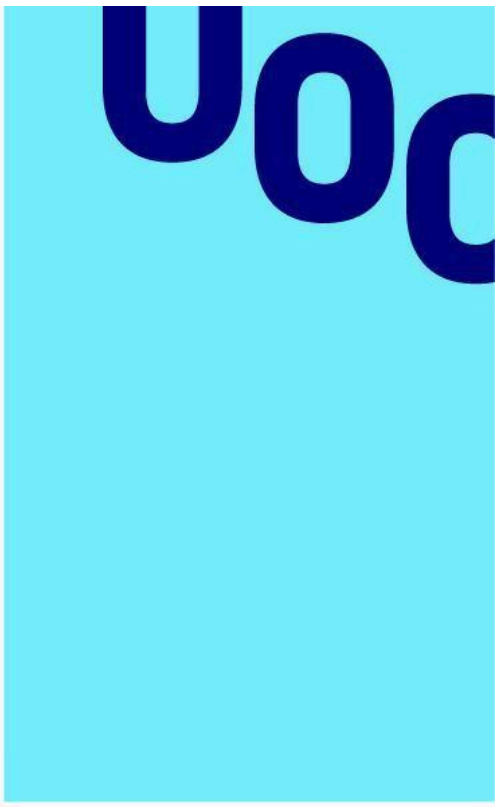
Synchronous Online Oral Tests

Guide for Teaching and Research Staff

Pilot test semester 2024-1



eLearning Innovation Center

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

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1. What are synchronous online oral tests?

Synchronous oral online tests are **graded activities** that can form part of continuous assessment or final assessment.

Synchronous online oral tests are administered for two main **reasons**:

- To provide a **space for direct, personalized support** that has a positive impact on the students' learning process.
- To reinforce the current mechanisms for **verifying identity and authorship**, by means of an oral and synchronous validation of knowledge and skills.

Although it may initially create some anxiety for UOC students and teaching staff, who are more used to asynchronous communication, **synchronous communication adds value to the assessment activity**. For example, it permits more fluid and dynamic communication; it provides the opportunity for clarifications *in situ*, personalizing the message, obtaining **more inputs that contribute to determining the result of the assessment**, etc.

At the same time, synchronous online oral tests reinforce the current mechanisms for **verifying identity and authorship**, which has a positive impact on the **credibility of the assessment itself** and on the **prestige of the programme.**

Synchronous online oral tests provide an **opportunity for teaching staff and students to meet each other** in an environment that is technologically and conceptually well defined.

This has a **positive impact on the teaching and learning process** due to the personalization of the assessment.

2. How are synchronous online oral tests included in the UOC's assessment system?

Within this pilot test, the synchronous online oral tests can be included in the UOC's assessment in three different ways, depending on the needs of each course:

- **Continuous assessment including synchronous online oral tests:** The synchronous online oral tests are integrated into the continuous assessment by means of a graded oral activity which is compulsory for all students on the course.
- **Continuous assessment + oral synthesis test**: The synthesis test is administered orally, as a final assessment test which is compulsory for all students on the course.
- **Continuous assessment + oral synthesis test or exam**: The exam is administered orally, and is only compulsory for students who do not pass or do not follow the continuous assessment.

The administration of synchronous online oral tests **does not entail a change in the course's assessment system**.

Meanwhile, **the course plan** for each course participating in the pilot test states that the course includes a synchronous oral assessment activity in the learning plan, which must be carried out in the final part of the course, and is graded.

2.1 Text to be added to the course plan of courses adopting the synchronous online oral tests strategy

- **Proposed text for the strategy of synchronous online oral tests in continuous assessment**

One of the continuous assessment activities planned for the course consists of an oral test that is carried out synchronously by videoconference.
Over the course of the semester, students will be informed of when they can choose a time slot to take the oral test.
When the time comes, the students must log in to the videoconference session (via the link sent to them beforehand) and do the activity that the examiner sets them.

The students will be informed of all the technical details necessary in due time.

- **Proposed text for the strategy of synchronous online oral tests in final assessment**

If the student has to take *[the synthesis test/exam, indicate the type of final assessment test to be an oral test – to be changed for each course]*, the format will be oral, and it will be administered synchronously in a videoconferencing session.

