CBS COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

Fit for purpose

Pedagogical Perspectives on Exam Formats at CBS

Table of Contents

Introduction

This document outlines the pedagogical considerations relevant to the selection of exam formats at CBS. It is intended for course coordinators and study board members who design, approve, and quality-assure assessment.

While recognising that exam-format decisions must align with legal, administrative, and budgetary requirements, this document focuses primarily on the pedagogical rationale. Where appropriate, we flag other relevant considerations and refer to CBS policies and procedures for detailed guidance.

Key pedagogical principles of selecting an exam format

Examinations are a primary mode of summative assessment at CBS – they provide students with a structured way to demonstrate that they have met the learning objectives of a course. Such assessment points are therefore important ways of directing student effort towards the learning objectives. Their design - and the task students respond to - must therefore be deliberate and fit for purpose. Use this document when deciding which exam format is best suited for the specific conditions of your course.

The core pedagogical principle underlying the selection of a suitable exam format is constructive alignment: clear alignment between learning objectives, assessment, and teaching and learning activities. Selection of an exam format should ensure that the assessment elicits the knowledge, skills, and competences specified in the learning objectives; in turn, the course design should enable students to develop these, and prepare for the exam.

Exam formats described in this document are defined through combinations of choices that shape assessment conditions - such as written or oral, on-site or take-home, and individual or group-based. To ensure alignment between learning objectives, assessment conditions, and the type of evidence students are expected to produce, each of these variables should be considered. Some are inherent to specific formats, while others determine how a format is implemented in practice.

- **Written vs Oral:**
  This variable concerns how students demonstrate their learning. Written formats support structured argumentation, use of sources, and development of ideas over time (especially, in home assignments with extended timeframe), while oral formats enable immediate articulation of understanding and allow reasoning to be explored through dialogue. The choice should reflect how students have practised expressing their knowledge and which competences the assessment is intended to evidence.

- **On-site vs Take-home:**
  This variable defines the conditions under which the assessment is completed. On-site exams provide controlled conditions with limited access to resources, supporting assessment of performance under time constraints. Take-home formats allow access to materials and extended time, supporting analysis, synthesis, and application of knowledge in more authentic conditions. The choice should reflect the

need for authenticity, assignment scope and the extent to which independent resource use is part of the assessment.

- **Group vs Individual:**
  This variable concerns whether learning output is demonstrated as a result of collaborative or individual effort. Group assessments can support the development and demonstration of collaborative and integrative competences, while individual assessments provide clearer evidence of each student's independent performance. The choice should reflect whether collaboration is part of the learning objectives and how individual contributions can be assessed.

- **Graded vs Grade-free (pass/fail):**
  This variable determines the level of differentiation in assessment outcomes. Graded formats allow for finer distinctions in performance, while grade-free formats shift attention from ranking and performance towards a more holistic assessment of students' engagement with learning. Because grading structures can shape student motivation and study behaviour, decisions regarding graded versus grade-free assessment are most effective when considered as part of a broader programme-level assessment strategy. Although at CBS grade-free assessment is most commonly associated with the *Active Participation* exam format, it is possible to assess all exam formats as pass / fail.

At CBS, alignment also underpins quality assurance requirements (e.g., programme and course approvals). Considering exam formats at the programme level is an opportunity to develop a coherent and progressive assessment strategy, rather than taking it as isolated course decisions. Study Boards play a pivotal role in setting and reviewing this strategy: ensuring constructive alignment across courses; sequencing exam formats to build progression in disciplinary knowledge and communication competencies; balancing validity, reliability, workload, and feedback opportunities across the year; and securing an inclusive mix of formats so that students encounter a purposeful variety across their studies. To support this work, exam format decisions are integrated into the annual programme and course approval processes. This ensures time for pedagogical consideration and alignment across courses, while also supporting compliance with national-level quality assurance requirements and CBS policies.

At programme level, decisions about exam formats should be considered in light of the broader capabilities students are expected to develop across their degree, including those described in the Nordic Nine, such as analytical thinking, collaboration, ethical awareness, and effective communication. Individual exam formats can enable students to demonstrate specific capabilities. For example, oral and group-based formats may be particularly suited to assessing communication and collaboration, while written take-home exams can support critical reflection, independent inquiry, and synthesis of knowledge.

