

MODERN EXAMINATION

An examination is a set of written exercises, oral questions, or practical tasks to test a candidate's knowledge and skill. The word "examination" comes from Latin "examinationem", noun of action from "examinare". In the sense of "test of knowledge" is attested from 1610s; shortened form "exam" first attested from 1848.

In ancient times the most important examinations were spoken, not written. In the school of ancient Greece and Rome, testing usually consisted of saying poetry aloud or giving speeches. In ancient India, the Vedas were learnt by repetition of various forms of recitation. Ancient China was the first country in the world that implemented a nationwide standardized test, which was called the Imperial Examination.

During the Early Middle Ages, the monasteries of the Roman Catholic Church were the centres of education and literacy and monks taught classes through stories, legends, folklore, rituals, and songs, without the need for a writing system.

In the European universities of the Middle Age, students who were working for advanced degrees had to discuss questions in their field of study with people who had made a special study of the subject. This custom exists today as a part of the process of testing candidates for the Doctor's Degree.

Modern systems of education in Europe derive their origins from the schools of the High Middle Ages. Generally, however, modern examinations are written. The written examinations, where all students are tested on the same questions, were probably not known until the nineteenth century. England had adopted the Chinese Imperial Examination in 1806 and which was later applied to education and it started to influence other parts of the world as it became a prominent standard (e.g. regulations to prevent the markers from knowing the identity of candidates), of delivering standardized tests.

In the late 19th century, most of West, Central, and parts of East Europe began to provide elementary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic, partly because politicians believed that education was needed for orderly political behavior. Perhaps it came into existence with the great increase in population and the development of modern industry. A room full of candidates for a state examination, timed exactly by electric clocks and carefully watched over by managers, resembles a group of workers at an automobile factory. Certainly, during examinations teachers and students are expected to act like machines. There is nothing very human about the examination process.

Two types of tests are commonly used in modern schools. The first type is called an "objective" test. It is intended to deal with facts, not personal opinions. To make up an objective test the teacher writes a series of questions, each of which has only one correct answer. Along with each question the teacher writes the correct answer and also three statements that look like answers to students who have not learned the material properly.

For testing student's memory of facts and details, the objective test has advantages. It can be scored very quickly by the teacher or by the computer. In a short time the teacher can find out a great deal about the student's range of knowledge.

For testing some kinds of learning, however, such a test is not very satisfactory. A lucky student may guess the correct answer without really knowing material.

For a clearer picture of what the student knows, most teachers use another kind of examinations in addition to objective test. They use "essay" tests which require students to write long answers to broad general questions. There are four types of essays: narration, description, exposition, and argument. Each type has a unique purpose: some tell a story, some are descriptive and others present viewpoints. Narration is telling a story from a certain viewpoint, and there is usually a reason for the telling. Descriptive essays have text which describes traits and characteristics of people, objects, events, feelings, etc in intricate detail. Expository essays can compare, explore and discuss problems, or tell a story. In an argumentative essay the writer is trying to convince the reader by demonstrating the truth or falsity of a topic.

One advantage of the essay test is that it reduces the element of luck. The student cannot get a high score just by making a lucky guess. Another advantage is that it shows the examiner more about the student's ability to put facts together into a meaningful whole. Sometimes, though, essay tests have disadvantages, too. Some students are able to write rather good answers without really knowing much

about the subject, while other students who actually know the material have trouble expressing their ideas in essay form.

Besides, in an essay test the student's score may depend upon the examiner's feelings and emotions at the time of reading the answer. If she/he is feeling tired or bored, the student may receive a lower score than he should.

Most teachers and students would probably agree that examinations are unsatisfactory. Students dislike taking them; teachers dislike giving them and scoring students' answers. Whether an objective test or essay test is used, problems arise. When some objective questions are used along with some essay questions, however, a fairly clear picture of the student's knowledge can usually be obtained.