Over the course of the semester, students will be informed of when they can choose a time slot to take the oral test.

When the time comes, the students must log in to the videoconference session (via the link sent to them beforehand) and do the activity that the examiner sets them.

The students will be informed of all the technical details necessary in due time.

These are **proposals for information** to be added to the course plan. The text is a guideline, and can be adapted according to the specific needs of each course.

3. What tools are used to administer synchronous online oral tests?

The synchronous online oral tests are administered through **VTramit**, a set of tools integrated into the campus for this pilot test. It is a solution that includes the following **features**:

- Integration with UOC login.
- System for reserving test times:
  - The examiner can propose times and dates for the test.
  - The students can select the times and dates.
  - The time and date can be confirmed through the sending of a message containing a link to the videoconference.
  - The test can be added to Google Calendar.
- Videoconferencing with a recording facility.
- Videoconferencing also allows screen sharing.
- Cloud storage of interview videos.
- Transcript of the conversation.
- Record of the synchronous online oral test.

If students or teaching staff encounter any **technical problems** during the tests, they will be able to use a help channel (contact number below).

For more information on how the appointment and videoconferencing management tool works, please consult the video tutorials that you will find in the annex to this document.

Telephone helpline for dealing with **technical problems**:

+34 931 227 844

Available from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

You can also make a query through F6 / Help Service, following the route provided for the oral tests, for continuous or final assessment:

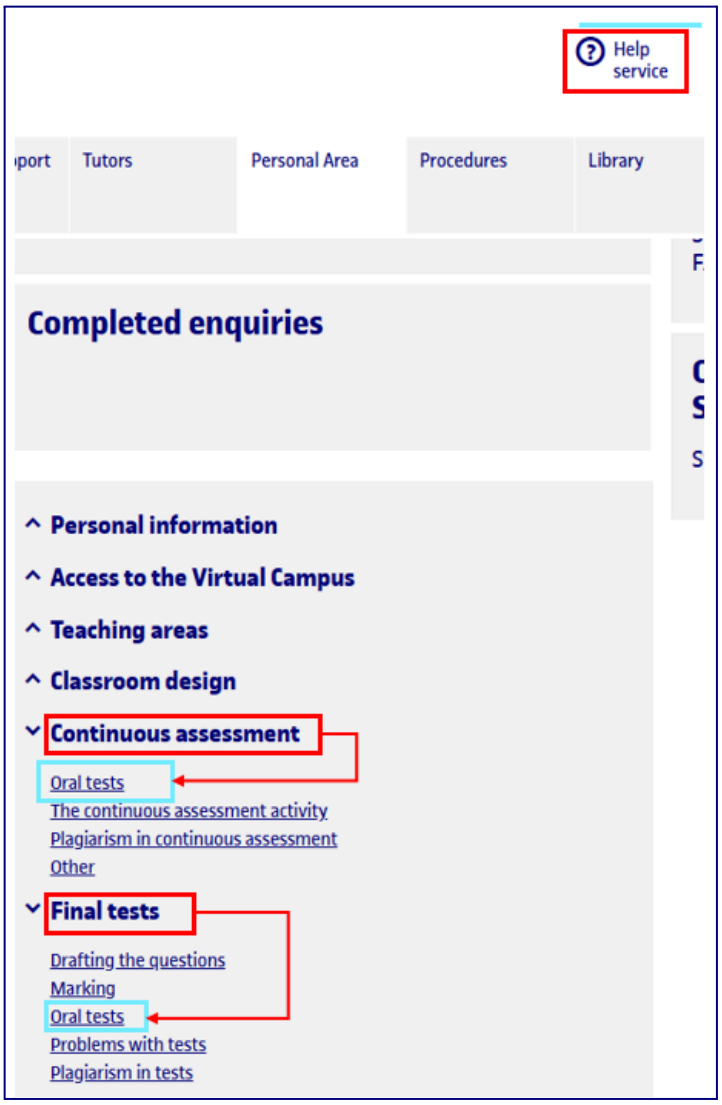

Figure 1. Procedure for making a query.

4. Who does what? Teaching tasks and roles

Synchronous online oral tests require the performance of specific tasks related to their preparation, development and assessment. This table contains a proposal for the distribution of tasks among the various members of teaching staff involved.