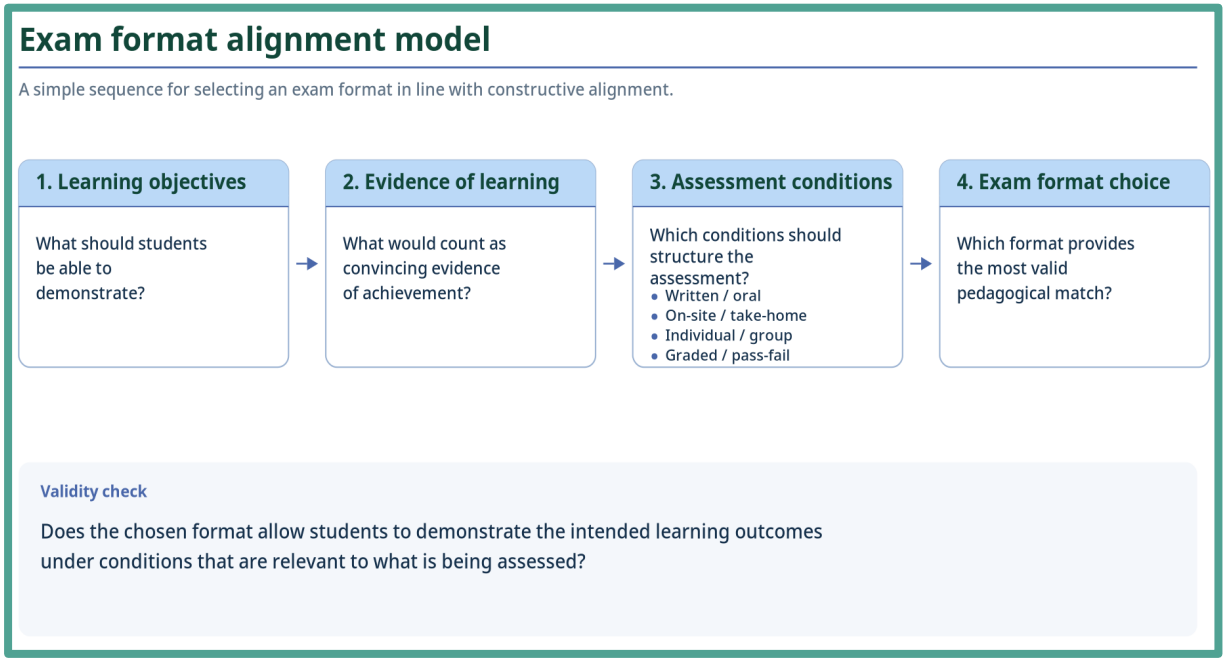
The key pedagogical question, however, is whether the overall assessment design across a programme creates relevant and progressive opportunities for students to demonstrate these capabilities. Some are supported by the choice of format, while others depend more on task design, assessment criteria, and the cumulative structure of the programme. The Nordic Nine is therefore best approached as a programme-level perspective on progression, balance, and the overall purpose of assessment, rather than as a separate set of requirements for individual exams.

Finally, the rapid adoption of AI tools is reshaping assessment in higher education. Across the sector, this is currently leading to significant experimentation, with new approaches to assessment being developed and tested; at CBS, this includes efforts to compile an inspiration catalogue on adapting exam formats to AI-rich learning environments. However, at present, there is limited research evidence on how AI use affects how students demonstrate their learning under different exam conditions. This document therefore does not provide definitive guidance on the relative AI vulnerability of specific exam formats. All formats have distinct pedagogical strengths, and their suitability should be considered in relation to the course learning objectives and assessment conditions.

When selecting an exam format, decide whether AI use is required, permitted, or banned; make expectations about disclosure, citation, and acceptable use explicit; and consider design features that support academic integrity (e.g., authentic tasks, process evidence, or an oral defence where appropriate). The aim is to enable students to demonstrate genuine achievement of the learning objectives, whether or not AI is part of the teaching.

At CBS, the various ways in which examinations are conducted are formally grouped into five main exam formats. These should be understood as overarching categories rather than as fixed models. Within each format, there is substantial scope for variation in task design, assessment conditions, and the kinds of evidence of learning that can be generated. Selecting a format category therefore marks the beginning of the pedagogical design process, not its end.

The following five sections describe the pedagogical characteristics of these formats, including the kinds of learning they are well suited to assess. This is followed by sections on integrated exams and partial exams, both of which raise additional pedagogical considerations that cut across the five main formats. The document concludes with a list of links and resources that may be useful when working with exams at CBS.



1. Written sit-in exam

A written sit-in exam is a time-bounded, invigilated assessment in which students respond individually to set tasks, questions, or mini-cases in an exam room. It typically takes place within a 2 - 6 hour timeframe, and with clearly specified rules regarding permitted aids.

Pedagogical value

The pedagogical value of a written sit-in exam lies in what it enables you to assess under fixed conditions - through the choice of tasks, materials, and the expected output. While the format is sometimes criticised as inauthentic or "old-fashioned", it can, when well designed, mirror situations where students must quickly form an overview of a problem, work with a bounded set of materials, and produce a coherent output without time for extended enquiry. The sit-in exam is therefore most relevant for testing the foundational skills students need to acquire in order to later perform authentic work.

What this format can assess well

- What students can produce with a limited timeframe, including their ability to keep overview, prioritise, and communicate a coherent response under shared conditions.
- Individual recall and use of standard methods (especially without aids). Students' ability to apply foundational concepts and the correct application of core disciplinary methods.
- Application, analysis and synthesis (especially with permitted aids). Open-book conditions (permitted aids) are most effective as assessment when questions require interpretation, application and integration.
- Authorship and integrity in a supervised setting. Standardised exam conditions can create more transparency around student use of digital tools, including generative AI, and make the basis for individual judgement clearer.

