Rising to the Challenge:

How to Improve the Online Proctoring Experience

Glossary of Terms

Key terms and definitions used by Examity or the online proctoring sector

- **Cancel / cancellation** - Exam appointment was cancelled prior to appointment start time
- **Complete** - The test taker arrived at the exam and completed the exam
- **Completion rate** - Percentage of exams that were completed
- **Exam rules** - A set of rules that test-takers must follow. They may apply to all exams or be unique to individual exams
- **Incomplete** - The test taker arrived to the exam, but was not able to complete the exam due to a technology issue or test taker preparedness
- **No show** - The test-taker did not show up to the scheduled appointment
- **Support ticket** - A submitted inquiry from a test taker asking for assistance
- **System readiness check** - An Examity website (**https://www.examity.com/test-taker-systems-requirements/**) where test-takers can make sure their device meets system requirements prior to the exam
- **Test candidates** - The people who are taking the exam. Also referred to as "test-takers"
- **Test organisations** - The institution administering the exam
- **Test windows** - The range of dates and times that an exam can be taken
- **Test-taker count** - Number of unique email addresses for users that took the exam

Executive Summary

Research purpose, aim and limitations

Looking back at 2020, and drawing on Examity's key data points, what can we learn about online proctoring practices? This is the purpose of this unique research exercise, which was produced at the request of a leading global certification organisation in the UK.

The aim for this relatively small-scale research project over a three-month period was to identify the main challenges encountered in online proctoring practices drawing from primary data on 2m+ online exams delivered by Examity.

We found a number of project limitations that require due consideration:
- Whilst we have access to a large dataset, this is limited to one year and may not prove consistent over time.
- The Covid-19 crisis has skewed our results in a significant way.
- It is unlikely that we have applied the same research rigour that may be encountered in the academic/scientific community.
- We acknowledge our strong bias towards exams which overlooks other assessment methods.

Key findings and observations

There are six key findings that emerged from this research project:
1. Difficulty connecting to a proctor
2. Unexpected challenges in appointment scheduling
3. Confusion over exam logistics and results
4. Confusion surrounding exam rules
5. Data privacy and security concerns
6. Trouble finding an ideal test environment

Conclusions

We have found that all challenges could be satisfactorily addressed and/or resolved by:
- Examity's current practices and/or continuous drive for improvements
- Working closely with test organisations

Recommendations and future dissemination

We have four recommendations:
1. We ought to continue this research over three to five years in order to analyse consistency and the effectiveness of recommended practices over time
2. We should help the academic / scientific communities around the world to inform deeper and broader research and literature reviews into online proctoring practices
3. We intend to disseminate this research in order to establish best practice in the global assessment sector
4. We should always aim to facilitate evidence-based decision-making for an organisation's short term and long term assessment strategy

Introduction

The recent increase in the application of online proctoring has presented an opportunity for many students and professionals to continue their education or complete a certification at a time when many universities and organisations have exclusively applied remote assessments.

This rise in online proctoring has introduced new audiences to an unfamiliar type of testing while also uncovering areas for improvement. For example, over the last twelve months, we have observed that the logistics of how and when to schedule exams, successfully connecting to a proctor, and privacy concerns became just some of the new experiences that our test-takers now face.

Back in December 2020, a UK-based global leader in the certification sector asked Examity to assess and address these areas of confusion among test-takers using online proctoring for the first time.

Over the next few pages, we have outlined a simple research methodology and highlighted our key findings and observations.

Each challenge is tackled by demonstrating a) what Examity can do to address this challenge; and b) what test organisations can also do in collaboration with Examity when faced with such challenges.

Our philosophy throughout this document and in practice is that the online proctoring experience is a 3-way process whereby continuous quality assurance monitoring and recording involves 3 critical elements for a comprehensive end-to-end system, namely:
1. The test-taker's behaviour and environment
2. The organisation's exam process and delivery
3. The online proctor who invigilates and troubleshoots IT issues in real time

Our goal, ultimately, is to provide stronger foundations for making decisions and choices in assessment strategy by facilitating evidence-based research and a problem-solution approach using primary data, whether it be quantitative or qualitative.