	Before the test	During the test	After the test
Teaching and research staff	• Defines the methodological design of the oral tests. • Defines the learning outcomes, the assessment criteria and the weighting of the synchronous online oral tests within the assessment as a whole. • Selects the examiners. • Structures the information on synchronous online oral tests in the course plan and in the classroom. • Creates the activity required when the synchronous online oral tests are administered as part of continuous assessment. • Coordinates the process of assigning examiners and managing time slots, supported by the Programme Management team.	• Guides and coordinates teaching staff actions during the synchronous online oral tests. • Seeks to ensure the quality of the entire process.	• If necessary, deals with reviews and appeals related to the synchronous online oral tests (these reviews and appeals are subject to the standard procedure). • Compiles any doubts, queries and incidents that may have arisen during the synchronous online oral tests to pass them on to the Project team.
Affiliated teaching staff (not the examiner)	• Prepares a bank of general questions and specific questions. • Coordinates the preparation of the synchronous oral online tests with the team of examiners. • Provides information about the online oral tests in the classroom's communication channels. • Resolves students' queries and doubts about the synchronous oral online tests.	• Seeks to ensure the quality of the entire process.	• If necessary, deals with reviews and appeals related to the synchronous online oral tests (those reviews and appeals are subject to the standard procedure).
Examiner of synchronous oral online tests	• Finds out about the student's record by consulting grades and qualitative feedback on SpeedGrader. • Notifies their availability (for the reservation of time slots) for the tests. • Contacts the students they are assigned before the synchronous online oral tests. • Coordinates the preparation of the synchronous oral online tests with affiliated teaching staff. • Selects questions from the question bank (if one has been created) and prepares a personalized interview for each student.	• Informs the student about the test procedure. • Administers the test. • Deals with possible queries, doubts and issues while the test is taking place, and tells the affiliated teaching staff and coordinating professors about them.	• Completes the assessment record and/or the assessment in SpeedGrader, which includes qualitative feedback and details on how the test went. • Where appropriate, participates in dealing with reviews and appeals related to the synchronous oral online tests.

5. How are the synchronous online oral tests administered?

5.1. Prior contact between the examiner and the student

Before the date on which the synchronous online oral test is administered, the examining teaching staff must send a message to each student whose work is being assessed, introducing themselves, explaining their role as examiner, describing the test and the timeframes involved, and offering guidance to prepare for it.

This initial contact is for informative and pedagogical purposes. Students initially tend to be anxious about assessment, and if they are accustomed to online procedures, personal contact can increase this anxiety.

For this reason, they will need to be reminded that they will be in a space for personalized support, in which synchronization will help with the process of communication, which will enable them to clarify points on the spot, etc.

5.2. Recommended duration of synchronous online oral tests

Although synchronous online oral tests may have a different configuration within the framework of each course participating in the pilot test, an **approximate duration of 30 minutes is generally recommended**, which includes the following milestones:

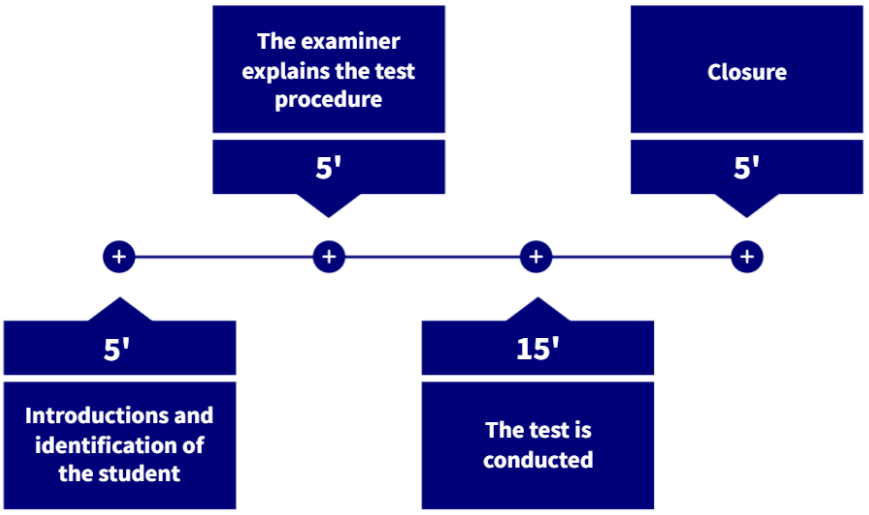

Figure 2. Example of proposed timing for a 30-minute synchronous online oral test

If the student does not appear within the first 15 minutes, they must be graded as **"Missing"**.