Typical variants

Because the format is flexible, the pedagogical value is shaped by the task type, the intended output, the time available and the rules of permitted aids. The two common (and pedagogically distinct) variants below illustrate how these design choices emphasise different aspects of student performance.

- **Case analysis (authentic problem + bounded materials)**
  In a case-based sit-in exam, students work with a real or realistic problem situation supported by data, mini-cases or models/figures and respond to questions calibrated to the case and the time available. The format can be used 'without aids' (emphasising e.g., individual recall of core concepts and methods) or with defined aids (supporting more interpretation and in tegration of the provided material). For example, a 2-hour case exam with no aids can be relevant when you want students to show the ability to prioritise and apply theory or methods under strong time pressure whereas longer case exams (e.g., 4–6 hours) with defined aids, allow for deeper reasoning and broader integration.

  This design can assess:
  - rapid problem understanding/framing and overview

- disciplined use of provided material e.g., a dataset (selection, interpretation, justification)
- analytical judgement and reasoned recommendations within constraints

A key decision to take is the submission format: should students write a structured case analysis, a decision memo, or another genre of submission that best evidences the learning objectives? The closer the output aligns with the learning objectives, the stronger is the validity of the exam.

- **Selected-response designs, including multiple choice**
  Selected-response formats assess students through questions with limited predefined response options (e.g., choosing among alternatives). They can be delivered in shorter or longer windows and typically work best without extensive aids. For example, a 2-hour selected response exam without aids can be relevant when you want students to focus on core concepts, whereas a longer exam (4-6 hours) with clearly defined aids is relevant for exam items that require interpretation and integration.

  Selected response designs can be effective for assessing:
  - foundational and factual discipline knowledge that underpins later higher-order work
  - conceptual discrimination (distinguishing close alternatives or identifying misconceptions)
  - method competence (choosing correct steps, interpretations, or parameter use).

  These formats can, when designed well, assess learning objectives at different levels, for example, through scenario-based items that require students to apply principles and make judgements. However, they are less suited for assessing student independence in open-ended enquiry and extended analytical work (e.g. product development, working with large datasets or substantial materials over time), and for assessing collaboration skills and complex teamwork or coordination.

Other relevant consideration

- Workload profile: Written sit-in exams can be efficient when assessing large student cohorts, but the workload varies with the task type. Constructed-response exams (e.g., essays/case analyses) typically require substantial time for question development, marking, and calibration/moderation, whereas selected-response designs can reduce marking load but increase upfront item-writing effort.
- Fairness, accessibility, and student experience: Supervised conditions support comparability, but strong time pressure and unfamiliar settings can disadvantage some students (e.g., students with high exam anxiety, slower writing speed, or language-related barriers). Consider whether time constraints are construct-relevant, and plan appropriate accommodations and opportunities to practise the format.
- Academic integrity and use of support tools: Closed-book conditions reduce the risk of unacknowledged use of external assistance and digital tools (including GenAI), but may narrow what can be meaningfully assessed.

2. Home assignment

A home assignment exam is an unsupervised, written assessment in which students respond to set tasks, questions, cases, or create a product outside the exam room. It must be completed within a specified timeframe, which may range from a short window (e.g. 24–72 hours) to an extended project period. Students have autonomy over where and how they work and may access course materials and other relevant resources, provided they comply with the task requirements and applicable academic integrity policies.

Pedagogical value

The pedagogical value of a home assignment exam lies in its ability to assess higher-order thinking, independent enquiry, and the application of knowledge to authentic tasks. These forms of learning are supported by the conditions specific to the format: time to consult resources, reflect critically, and develop structured responses outside high-pressure exam settings. At the same time, the reduced control over the working process constitutes an inherent limitation of the format and raises legitimate concerns about the validity of assessing the learning objectives. This tension has become particularly significant in recent years and calls for a careful balancing of the format's limitations against its pedagogical strengths. When well designed, home assignment exams can nevertheless mirror professional contexts in which individuals are expected to analyse complex information, draw on relevant materials, and produce well-reasoned outputs within a defined timeframe.

What this format can assess well:

- Application, analysis, and synthesis: With access to relevant materials, students interpret, apply, and integrate sources and data to address context-rich prompts, demonstrating independent judgement and engagement with complex, practice-oriented problems.
- Research and enquiry competences: Identifying and evaluating relevant sources, methods, or frameworks; analysing cases or datasets; and justifying methodological and conceptual choices in ways that mirror disciplinary practice.
- Progressive learning and retention: Drawing connections across topics, internalising key concepts, and demonstrating sustained engagement with the curriculum.

What it is typically less suited for:

- Assessing students' skills on the lower taxonomical levels: The format is not designed to test recall, rapid decision-making, or procedural fluency in tightly time-bound conditions.

Typical variants

This exam format offers substantial flexibility in defining assessment conditions, and its pedagogical value depends on task design, scope, timeframe, and degree of openness. Three common (and pedagogically distinct) variants are outlined below.

- **Short-window individual case assignment (e.g. 24 hours)**
  Students analyse a new case and submit a structured written response (e.g. max. 5 pages) within a defined timeframe.