Research Methodology

We used a primary quantitative approach in order to identify and determine the main challenges encountered by test-takers in 2020. In order to meaningfully tie these into our research purpose and aim, we added qualitative feedback from our teams for each identified challenge.

Research purpose
In response to direct customer demand, our main research question is:

Drawing from Examity's key data points in 2020, what are the main challenges test-takers face and what online proctoring practices are in place to resolve those challenges?

Research aim
Our aim was to identify the main challenges encountered in online proctoring practices drawing from primary data on 2m+ online exams delivered by Examity.

In order to achieve this aim, Examity brought in its operations and support teams to examine the 2020 test-taker data surrounding the following issues:

- Exam scheduling/completion rates
- Exam attempts/completion rates
- Support ticket-to-user ratios

Data collection parameters

Sample date range	1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020
Data type	Primary data
Data source(s)	Optional satisfaction survey results Logged test-taker support requests Examity's proprietary online portal
Sample size	c. 2,370,000 attempted exams Auto (20%) and Live (80%) exams

Data analysis
We reviewed the entirety of our available data for 2020 using solely Excel as our statistical tool. No external agency or researchers were commissioned for this project.

Within the constraints and limitations of our research project, let's now look at the main challenges that we identified, along with our recommended solutions for each challenge.

Key Findings & Observations

1. **Difficulty connecting to a proctor**

   The introduction of online proctoring has led to a shift in how people take exams. Rather than sitting in a room with a proctor, test candidates have now found themselves having to connect virtually, using their personal computers and home internet. With many first-time users, going through the steps to connect to a proctor can sometimes present challenges.

   Our data shows many test-takers require troubleshooting assistance for this step in the online proctoring process. The most common types of problems that test-takers needed help with were mainly technological, including issues with their camera, operating system, microphone, or not having the correct administrative access to their computer.

   How Examity is addressing this challenge

   We have created a system readiness check page (**https://www.examity.com/test-taker-systems-requirements/**) for test candidates to validate that their system is capable of supporting the exam and connecting with a proctor. We also make sure to clearly communicate the requirements needed to test with Examity, including meeting minimum download/upload speeds and having an available webcam and microphone. In addition to this, Examity created a "how to" video (**https://www.examity.com/prepare-and-connect-getting-started-with-your-proctor/**) with step-by-step instructions about downloading the meeting application and connecting to a proctor.

   What can test organisations do?

   An important step that test organisations can take is to make test-takers aware that they must connect to a proctor via a meeting application. They should communicate this early and often, along with what they will need to do to make this happen. Helpful tips, including arriving early for an appointment and familiarising candidates with available knowledge tools, will ensure a smooth connection.

   In addition, test organisations should work with candidates to prepare their system prior to their scheduled appointment time. They can use the system readiness check listed above to make sure that they are set up correctly and ready to connect to a proctor. By communicating effectively and taking the necessary steps to make sure that test-takers are prepared, we can eliminate the difficulty in connecting to a proctor.
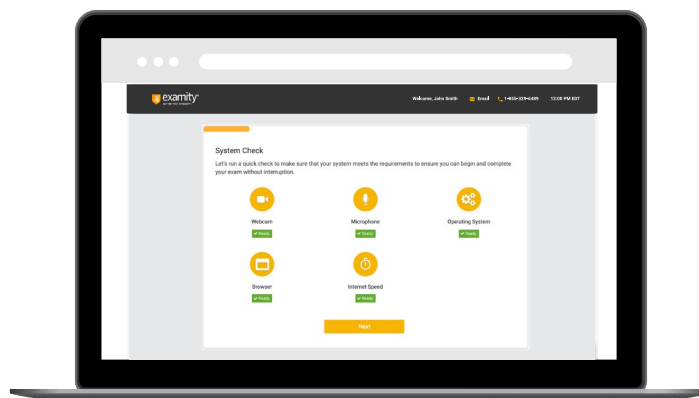
## 2. Unexpected challenges in appointment scheduling

Our research has uncovered that scheduling for online proctoring can sometimes be unfamiliar and confusing. There are many reasons for this. Some test-takers can't secure their preferred dates and times due to the limitations of the test organisation. Others wait until test day to schedule their exam and then find themselves unable to find a timeslot. Along with this, systems have been found to sometimes be hard to navigate, making it difficult for test candidates to know what to do.