5.3. Identification of the student and start of recording of the test

The first step in administering a synchronous online oral test is to identify the student. After greeting the student but before starting the recording, the student must be asked to show their identity document. With this identification, the examiner can confirm that:

- The **name** that appears on the **identity document** is the student's name. If not, the synchronous online oral test will be cancelled and the reason for this will be stated in the assessment record.
- The **image on the identity document** matches the student. As it can be difficult to check an image, if there is a very significant difference, this must be noted in the assessment record and the test should continue.

If everything is in order, the student is informed that recording is **about to begin**.

The purpose of the **recording** is to **provide evidence** that gives both students and teaching staff safeguards in the event of any possible complaints or appeals.

The student should not be asked if they want to object to the recording, since this is a right, along with others, which they have already been informed about. Accordingly, if they want to object, they must do so proactively. They may be informed that if they object, the evidence from the test will be the teaching staff's record, and it is important to note in the record that the test has not been recorded due to the student's specific objection to this.

If the student **objects to the synchronous online oral test being recorded**, it is very important that this is noted in the **"Comments"** section of the record.

5.4. Explanation of the test procedure

Once the recording has started, the examiner must remind the student of what the synchronous online oral test involves. It is useful to have a standard script that provides this explanation, to ensure that all students receive the same information. This initial explanation should include:

- A friendly **greeting** to the student.
- A **brief introduction** to the examiner (as a reminder of the one already given).
- A **description** of what the synchronous online oral test is, highlighting its educational nature, the space for meeting and personalization that it provides, the opportunity for online clarifications if any question is not clear, etc.
- The **procedure** for the synchronous online oral test: how long it lasts, how many questions it includes, the need to give concise answers, avoid digressions in the answers (there is a time limit), and how and when the result will be posted.

Synchronous online oral tests should be administered in the language of instruction. However, the student may not have a strong command of the language of instruction used during the course. According to the regulations, **students are entitled to take their final assessment tests in any of Catalonia's official languages,** except for final tests for courses assessing language proficiency.

5.5. Withdrawal by the student

If the synchronous online oral test is taken as part of **final assessment tests**, you should leave 15 minutes for the student to decide whether they wish to **withdraw** from the oral test. The examiner must inform the student of the time available to make this decision before starting the test.

The student must be aware of the contents of the oral test beforehand in order to be able to make an informed decision. This will let them decide whether or not they want to take the test.

5.6. Administering the test

Questions must be asked orally, clearly and concisely, and always with a friendly and approachable tone. If the student has any doubts (which are reasonable in an assessment context), for example, if they have not understood the questions, the questions can be explained or reformulated (as far as possible).

The oral test must be different for each student. In other words, this is a personalized test. To that end, in addition to having a sufficiently broad set of questions, it is important that during the interview preparation process the examiner prepares personalized questions that are based on a review of the student's history and development during the course. For example, if the feedback from a specific continuous assessment activity showed that an area of knowledge needed reinforcement, now would be the time to assess this progress.

5.7. Ending the test

When the time limit for the test is up, you must tell the student and bring the test to an end. This should be done with a polite message involving the following:

- Announce that the time limit has been reached and the test has therefore ended.
- Thank the student for participating.
- Provide a general assessment of their presentation, without giving any details or information related to the result of the assessment (the grade).
- Finally, remind them how and when the result and the feedback from the test will be announced.
- At the end of the entire test process, **stop the recording**.

In the details of a scheduled test, the examiner must change the assignment status to "**Completed**", and the form to finish filling in the details required to complete the synchronous online oral test and to **create the record** will then appear.

