

# Create Your Year-end Finals with Students FIRST!

Finals are right around the corner. Where did the time go? This very unique school year in the history of education really went fast.

So now that we are headed towards school being out for the summer, shout it out Alice Cooper!- How could your final exam look like to gauge your student's learning at school-year end that takes into account the effects this odd school year has had on our students' social-emotional wellness and how can our finals fairly measure our students' knowledge of our content in these unique times?

I believe until we are back in the physical classroom all five days in a week, the way finals used to look, especially at the high school level, should be put in the drawer for now. In light of an extremely volatile school year with virtual learning at home, a U.S. Presidential election like no other, many horrific news stories airing all over social media, almost on a daily basis, the pandemic woes, vaccinations hoopla, social unrest, and racial concerns, our students have lived through a lot inside this school year, and still needed to do school. None of these reasons address what could be or could not be happening at home while our students are learning from home.

So in this episode, I'm riding my white stallion horse in with five strategies to give your finals a 20-21 SY facelift to, 1) give you a final that measures students' knowledge and understanding, 2) our final meets our students where they are at, and 3) to increase the probability your students will complete it, complete it with effort, and submit it for credit.

The first strategy is to create a final that has three different versions. This strategy gives students options, and we know that offering options to students, empowers them and gets them on the side of the final before they answer the first question.

So how would you do this, create three different versions of a final, to give students a final exam choice? You would create first one version of the final in text form, which is probably similar to most of the final exams you have given to students at the end of the school year over the course of your educational career, and your traditional mode of finals before virtual learning. The second version of the final exam is in audio, and the third final exam version is in video.

For the text version, you would create your final exam questions in a document such as MS Word or a Google Doc, and then either save the file and give students the directions to download and save or save a copy as in the instance of a Google Doc, complete the final by marking it up with text, saving it, and then submitting it.

Another text version would be to copy and paste the Final questions that are in the MS Word document or Google Doc into an online quiz in your LMS, learning management system, such as Canvas, Moodle, or Google Classroom, or you can use MS Forms, or another form application like Typeform or a Google Form. I'll place all the links in the show notes.

Placing your questions from a document into a quiz, offers many advantages: 1) you can set up closed-ended questions which are auto-correct, like multiple choice, multiple selection, true and false, or fill-in. Then, you would only need to grade the students' answers to your Final's open-ended questions, 2) students do not need to download, rename, save, complete, save again, and then submit a document to hand in your final. Virtual learning data has shown, taking the traditional "worksheets" that we used to print out in the copy room, hand out and students completed with pencils, have a higher rate of submission in virtual learning if we turn those documents into quizzes for student ease with less steps in the process.

The audio version of this final would mean creating the test in an online quiz, but along with pasting in the question, you recorded your voice for each question. You may want to make it conversational and add a few points to jog the students' memory. Or, you could just do this for students who may need accommodations. Most LMS quiz elements make narrations easy to insert into quiz questions. However, if you are using an LMS quiz element, that does not offer narration in quiz questions, record your voice reading each question using a simple voice recorder, again, I'll place the link in the show notes, (<https://online-voice-recorder.com/>). Save each recording naming it with the question number to make it easy for you to add these question recordings to your Final online quiz version OR the text version. You can add audio files to an MS Word document following these steps (Insert > Object > Create from File tab > Browse for the file, choose to either place it on your final document, and you can include as an icon <my suggestion because it will show an audio icon> or a link to a file). If your text version of your final is in Google Docs, there isn't the same type of routine to add an audio file onto the Google doc. But, you could save your recordings online, and then create links to each recording in each question. I'll paste the steps on how to insert audio recording files into an MS Word document in this episode's show notes..

The third version of your final exam in strategy 1, the video version, is a whole lot easier. I recommend creating a video of you reading the questions and then placing the video in Playposit or Nearpod to embed the question after your question is read in the video. You can also place the video after you create it in Microsoft 365 Stream and then create a quiz in an MS 365 Form with the final questions and then add the Form to the Interactions part of the Stream video. Again, I'll place instructions down below on how to create all three versions of your Final exam (text, audio, and video) that I shared with you in this first strategy. Offering students three different versions of your final exam not only empowers them with options, but also appeals to the different learning styles of our students.

A second strategy is to create a final exam where students apply what they have learned and create an artifact based on the assessment's ask. For example, let's say I am teaching a journalism class. Students learned all year how to write good samples of different kinds of writing in my course. In my final, I would ask students to create a publication of their choice based on specific criteria in the final exam rubric so they know the expectations of what you are looking for in their final submission right up front. Reading over the rubric criterion may also help them make their decision. Staying with the Journalism course final example, I would offer students the final exam artifact options to create a 1) public service announcement (would fall inside my unit on broadcast journalism), 2) news article (a publication they learned in my print journalism unit), or 3), webpage (a solid artifact to showcase what they learned in my

digital journalism), or a sports writeup (a writeup students who have learned in the unit on sports journalism). Giving students authentic assessments where they are creating an end product based on the skills and knowledge they learned in your course should definitely heighten the student's desire to complete the final exam. Just make sure you give students enough of time to put their all into the one artifact.

