

## 5 Ways to Cheat on Online Exams

Michael London provides examples of creative tactics distance learners use to try to break the rules when taking exams.

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Ten years ago, when the U.S. Department of Education eliminated the 50 percent rule, which barred students who took more than half of their classes online from receiving federal aid, an estimated three million American college students were taking online classes each year. Today, that number has nearly doubled, with one in four students enrolled in at least one online course.

As online learning goes mainstream, colleges and universities face an array of well-documented challenges and opportunities. Can online programs help higher education make good on its promise to working adults and other nontraditional learners? How can we balance scale with quality to improve not just access, but also completion rates? And, of course, how can we ensure integrity in an increasingly fragmented system of learners, taking courses -- and tests -- on a multiplicity of devices and formats? After all, research suggests that most students hold the perception that it is easier to cheat in an online course than in a traditional one.

That may not be the case. An array of technologies -- from webcams to biometric keystroke analysis -- are helping colleges and universities tame the Wild West of online testing, allowing them to verify students' identities and validate their achievements. But even the most state-of-the-art proctoring and authentication systems don't deter everyone. And when it comes to working around the system, test takers show no shortage of creativity.

In recent years, we've seen plenty of inventive -- and not-so-inventive -- attempts at breaking the rules. Here are five of the most memorable ways we've caught students cheating on online exams.

### **1. The Old-School Try**

Despite advances in online learning, some aspiring cheaters still prefer taking a more traditional route to getting caught. Just like in a campus classroom, we've seen students scrawl notes on their palms or tape notes to computer monitors -- and reference them during the exam. They don't always realize that online proctors pay close attention to students' surroundings. Even automated solutions now incorporate facial recognition and detection technology that not only verifies student identities, but can detect when test takers leave the area or turn their head for a certain amount of time, flagging potential concerns for faculty.

### **2. The Screenshot**

For all the tech-savvy students who use cutting-edge tools to break the rules, there are always those who don't quite grasp how technology works. One student held his cell phone up to his computer screen in order to take pictures of the exam. He had apparently forgotten that webcams go both ways. Of course, there are other ways to take a screenshot without pulling out a camera -- but those would-be cheaters are out of luck, too. Keystroke analysis allows proctors to detect irregularities as students type. Live proctors can usually tell the difference between a student who is typing an answer and one who's trying to take a screen grab.

### **3. The Water Break**

There's no rule against staying hydrated while taking a test -- but we've seen students use drinks for more than just quenching their thirst. That was the case for the test taker who wrote notes on the inside label of a two-liter bottle and cup he was "drinking from." It may be another tried-and-true method from in-person tests, but it's not one that can escape a watchful webcam armed

with biometric imaging that raised questions about why a test taker kept looking at a bottle.

#### **4. The Cover-Up**

Some students use furniture to provide cover -- closets, desks and beds can all act as shelter for cheaters looking to game the system. When it comes to the most versatile piece of decor, however, blinds might top the list.

One student enlisted the support of a friend who whispered answers while hiding behind the blinds. Just because you can't be seen, though, doesn't mean you're safe. High-quality audio detection in both live and automated proctoring can alert proctors to suspicious sounds.

Others go it alone: one student taped the answers to clear vinyl blinds in the room. Unfortunately for him, before each exam, students must show proctors around their test-taking environment to make sure nothing escapes their notice. One has to wonder how that student might have performed on the test if he'd spent his time studying rather than setting up such an elaborate scheme?

#### **5. The Big Listen**

Students also try to take advantage of technology to stay one step ahead. One used a Bluetooth headset to relay information back and forth to a friend in another room. Unfortunately, webcam technology has developed as well -- and the proctor immediately spotted the device. When asked if he had anything in his ear, the student not-so-discreetly dropped the headset on the floor (like it was never there). Not quite smooth enough.

For every new online exam proctoring technology, students will be hard at work finding new ways to get around the rules. But for all their inventiveness, the examples above do have something in common: in every case, the cheater was caught.

We may never run out of stories to tell about the creativity of cheaters taking online exams. But we also shouldn't let these violations prevent online

learning from realizing its potential as a pathway to flexible, affordable higher education for the learners who need it most.

<http://insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2017/09/20/creative-ways-students-try-cheat-online-exams>