5.8. Creating the record

At the end of the session with the student, the assignment status must be changed, and as a result the test record appears with the following fields that must be filled in:

- Type of test: a drop-down menu with 3 options:
  - Continuous assessment.
  - Synthesis test.
  - Exam.
- Questions or topics included in the test (open field).
- Score for each of the questions/topics in the test (open field).
- Other comments (open field).
- Grade (numerical).

The system takes the rest of the information required for the record by default. The record is generated automatically. Note that this file may take up to **24 hours** to be generated. Each examiner and the administrative staff will have access to this record (you can see a sample of the record template in the appendix below).

Remember that if the student does not join the test session within the first 10 minutes, they must be graded as "Missing".

5.9. Grading of synchronous online oral tests

Synchronous online oral tests are graded by the examiner according to the previously defined assessment criteria. It may be useful to create an assessment rubric that helps to grade the synchronous online oral test on a more uniform and objective basis.

The grading of and feedback for synchronous online oral tests carried out within the framework of **continuous assessment** will take place using Canvas SpeedGrader. The records generated in VTramit are **not automatically transferred** to SpeedGrader.

The grading of and feedback for synchronous online oral tests that take place within the framework of **final assessment** will take place using the final assessment test marking system.

6. General recommendations

Here are a series of **recommendations and methodological guidelines** that can contribute to the quality and trouble-free administration of synchronous online oral tests.

- During the synchronous oral online test, the examiner and the student will be able to interact personally for a limited time, but with the familiarity permitted by this type of interaction (being cordial, providing clarifications, reformulating a question if it has not been understood, etc.). At the same time, reinforcing the mechanisms for verifying identity and authorship provides added value for the reputation of both the degree programme and its graduates. It is important to convey this positive message to students.

- They must be informed of how the synchronous online oral tests work in the classroom, with communications planned for implementation at different times on the academic calendar, in order to:

    a) Explain what synchronous online oral tests are, and how they are administered to students.

    b) Convey the advantages and benefits of synchronous online oral tests through a positive message.

    c) Listen to concerns and resolve doubts before the synchronous online oral tests take place.

- It is important to clearly define and explain the assessment criteria for synchronous online oral tests. Among other aspects, these criteria may include: the weighting of the test in terms of the course as a whole, the weighting of each question, the aspects that are assessed during the test (content of the answer, quality of the oral presentation, etc.). In this regard, it may be useful to create an assessment rubric that helps assess the quality of each learning outcome associated with the synchronous online oral test. You can find more information about assessment at the UOC in this support guide for teaching staff.

- When organizing the appointments schedule, it is important to consider the needs of students who live in countries in **different time zones**. It is also important to anticipate the impact that synchronous online oral tests may have on **people with disabilities or specific educational support needs**. Identifying people this applies to, communication beforehand, having a wide range of appointment times available and a flexible assessment design are important factors in ensuring a more inclusive assessment system.

- The oral test must be different for each student. In other words, this is a personalized test. This means a sufficiently wide range of questions must be prepared in order to ensure both randomness and personalization. A good time

for the affiliated teaching staff to prepare the personalized questions and write the qualitative comments that can guide the examiner is at the end of the assessment of each continuous assessment activity, since the detailed information is recent.

- Some tips for carrying out synchronous online oral tests:

It's not advisable to…	It's better to…
Maintain a cold and distant attitude with the students taking the oral test.	Show empathy and understanding towards students while maintaining a pleasant attitude.
Enter the test without being familiar with the student or their record on the course.	Review their activities and the feedback provided by the teaching staff to find out their writing style, preferred topics, errors and key issues, etc.
Begin the test by asking a graded question.	Begin the test by introducing yourself, telling the student how long the test will last, providing a brief introduction to the objective of the test and the process involved, and other aspects you consider relevant to administer it properly.
Approach the test as if it were an oral exam or inquisitorial test.	Approach the test as a synchronous interview in which a dialogue is maintained with the student.
Improvise the questions during the test.	Have a list of questions and select some from this list. The test can be focused towards other questions that are not on this list depending on the student's answers.
Formulate ambiguous or complex test questions.	Formulate clear and concise questions, avoiding the use of ambiguous or overly complicated language that could confuse the students.
Describe an image, video or table orally.	Share a screen with the student if possible, so that they can see the image, table or any other visual document.
Rush the student's response or interrupt the student during their response.	Give the student a reasonable amount of time to think and answer. Avoid interrupting them prematurely, but you must also manage your time to ensure that all the questions can be covered.