A third strategy is a strategy I used when I was a professor for an Introduction to Business course in a PA university. My final exam did not have multiple choice, fill-in, or other closed-ended questions. I gave my freshmen students three questions, each with a different business scenario. One question was based on the accounting part of the curriculum. Another question was based on the management part of the curriculum and the third question was about marketing. Each student needed to create a plan of action for each scenario, with the student playing the role of a business consultant.

What made this final exam methodology more powerful was students had the choice to work independently on the final or with one or two partners. I will tell you, those final exam sessions were the best classes in my collegiate teaching career. Why? Because I heard students discussing the problem, the content, reminding each other of business principles and practices they learned in class, and they were researching content in their books and notebooks, which I allowed.

What was the result? I heard and saw more active, social, and critically-thinking learning take place in my final exams than any of the classes I taught all semester. Also, I received the BEST feedback from students telling me they loved taking a final this way. They added that they learned more inside the final exam from their partners, and it was one of very few finals in their college degrees where they left the final with a huge smile on their faces. I remember, the average grade for the final across the three sections of Introduction to Business I taught was an 83%. Now, THAT is the way you, the professor and the student, want to end a semester or school year of teaching.

My fourth strategy to revamp your final exams so students feel like taking them, putting in an effort, completing and submitting your final exams is to have a list of topics that students learned in the class for the course. Make sure you have at least enough of topics ready where each student chooses a different topic. If two students choose the same topic, they figure it out on their own who keeps the topic, as they compromise and use negotiation skills. To make it a big deal, I made sure I asked students to select their topics a week before the final and after each student chose a topic, the student signed a contract about which topic they have chosen to complete the final exam for my class, and the student agreed to complete and submit the final.

Making a special deal about it helped students take my final exam seriously.

The final exam was that each student created an educational resource about the topic they chose that I would use with the students who I had in the next semester or school year. Students could create either choose to create a 1) presentation, 2) video, or 3) a webpage in our LMS. Students had an entire week to plan out what they wanted to place in the learning resource and we worked together on it over the course of three classes.

Since everyone in the class had a different topic, students worked on their resources individually, but they could help one another with the tech skills needed to create a presentation, video, or webpage creation.

Not only did the students become subject matter experts in their topics, they had a week to plan and create it to submit at high-quality end product. I have no problem giving students a week to work on a final exam project when we spent the other 35 weeks learning the content. And, I'm cognizant that we could all have a bad day. Taking a final in a single class period of what you learned in the course of nine months, when it comes to students, just doesn't make sense, especially in these unique times.

And, just as we all have interests and strengths in what we know, I allowed students to choose their expertise and then showcase their knowledge and skills in an end product of their choice. And, yes, I made sure I used their final exam end products in the next year's or semester's course in keeping my word and adding worth to their work.

The last strategy to revamp a final exam to get students to want to take it and do well on your final is to make your final examination in the form of an Exit Interview and have students answer questions about the course either in a document or online form, or as a video or audio recording, or, in a virtual meeting for our students who need additional support.

For example, below could be possible questions on your Exit Interview final exam. You share with your students prior to the Exit Interview final, their answers need to connect to the content, and not about the student's grades, absences, or confusion in the content. In other words, the students' answers need to teach the teacher about the content and showcase his learning to you.

- What was your favorite unit and why?
- What was your least favorite unit and why?
- What did you learn in this course that has made the biggest impact on you and the way you look at things? What impact has it made on you personally?
- What did you learn in this course that has caused you to look at something differently? How did you look at it before learning in this course? How do you look at it now?
- What did you learn in this course that you believe helped prepare you for something in your future? What is that "something" in your future this content helps? How does it prepare you?
- If you could stay in this course for another marking period, what would you want to learn more about and why?
- If you were President in the United States one day, what is one thing you learned in this course that you could use as the leader of this country? How can you change an issue in society with something you learned in this class?

You can create questions that may better align to your content or your grade-level but the aim for the Exit Interview final exam is to get students to think back over what they learned, reflect on what they learned, and propose ways they can use the content as they leave your class, or how the content has changed them as a person.

This type of final exam has a very metacognitive flair to it that I believe we need to immerse our students into more opportunities where they get to think about their thinking and their learning, and about the changes the content made in their lives as a student and a human being.

In Exit Interviews, I always like to end the interview sharing with the student one of the student's strengths I saw in my class. You can share this information in your feedback you provide to students when you grade their work. Remind your students to look for your feedback.

Finding new ways to revamp the “dreaded” final exam is worth it to end this school year on a high, social-emotional wellness note. You want students to look back at your content and the class with positive thoughts.

Final exams can be extremely overwhelming for some students. And, as we move to do more in our classrooms that are proactive, interactive, and constructive, these final exam revisions are a way to do just that!

Getting students to feel good about what they learned as they leave our classrooms has a positive ripple effect on the way your content lingers on in their academic minds. To prepare our students to be the changemakers of the world calls for us to change the way we assess their learning in the last weeks of school. Impressions at the end of your class are more powerful than students' first impressions of our class in August or September. It is these final impression that will last.

[Get the FREE GUIDE to create three versions \(text, audio, video\) of your Final Exam in Strategy 1.](#)

***Please comment below—Are you going to revamp your final examination this school year by using one of my five strategies? Or, do you have your own way to revamp your final exam? I'd love to read your ideas!***

*Share in the comments below. I would love to read all your feedback ideas.*

*Next week's blog topic: How can you use the time at the end of the year to prepare students for next school year, and fill in the gaps?*