How Examity is addressing this challenge

We partner with test organisations to provide guidance and instruction materials on how to schedule exams. In addition, we have taken steps to improve the Examity platform in order to create a more user-friendly experience for test-takers.

What can test organisations do?

There are additional steps that test organisations can take in order to help with this problem. For example, providing larger test windows with additional dates and times will provide more opportunities for test candidates to schedule their exams. Also, offering practice exams prior to the appointment date will help familiarise them with the process. Lastly, communicating clear instructions well in advance will also increase the understanding of scheduling procedures. Together, we can help test candidates overcome scheduling challenges through these simple and effective changes.
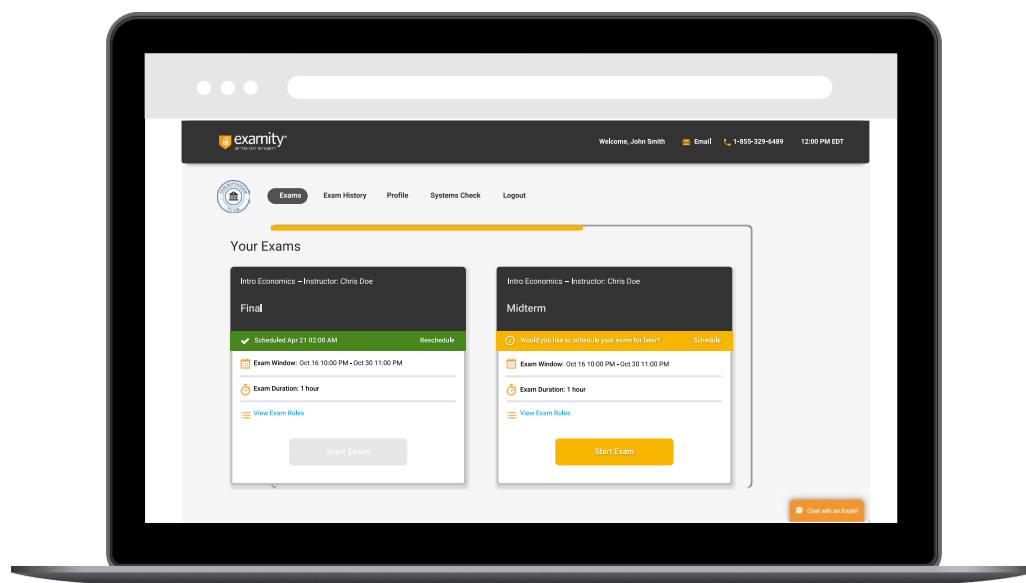
3. Confusion over exam logistics and results

Candidates often want to know about the logistics, status, and results of their exams. However, they may not be sure who to turn to in order to find out that information. This can lead to confusion and a negative testing experience.

The problem is that test-takers sometimes have trouble correctly distinguishing between their organisation and the online proctoring provider. In our research, we have found that many of the support enquiries we receive relate to exam logistics. This means that not only are test candidates confused about the details of their exams, but they are also unsure who to turn to when they need help.

How Examity is addressing this challenge

Examity aims to be as clear as possible in communicating to test candidates that we do not have answers to their logistics questions, nor do we have exam results. We have added that information to both the pre- and post-exam instructions and include it in our FAQs. In addition, Examity provides a phone number and email address for their institution so that they can contact them directly.

What can test organisations do?

Test organisations can follow Examity's lead by providing clear information about how to find out the answers to their logistical questions. This information should be shared prior to the exam, along with corresponding contact information.

