicked out so they can have another chance at the test after studying further. You can make this determination based on how many questions were attempted compared to the amount of time spent on the test and the ratio of correct to incorrect answers on their attempt.

Please contact the iSITE Service Desk for any issues you may have:

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