This design can assess:
- transfer of knowledge to new contexts
- analytical reasoning under moderate time constraints
- integration of relevant sources and course concepts
- concise and structured academic writing

The framing of the task and the time window must align with the intended depth of analysis.

- **Group project report (extended timeframe)**
  Students work in groups (e.g. 3–5) to investigate a self-selected or defined issue and submit a substantial written report (e.g. max. 25 pages, with identifiable individual contributions).

  This design can assess:
  - research and enquiry competences
  - synthesis and critical integration of sources
  - collaborative planning and division of labour
  - sustained, evidence-based academic argumentation

  The scope of the enquiry, group size, and requirements for individual contribution should allow for meaningful collaboration and fair individual assessment.

- **Individual project report (extended independent enquiry)**
  Students select a topic or problem, collect and analyse data, and submit a structured report (e.g. max. 20 pages).

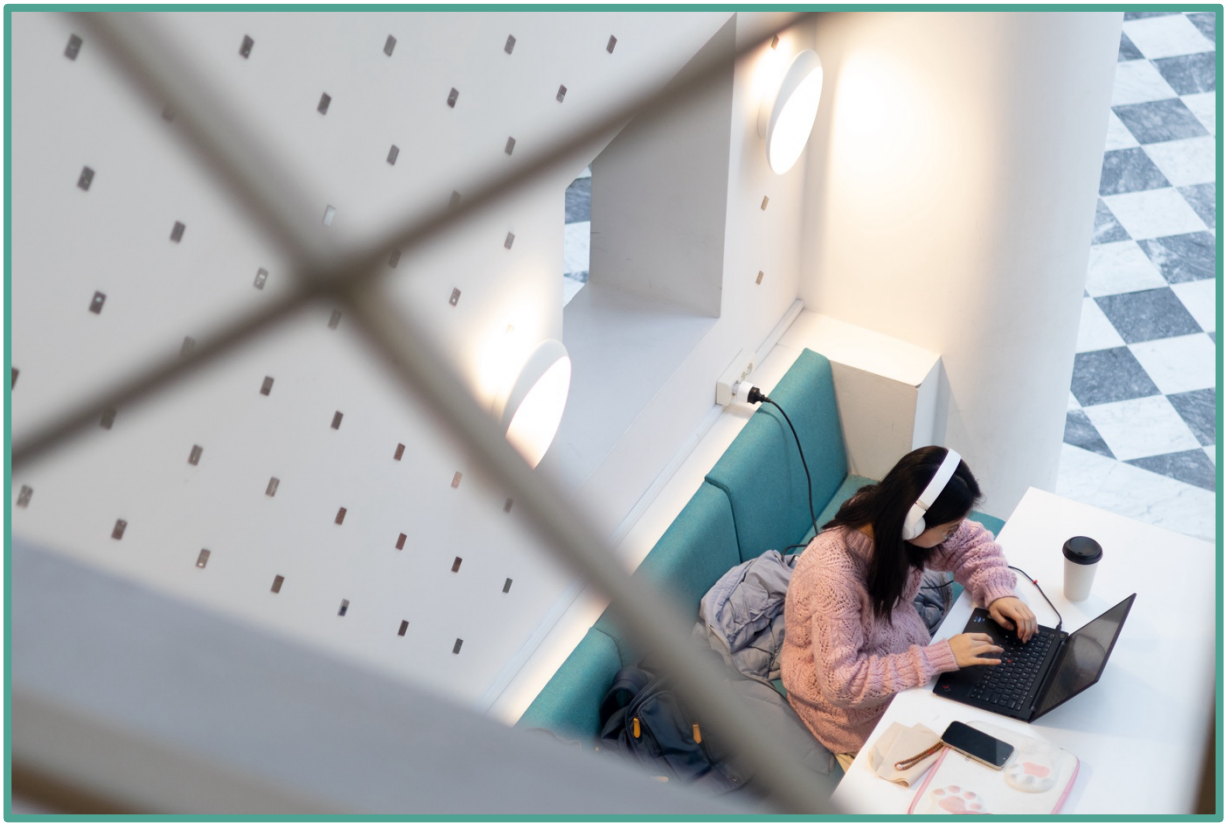
  This design can assess:
  - independent enquiry and methodological judgement
  - application of theoretical frameworks to authentic contexts
  - depth of analysis and conceptual integration
  - sustained, coherent argumentation supported by evidence

  The level of openness, methodological scope, and timeframe should reflect the intended depth of independent enquiry.

Other relevant considerations

- Academic integrity and use of support tools: Because home assignments are completed in an unsupervised, resource-rich context, they create greater scope for unauthorised collaboration and misuse of support tools, including GenAI. When selecting this format, consider whether the learning objectives require evidence of independent performance that cannot be established reliably from the submitted work alone. If so, the exam design should include opportunities for students to contextualise or reflect on their work and process, potentially through an oral component.
- Fairness and accessibility: The flexibility inherent in this exam format is well suited to support students with varied learning needs and preferences. However, because of diverse personal and technical environments, student access to technology, licensed materials, or suitable working conditions may differ. When selecting this format, consider whether assessment conditions can be made sufficiently equitable across the

cohort, particularly in shorter examination windows requiring simultaneous access to specific tools or datasets. In extended project formats, the absence of structured pacing may also affect comparability of outcomes.