It would also be very helpful for institutions to share FAQs and talking points with Examity so that we can provide certain responses on their behalf. By taking this step, we can help improve customer service and provide a better test experience.
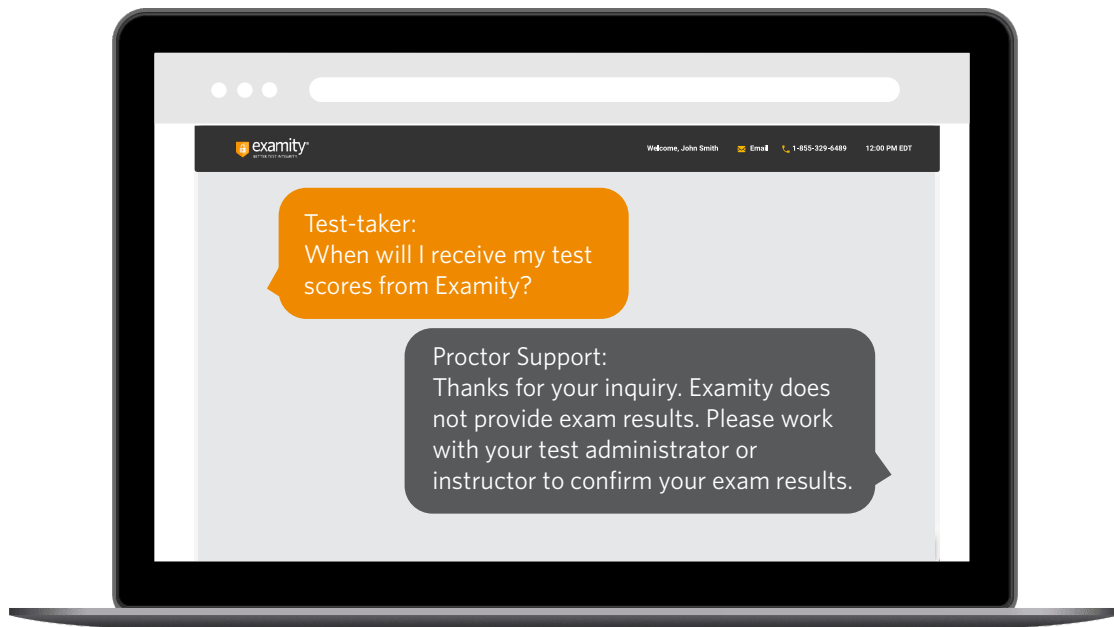
4. Confusion surrounding exam rules

Online proctoring certainly presents a different set of rules and instructions for test-takers. That is because an online environment presents more variables, leading organisations to define and present new processes and procedures to maintain the integrity of the exam.

However, these rules are sometimes not clearly communicated, leading to confusion amongst test-takers. In turn, setup times for exams increase along with the number of support questions that are asked prior to the exam. We have found that clients using complex exam instructions have a launch time that is twice the industry average or more.

How Examity is addressing this challenge

The most important way to overcome this challenge is through clarity. Examity clarifies the exam instructions with the organisation prior to exams and then trains our proctors to apply them appropriately. But what if a test sponsor doesn't know where to start? We also provide our partners with a sample and a template for developing effective exam proctoring rules to help them both create and communicate understandable instructions. When possible, we encourage organisations to use common rules and standard language to maintain consistency.

What can test organisations do?

The first step that organisations can take is to evaluate whether additional unique exam rules are in fact necessary. They should review the standard proctoring process and templated exam rules before creating new rules. Of course, there are times when they are needed. However, if they mainly complicate or overlap with the standard proctoring process, then they may not need to be incorporated.

When additional exam rules need to be implemented, then they should be clear, concise and easy to understand. Organisations should collaborate with their Examity account manager to draft instructions or, when possible, reuse applicable content that is already familiar to the Examity operations team. It also helps to be clear about standard rules that apply to all online exams. For example, it is important to note that the exam time begins only after authentication is complete. Taking these steps will help ensure that exam rules and instructions will be easy to understand for test-takers.
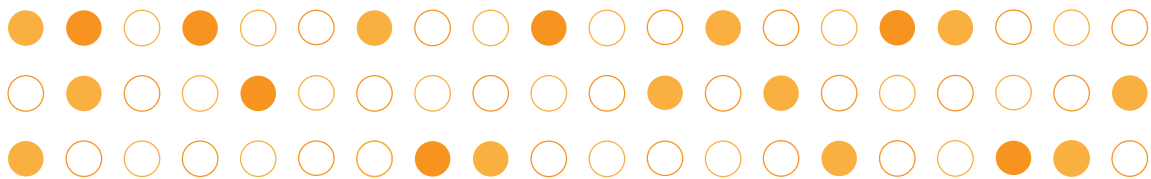
5. Data privacy and security concerns

As testing moved from classrooms, conference rooms, and test-centers to living rooms and bedrooms, privacy naturally became a concern. Some test-takers became cautious and resistant to sharing their screen or providing limited control to online proctors. The use of cameras inside personal spaces also led to worries amongst test-takers.

