



PRESS RELEASE:

Open book exams – a way to instil critical thinking skills

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The Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) and ATA CEO, Mohan Dhall believes that there is a place for open book exams at all levels of senior schooling nationally.

“Around 25% of all final year high school assessment could be open book in nature”, ATA CEO Mohan Dhall said.

The Year 12 final exams around the nation are due to begin. It is important at this time to question whether solely using closed book exams instil the skills and abilities in students that are sought. The new Australian curriculum focuses on, amongst other things, critical and creative thinking. Open book exams encourage the development of these skills in students and also in the way assessment is designed.

“Closed book exams have their place but balanced assessment should include a proportion of examination-type instruments that are open book in nature”, Dhall said. *“Open book exams begin with a premise of knowledge rather than memory. It requires students to apply knowledge and skills rather than simply recall.*

“They have further attributes in that open book exams require students to learn how to organise notes they take in as a resource. They also require students to learn to effectively summarise content and organise information according to its purpose and utility.

Dhall also said that other the benefits extended to the design of assessment. *“At present, assessment is predictable and in every high school nationally closed book exams encourage students to memorise a series of template responses or ‘exemplars’ to a range of possible predictable questions. Students then mostly adapt content to fit the question. Open book exams would remove this element of rote ‘learning’ especially if the exams are well designed to utilise stimulus.*

“Whilst open book exams would require teachers and tutors to adapt how they prepare students for exams, it would help prepare students for the real world where access to knowledge is readily available. What is required is initiative, skill and discernment to utilise information to solve problems.

“With increased reliance on technology, there needs to be increased teaching of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is also the driver of innovation. Innovation is necessary in a knowledge economy and for our future survival. Open book exams have the capacity to engender and assess such skills.

“At lower levels of schooling, students should be able to access information during a proportion of assessment through using technology. Here the skills would be to assess how well students can research and apply relevant information, and also how well they can acknowledge sources.”

In summary

Open book exams should be seriously considered as an option at all levels of high schooling. It should be a proportion of all assessment, rather than a reliance on the sole use of closed book testing. Moreover, for a proportion of assessment to Year 10, access to the internet should be considered.

ATA Media contacts:

Mohan Dhall (ATA CEO) (02) 9704 5724 or 0408 619 714
Storm McGrath (02) 4929 6711 or 0419 295 637