3. Oral exam

An oral exam is a time-bounded, supervised assessment in which students respond individually to one or more questions, tasks, or mini-cases in a live dialogue with the examiner (and, where applicable, a co-examiner). The format may include a short preparation period (e.g., question draw + planning time), and is conducted under clearly specified rules regarding permitted aids (e.g., brief notes made during preparation).

Pedagogical value

The pedagogical value of an oral exam lies in the kind of evidence it can generate: students' understanding becomes visible through explanation, justification, and dialogue. The format is particularly useful when the learning objectives involve reasoning aloud, making and defending choices, and responding to critique or follow-up questions. It can also strengthen confidence in individual authorship and conceptual ownership, because students must account for their thinking in the moment rather than relying on unacknowledged external support.

What this format can assess well:

- Verbal reasoning and conceptual understanding: Students' ability to explain, define, distinguish, and connect concepts, and to argue coherently under questioning (e.g., stating assumptions, justifying choices, and explaining implications).
- Application and judgement in dialogue: Responding to scenarios, cases, or data excerpts where the examiner can follow up on reasoning, test assumptions, and ask for clarification.
- Professional dialogue and defence: The ability to engage in disciplined academic conversation, including revising claims and maintaining a coherent line of reasoning.
- Depth of understanding: The format can reveal students' "why" and "how" thinking, not only their final answer, by allowing the examiner to explore boundaries and misconceptions.
- Oral communication competencies: Concise presentation and use of appropriate disciplinary language (particularly relevant when oral communication is part of the learning objectives).

What oral exams are typically less suited for:

- Extended enquiry and production work: Long-form analyses, iterative drafting, or work with large datasets/materials over time.
- Collaboration and complex teamwork: Unless collaboration is itself explicitly evidenced and assessed.
- Broad sampling of the full curriculum: Time per student limits breadth unless the exam is deliberately structured for coverage.

Typical variants

- **With preparation:**
  Students are given a short individual preparation period, often based on a drawn question or model, followed by a time-bounded oral exam(e.g. 20 mins). Compared

with oral exams without preparation, this variant allows for a more structured demonstration of knowledge and reasoning, and may be particularly well suited where the aim is to assess students' ability to organise, apply, and communicate their understanding in a coherent way. It may also reduce the extent to which performance is shaped by immediate confidence or nervousness.

- **Without preparation:**
  Students respond immediately to a drawn topic or question in a time-bounded oral exam. Compared with oral exams with preparation, this variant places greater emphasis on immediate reasoning, secure command of the curriculum, and the ability to explain and apply core concepts without prior planning. It may therefore be better suited where the aim is to assess spontaneous understanding, readiness, and oral abilities under direct questioning.

Other relevant considerations

- Workload profile and capacity: Oral exams are resource-intensive per student. Scheduling, room availability, examiner time, and breaks can become binding constraints in large cohorts, and examiner fatigue can affect consistency across the day.
- Fairness and accessibility: Oral formats can increase performance pressure and may disadvantage some students if confidence or fluency becomes a dominant factor. It is therefore important that teaching and learning activities throughout the course help students develop the oral skills required for the exam. Transparent criteria, exemplars, and opportunities to practise the format can help reduce construct-irrelevant effects without lowering standards.
- Potential AI-related challenges: Oral exams are often chosen because they make students' understanding and reasoning more directly visible. At the same time, examiners should be aware that students may prepare with AI-generated explanations, arguments, or formulations, which can then be reproduced during the exam. It is therefore particularly relevant to assess students' own understanding, judgement, and ability to respond reflectively in the moment.

4. Oral exam based on a written product

An oral exam based on a written product combines a written home assignment (e.g., synopsis, project report, case analysis, short/seminar paper or thesis) with a time-bounded, on-site oral exam/defence that takes the written product as its point of departure. The format spans a wide spectrum from a relatively small written "launchpad" (e.g., a synopsis) that supports a predominantly oral examination, to a substantial written product that is the primary work, and the oral component functions mainly as a defence.

Pedagogical value

This format combines two complementary forms of evidence of learning: a written product developed over time and an oral examination conducted in real time. The written component allows students to formulate, structure, and communicate an academic argument in a sustained way, while the oral component makes their thinking visible through explanation, justification, and response to questions or critique. Taken together, the format can provide a richer basis for assessment than either component alone, particularly where the aim is to assess both the quality of an academic product and the student's understanding of the reasoning behind it.

What this format can assess well

- Dialogue in the oral exam helps establish judgment, authorship, and conceptual ownership of the written submission. It allows the examiner to test whether the student can defend methods, interpretations, and conclusions, and to assess the quality of thinking behind the submitted text.
- The format can support integrative competence: the examination can begin with the written product and then extend to broader parts of the syllabus, allowing assessment of the student's ability to synthesise across a course (or across several courses' content, where relevant).
- Communication in two modes. The format can assess academic writing and oral explanation/discussion as distinct but related competencies (particularly relevant where learning objectives include argumentation, persuasion, stakeholder-oriented recommendations, or professional dialogue).