Along with this, candidates were concerned about how their personal data would be used. A common expectation in today's word is that website and applications collect personal data. This assumption, coupled with a general lack of experience around online testing, leaves test-takers unsure and wary of how their information may be collected and used.

How Examity is addressing this challenge

Examity takes privacy and security very seriously. Examity is GDPR compliant and ensures that our privacy and security practices meet the highest standards for online proctoring. Transparency is key, which is why we post all of our privacy and security policies on an easy to read page (**https://www.examity.com/privacy-and-security/**). Test-takers can visit this page and read about what we do, and what we don't do, with their data, along with FAQs to help answer any questions they may have.

We also spend a significant amount of time training and coaching our employees to follow all of the policies that we have in place and provide scripting on how to best address these concerns. Examity's proctors are held to the highest standards regarding privacy and security, and this ongoing training ensures that they always know the latest information.

What can test organisations do?

Clear communication is the best way to address these types of concerns. Test organisations should let their candidates know about how safe and secure online testing is. Education around screen sharing is important to calm fears.

Test organisations should also make it clear that in addition, proctors cannot perform any task that requires administrative rights. Re-emphasise with the test taker that online proctoring is not focusing solely on the candidate, and instead is a 3-way process of monitoring and recording the exam including:

1. The test-taker's behaviour and environment
2. The organisation's exam process and delivery
3. The online proctor who invigilates and troubleshoots IT issues in real time by providing transparency around safety and security, test-takers can feel more at ease with online proctoring.

6. Trouble finding a suitable test environment
   Another challenge that arose is that test-takers are struggling to find a suitable test environment in their homes. In some cases, test instructions are very clear about the parameters for taking an exam remotely, including others not being allowed in the testing room, writing not being allowed on the walls, and background noises not being permitted.

   Test-takers are expected to take their exam in a private room, alone, and with no distractions. But, in some cases, this is just not feasible. The location that test-takers select to complete their exam is at the discretion of the test administrator, not set as mandatory by the online proctoring company

   ### How Examity is addressing this challenge
   Examity knows how difficult this type of situation can be. Because of this, we train our proctors to be sensitive to different living situations and to use good judgement in determining what is and what is not an exam violation. Examity has standard rules, representing best practices, that ask that a test-taker be alone in a room. However, this is an agreed-to policy by the test organisation's administrator and it does not mandate in any way that the location must present a student's intimate surroundings.

   We also encourage our partners to demonstrate flexibility when creating rules regarding test environments. For example, lower stakes exams may not need to follow strict guidelines. When administering high stakes exams, rules should be looked at closely to make sure that test-takers are not severely penalised for small infractions due to their living situations.

   ### What can test organisations do?
   Along with being flexible, test organisations can build more exceptions into their rule sets to accommodate those without suitable testing situations. One example of this is when another person enters the exam room. If they are just passing through and the test-taker does not engage with them, then it should not be a violation. By specifically writing this exception into the rules, candidates will not feel added stress if a situation like this occurs.

   Test organisations can also partner with their candidates to find out what kind of environment they have access to. By knowing ahead of time what potential problems may occur, they can preemptively allow exceptions. If test-takers have a hardship where they can not locate a private location to complete an exam, then test administrators can work with them to receive an accommodation to complete the exam in a place of their choosing that is not private. Flexibility and understanding are the keys to helping test-takers overcome the challenge of less than suitable test environments.

By looking at and analyzing the challenges that test-takers face, test organisations can work to make testing easier and safer. With online proctoring being the new standard in 2021 and beyond, we can all do our part to ease the transition to this new standard and provide sensible solutions for a rigorous and accountable online assessment environment.

To learn more about how Examity
can help you, please contact us at
www.examity.com/intl