



Advice to students on open book examinations from the Examinations Committee

After an examination period the Board releases general statistics and comments from examiners in relation to each examination. This is designed to help students calibrate their performance against the rest of the cohort, understand where they need to improve, and help all students prepare for future examinations.

During COVID the Board has moved towards online and open book examinations. This general advice is offered to students to help all prepare for online and any open book exams in the future.

Resist the temptation to cut and paste

Open book exams have always provided an opportunity for students to copy material from prepared notes into their answer booklet. Online open book exams increase the temptation to do so, as students can simply cut and paste rather than re-write. Students who cut and paste generally lose marks because:

- There are no marks for volume of material, or for copying slabs of quotations. **Marks are awarded for an argument – which may be supported by judicious use of quotations, or simply citing an authority.**
- Prepared notes may cover the issues raised by the question but do not directly address the issues raised by the question. **Marks are awarded for thinking about the question and selecting appropriate authorities to support an argument which responds to the question – not for copying everything which may or may not be relevant to the question.**
- Examiners are looking for evidence that students have understood the material, and can think about, analyse and apply the material – not for the best prepared notes about the course.
- Copying from notes often gets in the way of preparing a good answer. Instead of rifling through your notes, spend your time thinking about the question and using your knowledge to draft a response. Your notes – hard copy or online – should be used to help you check detail, not to help you answer the question.

If you haven't read and understood a source prior to the examination, don't attempt to do so in the examination.

Examinations – closed book and open book – test what you know. The reading time is the same. This time is designed for you to read and think about the questions asked in the paper – not the cases that you were asked to read during the semester. If, for example, there is a question which asks you to discuss a particular case, and you have not read that case – it is too late. You will not have time to read the case for the first time during the examination, and copying slabs from the case, or about the case from another source, will not answer the question.

If you don't know something before an open book exam there is no time to learn it in the exam. If you don't know something before an open book exam you will be unlikely to be able to spot this as an issue raised by the question.

Your notes can help you identify detail to add, but they cannot help you identify the issues raised by the question – unless you know all the material in your notes.

All sources must be acknowledged, even in an examination.

The advice is often given that referencing requirements do not apply to examinations. And this is true – so that full AGLC citations are not required, and it is sufficient to identify a case as *Smith's case* or legislation as the *Dog Act*.

However this advice is predicated on the understanding that students will generally only be referring to primary sources in an examination.

If you are referring to secondary sources:

- Think again. Why are you doing this? How is it helping you to support your argument?
- You must acknowledge the secondary source. A full AGLC citation is not required but the source is.
- Think about which sources you are using. Many internet sources, easily accessed during an online exam, are not authoritative – eg Wikipedia – and should never be used (even with acknowledgement). Others, such as Thinkswap and other file sharing sites facilitate breaches of copyright and should never be used for ethical reasons – even with acknowledgement.
- Turnitin will identify any and all uses of secondary sources.

You should think carefully about how you prepare notes to take into an open book exam. If you are in the habit of copying slabs from secondary sources into your notes, and then taking these into the exam you increase your chances of plagiarising in the exam. If you copy word for word from another source – even the text or the lecturer's notes – into your notes, and then copy these word for word into the examination paper you are plagiarising. (And you are probably not preparing a good and thoughtful response to the question.)

The best notes are those which, in your own words, express the relevant concepts and identify the sources of those concepts.

And the best answers are often the shortest – because they get straight to the point, resist padding, and concentrate on what is relevant rather than everything the student knows (or can find in an internet search.)

Examinations Committee

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