What it is less suited for

- If the oral assessment is tightly anchored in the submitted product, the format does not test a broad sampling of the full curriculum. This is especially evident when students have substantial freedom in topic selection.

Typical variants

Across variants, two conditions typically apply at CBS: 1) submission of the written product is a prerequisite for sitting the oral exam, and 2) the final grade is based on an overall (holistic) assessment of both the written product and the oral performance. The exam can be organised as an individual or a group exam.

- **Synopsis + oral exam:**

A short synopsis frames the student's approach. The oral exam takes departure in the synopsis but deliberately extends to cover key parts of the course curriculum.

- **Project report + defence:**
  A larger written product (often with substantial topic freedom) followed by an oral defence focused mainly on the product's argument, methods and limitations, with selective links to relevant syllabus areas.

- **Individual or group oral exam based on a group assignment:**
  A group report addressing a self-selected case, followed by an oral exam that tests both the report's internal logic and relevant course theories beyond the report.

- **Portfolio style variant:**
  An individual oral exam based on a group or individual project consisting of multiple written components (e.g., worksheets) completed progressively during the course, typically supported by workshops and ongoing teacher/peer feedback prior to the final oral exam.

Other relevant considerations

- Workload and capacity: The format combines two demanding elements; reading and assessing the written product and preparing for and conducting the oral exam. Workload is therefore split across the submission deadline and the exam period and can become substantial in large cohorts or when students have high topic freedom (as examiner preparation becomes less predictable).
- Individual contribution (especially in group formats): Where the written product is produced in groups, the exam must still generate credible evidence of individual achievement. Clarify how individual performance will be evidenced (e.g., individual defence, distribution of speaking time, and how the examiner records the basis for the judgement), as this affects both transparency and perceived fairness.
- AI use and evidencing of learning: In contexts where the use of AI tools is explicitly permitted, oral examination based on a written product can provide a robust means of evidencing learning. The oral component enables examiners to probe students' reasoning, conceptual ownership, and methodological judgement. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the purpose and design of the oral examination – the primary focus should be on exploring and deepening discussion of the written work rather than verifying authorship or detecting GenAI misuse.
- Reliability, comparability, and transparency: Because the oral examination is based on different written products, the questioning will have different points of departure and will have increased variability across students. This makes comparability more difficult unless there is a shared understanding of the assessment criteria and a sufficiently aligned examination practice. Transparency also depends on clarity about how far the oral exam may extend beyond the written product and how evidence from the written and oral components is brought together in the overall judgement.

5. Active Participation

Active participation is a distributed, pass/fail assessment format in which students are assessed on their engagement with clearly specified learning activities across the course (e.g., in-class exercises, presentations, group work, peer feedback). The activities must provide sufficient evidence for the teacher to make an overall judgement of whether each student has achieved the learning objectives.

Pedagogical value

The pedagogical value of this format lies in shifting assessment from a single high-stakes event to sustained engagement with learning activities distributed throughout the course. By embedding assessment within teaching, it supports continuous engagement with learning and positions formative feedback as a central element of the assessment process. This can promote deeper learning, strengthen study intensity, and help students develop effective study habits while reducing reliance on performance under time-pressured exam conditions.

What this format can assess well

- Learning progress through continuous engagement: Ongoing participation in class discussions, group work, and practice-based activities increases study intensity and provides evidence of incremental progress towards the learning objectives.
- Collaborative and communicative competences: Active involvement in group work, peer feedback, and discussion-based activities supports the development and demonstration of collaborative skills and verbal reasoning in context.
- Iterative learning and self-regulation: The integration of formative feedback enables students to refine their work over time, supporting the development of self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and effective study practices.
- Engagement through multiple modes of participation: By incorporating varied activities and forms of contribution, the format enables multiple ways of engaging with content and demonstrating understanding. This can support more inclusive assessment by accommodating diverse learners and reducing reliance on a single mode of performance.

Typical variants

- **Distributed written assignments (X out of Y model):**
  Students complete a series of short group-based tasks distributed across the course, complemented by individual follow-up work that extends group outputs. This structure supports continuous engagement, application of concepts in practice-based tasks, and the development of individual understanding through iteration and feedback.

- **Group assignment with teacher-facilitated peer review:**
  Students co-author a written product and participate in a facilitated peer-review process using shared criteria. This variant supports the development and assessment of collaborative writing, critical evaluation, and feedback literacy within a structured academic context.

- **Multiple experiential activities with reflective component:**
  Students engage in practice-based activities (both in groups and individually) combined with a short individual reflection linking experience to theory. This structure enables assessment of applied understanding, integration of theory and practice, and individual meaning-making.

