

Final Exams FAQ for Face-to-face, Online, and Hybrid Courses

Questions about the scheduling and administration of final examinations often emerge in interpreting the guidelines that appear in the USC faculty manual. Combined with the restrictions on culminating assessments during the week before Reading Day (the actual number of off-limits periods varies depending on your schedule; see the Registrar's site for more information), a degree of uncertainty prompts questions to or within an academic unit. The intent of this document is to clarify ambiguities or uncertainties that may arise. The content provided here is based on input from the Office of the Provost.

Are instructors required to give final examinations?

A course instructor is not required to give a final examination. However, the instructor should clearly specify whether or not a final assessment will be given during finals week within the course syllabus so that students can plan appropriately.

But doesn't the faculty manual wording say, "faculty members shall give final examinations" and must have the dean's permission to deviate?

It is important to consider the entire text to get a contextual understanding. At the top of page 54, the manual states, "Each semester, faculty members shall give final examinations, including laboratory examinations, in accordance with the published schedule and shall not deviate from it without prior approval from their dean." The emphasis focuses on when the final examination is administered. While deviations are strongly discouraged and a faculty member must deviate from the established schedule, they must have the dean's permission; it must be granted every semester.

Once an instructor has the Dean's permission, they will need to schedule a classroom to give the exam in consultation with the Registrar. Deviations are limited to days, times and locations that are not occupied in the established schedule. The policy does not specifically require final examinations. The whole point of having an exam schedule is so that multiple classes are not scheduled for finals in the same space.

When can a course instructor administer a final exam?

As stated in the USC Faculty Manual (p. 54):

In any course or laboratory that meets weekly, no quiz, test, or examination shall be given during the last class session before the regular examination period. In any course or laboratory that meets two or three times a week, no quiz, test, or examination shall be given during the last two class sessions before the regular examination period. In any course or laboratory that meets more than three times a week, no quiz, test, or examination shall be given during the last three sessions before the regular examination period.

Additionally, the start times for final examinations and their duration are posted on the [Registrar's Final Exam](#) webpage..

I don't see anything on the Registrar's site for my class meeting time. So, when should I schedule my final exam or assessment?

Most likely your class meets at a "nonstandard" time. You should contact the [Registrar's Office](#) for a date and time. A staff member will advise you of a date and time that does not conflict with the established schedule.

I want to give an online exam, but my designated finals day is the first day of finals week. How do I give "ample time" without using class periods during the week before Reading Day?

Provide access to the exam after the last class meeting and make the due date at midnight on the first day of exams. However, most online final exams consist of multiple choice and would require 24 hours or less to determine the final grades. The key is that you cannot have the due date on Reading Day or during the last few classes.

What if my students or I want to deviate from the day and time that the Registrar's Office posts for the final exam?

You must adhere to the schedule posted on the [Registrar's Final Exam](#) webpage. Deviations may create conflicts for students with other exams or activities.

I have a nonstandard start time and don't want to hassle getting a final exam time from the Registrar's Office since my intention is to give an online exam. I want to have the online test due any time during finals week. So, can I make it the last day and then have 72 hours to get my grades in?

You must confer with your dean or academic head.

I teach an online course but do not have a required date and time specified on the Office of the Registrar's website. When can I offer my final exam?

As with a face-to-face course, you must specify within your syllabus when the final exam will be administered, if you choose to give one. You must administer it during the specified exam period. You can select the date(s) and time for the exam. For online course management, consider scheduling this final assessment before the last day of the final exam period.

You may open the exam at 12:01AM of the first day of the final exam week and allow students to complete it by 11:59 PM of the last day of the week. The testing window (the time when students can take the exam) does not need to be open during the entire week. As students may be in different time zones and have face-to-face exams, you must provide students an ample testing window (e.g., the exam may be available for days but be set to be completed within a specific timeframe).

I teach a face-to-face course but wish to offer an online final exam. What day and time should I administer the examination?

You must adhere to the day and time that is specified for your course. Please check the schedule posted on the [Registrar's Final Exams](#) webpage. If your course meets on a nonstandard schedule, a staff member will advise you on what to do.

I'm teaching an online course. When do I turn in grades?

As with a traditional course, you will have 72 hours following the end of your final exam to submit grades.

I teach an online blended class. I meet face-to-face for less than 50% of the semester, but I have an assigned classroom meeting time. When do I give my final exam?

For face-to-face exams, you must check the [Registrar's Final Exam Schedule](#) website to find the details related to your class meeting day and time and administer the exam on that date and within that time period.

I teach an online blended class. I meet face-to-face for less than 50% of the semester, but I do not have an assigned classroom meeting time. When should I give my final exam?

If you plan to administer the exam in a face-to-face arrangement or in an online setting, you should contact the [Registrar's Office](#) for a specific day and time period assignment.

A student in my class becomes very ill or impacted by an extenuating circumstance that prevents them from completing the final exam during the established time period. What should I do?

Similar to cases in which you might assign a grade of "Incomplete", you should use your discretion to determine the extent of the problem and require documentation of the issue (i.e. a written statement from a physician, counselor, safety officer, or other qualified professional). Using your best judgement and interest in the student's academic success, you may arrange an alternative time period and date(s) that is suitable to the student and you.

In lieu of a "traditional final exam", I want to assess my students' academic growth through the administration of a final paper, report, performance or another alternative assessment. Is it permissible for me to do so?

At your discretion, you may design or select an assessment that is consistent with course objectives and well connected to learning experiences. You must administer it during the designated final exam period and not during the off-limits week before Reading Day. In setting the due date/time, you should ensure students have enough time to access and complete it.

What if I want to administer a final assessment to wrap up the semester but not in class? Or, I want to give it in class but not during finals week?

It depends on the form of the assessment. You may administer a culminating assignment (i.e. presentation, team report, a performance) at least one week before Reading Day. The alternative assessment is not considered to be a "final examination." You should not require students to complete it on Reading Day.

What if I want to administer a final assessment to wrap up the semester during the last week of class?

You should avoid giving a final project or administering an allowable assessment within the week before Reading Day. As a courtesy to students so they can plan, it is appropriate to include a clear statement in your syllabus that no assessment will be given or is due during finals week and be clear on all other assessments that you will administer.