Other relevant considerations

- Clarity of expectations and assessment practice: Because this format is relatively new at CBS, careful attention should be paid to how participation requirements, assessment criteria, and teaching activities are aligned and communicated across the course. This is important both for guiding student engagement and for ensuring that participation provides a sufficient basis for assessment.
- Workload profile: The distributed nature of assessment and the focus on formative feedback can lead to sustained workload throughout the teaching period. When selecting this format, consider whether this workload is manageable for both students and staff, and whether the course structure can support continuous engagement without creating peaks in activity.
- AI use and evidencing of learning: In active participation, the key issue is whether students' contributions provide visible and sufficient evidence of their own learning across the course. Where AI-supported preparation is permitted, the design should still ensure that individual understanding becomes observable through discussion, reflection, peer response, or other traceable forms of participation. Reliance on polished written contributions alone weaken the evidential basis for assessment.
- Formal requirements: At programme level, no more than one third of courses may use grade-free exam formats (including Active Participation), in accordance with ministerial requirements. The Study Board oversees this distribution when approving exam formats. Note: A pass in this format corresponds to the Danish grade 2 or above.

Integrated Exam

An integrated exam is a single assessment that covers learning objectives from two or more courses within one combined product and/or performance. In practice, integrated exams can be built from different combinations of the first four CBS exam formats (written sit-in exams; written products prepared at home; oral exams with no written submission; and oral exams based on a written product), but not from active participation.

Pedagogical value

Integrated exams are most appropriate when integration across courses is an explicit programme learning objective. They can be particularly useful when the programme aims to assess integrative competence, for example, students' ability to combine methodological choices with substantive theory, or to synthesise concepts across domains to analyse a complex case. Well-designed integrated exams can support constructive alignment at programme level by making explicit how different courses contribute to a coherent capability. Integrated exams can also reduce duplication across courses and create space for fewer, higher-quality assessment moments focused on depth.

A further pedagogical value is that integrated exams can be used to assess progression. They can provide evidence of cumulative learning across a semester or academic year, and are often well suited at programme "transition points" (e.g., end of first year), where the aim is to see whether students can mobilise and connect what they have learned across courses.

At their best, integrated exams assess not only "knowledge from multiple courses", but also the quality of integration - how students justify theoretical choices, handle trade-offs, and use methods appropriately to support conclusions.

What integrated exams can assess well

- Integrative argumentation: Building and defending one coherent line of reasoning that draws on multiple course perspectives.
- Transfer to new contexts: Applying concepts and methods from different courses to an unfamiliar case, demonstrating flexible use of knowledge beyond the teaching context.
- Complex problem framing: Defining the problem, setting boundaries, making assumptions explicit, and deciding what evidence is relevant when multiple lenses are available.
- Conceptual discrimination across frameworks: Distinguishing between closely related theories/models, identifying tensions, and explaining why one framing is more appropriate than another for the case.
- Interpretation and judgement under uncertainty: Weighing incomplete or imperfect information, acknowledging limitations, and making defensible choices.
- Evidence of progression: Demonstrating cumulative capability by mobilising content from more than one course in an integrated way (particularly relevant where the programme expects students to move from "course-specific performance" to synthesis and judgement).

What integrated exams are less suited for

- Broad curriculum sampling in each course: integrated tasks tend to privilege depth in one shared case/problem, which can make it difficult to generate sufficient evidence across the full range of topics and skills in each included course.

Typical variants

- **Integrated written product (take-home) + oral defence:**
  Students produce one written product that draws on two or more courses, followed by an individual oral defence that tests both the product's internal logic and relevant course perspectives beyond the text. This variant is often chosen when the programme wants evidence of sustained work and individual conceptual ownership.

- **Integrated oral exam without prior submission:**
  A time-bounded oral exam based on prompts/cases designed to require concepts and methods from more than one course. This variant is often chosen when the programme prioritises real-time reasoning, probing of understanding, and stronger assurance of individual performance.

Other relevant considerations

- Assessor expertise and shared judgement: Integrated exams require assessors who can evaluate performance across more than one course domain, or who can work from a sufficiently shared understanding of what counts as strong performance across them. Where this is not in place, the overall judgement may become overly dependent on individual assessor emphasis, for example on method, theory, or application, which can weaken fairness and consistency.
- Coordination across courses: Integrated exams require explicit coordination across the contributing courses regarding what is being examined together and for what pedagogical purpose. Without this, students may experience the exam as two parallel assessments rather than as one coherent integrated task.
- AI use and evidencing of learning: In integrated exams, the central question is whether the format elicits students' own capacity to combine perspectives, justify trade-offs, and exercise judgement across courses. If AI use is permitted, task design should ensure that integration cannot be reduced to generic synthesis. This may require case specificity, explicit justification of choices, and, where relevant, an oral component that probes how and why connections were made
- Transparency and meaningful integration: Integrated exams require clear communication to students about the purpose of the format, the nature of the expected integration, and the basis on which their performance will be assessed. Where the integration of different subjects or disciplinary areas is not self-evident, the exam design should be supported by relevant examples from research, practice, or established educational approaches. Where such examples are limited or unavailable, teachers should still be able to articulate a clear pedagogical rationale and provide concrete illustrations of how the fields are combined in a meaningful way.

Partial exam

A partial exam (delprøver) is an assessment format in which the final grade for a course is based on two or more separate assessed components (partial exams), each contributing a weighted mark to an overall grade. The components may assess different learning objectives and can be distributed across the teaching period.

Pedagogical value

The pedagogical value of a partial exam lies in its ability to assess different learning objectives through low-stakes assessment elements. By distributing assessment across multiple tasks, the format allows specific competences to be examined individually while supporting progressive learning and scaffolding, as students receive feedback on defined aspects of their performance before they proceed to the next partial exam and their final grade is determined. When well aligned, partial exams can ensure that essential competences are demonstrated explicitly rather than inferred from a single, aggregated performance.

What partial exams can assess well:

- Distinct components of the curriculum: Courses comprising clearly defined modules or topic areas, where different learning objectives can be assessed separately and contribute to an overall judgement.
- A broad portfolio of competences: The format allows assessment of varied knowledge and skills across multiple components and formats, enabling students to demonstrate their learning in different ways rather than through a single mode of performance. This can support more inclusive assessment by allowing students to work to their strengths.
- Progression and sustained engagement: Multiple, lower-stakes assessment points support continuous engagement and enable students to demonstrate development over time.
- Creative and exploratory competences: Lower-stakes components can create space for experimentation, iteration, and innovative approaches without the pressure of a single high-stakes exam.

What partial exams are less suited for:

- Synthesis of skills and knowledge: Less suited to assessing the holistic integration of competences in a single, coherent performance or product.
- Sustained performance within a single assessment task: The distribution across multiple components may limit opportunities for extended, uninterrupted work that supports the demonstration of research and enquiry competences, particularly where no substantial final component is included.

Typical variants

- **Combined 48-hour individual take-home assignment weighted at 30%, and a 2-hour on-site written exam weighted at 70%:**
  In this variant, assessment is distributed across two weighted components, allowing different aspects of the learning objectives to be assessed under contrasting conditions.

The take-home component supports analysis and structured problem-solving, while the sit-in exam assesses accuracy and procedural fluency under time constraints.

- **Equally weighted combined individual take-home assignment and a group-based project followed by an individual oral exam:**
  In this variant, students work with a self-defined or guided problem, applying course concepts, models, and data to analyse an authentic problem and develop a coherent strategy. The written components support extended enquiry, integration of theory and data, and structured argumentation, while the individual oral exam allows students to explain, justify, and critically reflect on their work.

- **Multi-component partial exam:**
  In this variant, assessment is distributed across four components, weighted at 15%, 20%, 15% and 50%, and aligned with different stages of the course, from theory-focused sit-in exams to case-based assignments and a final integrative project with an oral component. This structure supports progressive development and cumulative assessment of competences.

Other relevant considerations

- Assessment load: Because partial exams combine multiple components, the overall assessment load should be proportionate to the length and credit weight of the course. Introducing too many different task types may increase cognitive and organisational demands, as students must interpret varied instructions and assessment criteria.
- Formal requirements and regulations: Study regulations may specify that individual components must achieve a minimum grade, be completed within the same examination period, or carry different weightings. Passed components cannot normally be retaken, while rules for resits of failed components are defined in programme regulations. These constraints should be considered when selecting and structuring the assessment.
- Administrative complexity and coordination: The use of multiple assessment components may increase administrative workload related to scheduling, communication, submission handling, and resits. Consider whether the necessary coordination can be supported, particularly when components are distributed across the course.

Useful resources

This document focuses on the pedagogical considerations relevant to selecting the most purposeful exam format.

For programme-specific procedures, institutional policies, timelines for approval, and extended support on assessment and AI, please consult the resources below:

1. Annual Exam Planning Cycle at CBS (DK only – look under 'Frister'): https://cbsshare.cbs.dk/teams/projekter/Exam%/Pages/default.aspx
2. Guidelines for the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in exams at CBS: https://sar.cbs.dk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Guidelines-for-the-use-of-Generative-Artificial-Intelligence-GenAI-in-exams-at-CBS.pdf
3. CBS Library on AI and Digitalisation at CBS: https://cbsshare.cbs.dk/vipservices/ai-at-cbs/Pages/default.aspx
4. EDQ's AI Hub: https://teach.cbs.dk/ai-exams
5. CBS legal's repository of exam policies, guidelines and descriptions (look under Prøveformer for documents in both Danish and English): Eksamen
6. CBS' collection of study administrative rules and regulations (SAR) on exams and grading: https://sar.cbs.dk/en/bachelor-graduate-programmes/exams-and-grading
7. EDQ course catalogue (e.g., for workshops on Oral Exams, Active Participation, AI literacy): https://teach.cbs.dk/training/coursecatalogue
8. Information on Nordic Nine and support resources: https://www.cbs.dk/en/about-cbs/news-from-cbs/news/nordic-nine
9. The examination order (eksamensbekendtgørelsen, DK only): https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2025/1121

If you need further guidance or pedagogical sparring, feel free to reach out to the Learning Consultant assigned to your Department or Study Board:
https://teach.cbs.dk/about/contact/learning-consultants

If you need further guidance or pedagogical sparring, feel free to reach out to the Learning Consultant assigned to your Department or Study Board:
https://teach.cbs.dk/about/contact/learning-consultants

Written by Varia Christie & Nina Rathlev Henriksen
Educational Development & Quality, CBS. June 2026