It's not advisable to…	It's better to…
Finish the test after having answered the last question.	End the test by providing very general feedback before saying goodbye (without giving the grade for the test).
Fill in the report while the test is being carried out. The student may think that you are not paying attention to them.	Fill in the report after the session with the student ends.
Complete the report a few days later.	Fill in the report as soon as possible so that you do not forget any details of the test.

7. Appendices

7.1. Assessment record template

Synchronous online oral test records, with UOC style (in Catalan)

The record template that you will find when you do the synchronous online oral tests will have some fields in which the relevant information has already been completed, including the name of the course, the semester of teaching, the course code, etc., and it must be filled in with the fields that are completed after each session.

The final record will be available from VTramit with the fields filled in.

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Acta prova oral síncrona	
Semestre	
Data	
Hora inici - Hora fi	
Codi assignatura - Desc	
Tipus de prova	Avaluació contínua (AC) / Prova de Síntesi (PS) / Examen (EX)
Personal docent investigador	
Nom i cognoms de l'estudiant	
Avaluador(s)	
Preguntes/temes que s'han tractat a la prova	
Valoració del contingut de la prova per a cada pregunta/tema	
Altres Observacions	
Qualificació (numèrica)	Exemple: 7 (B)

7.2. VTramit tool video tutorial (06/05/2024)

Video tutorial on the VTramit tool carried out on 6 May 2024 (in Catalan).

7.3. VTramit tool video tutorial (12/06/2024)

Video tutorial on the VTramit tool carried out on 12 June 2024 (in Catalan).

7.4. Settings of synchronous online oral tests in continuous assessment

This test can be set in two ways:

- as the single graded activity of a continuous assessment activity or challenge.
- as one of several graded activities, when there are two or more graded activities within a continuous assessment activity or challenge.

The format of the synchronous oral online tests for continuous assessment in Canvas will follow the pattern below or a similar one (depending on the characteristics of the test):

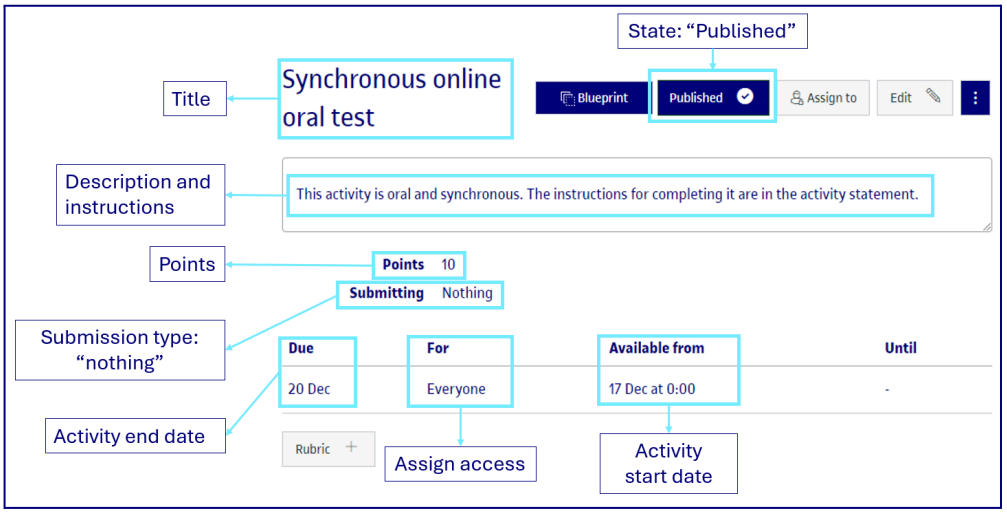

Figure 3. Overview of the submission of the activity in the synchronous online oral test.

Example A. View of a synchronous oral online test as the single activity in a continuous assessment activity or challenge

Challenge 4 is worth 20 points. In this case, the challenge consists of a single activity, and the synchronous online oral test is worth the total score.

This is how it looks in the Challenge (Figure 4) and in the Gradebook (Figure 5):

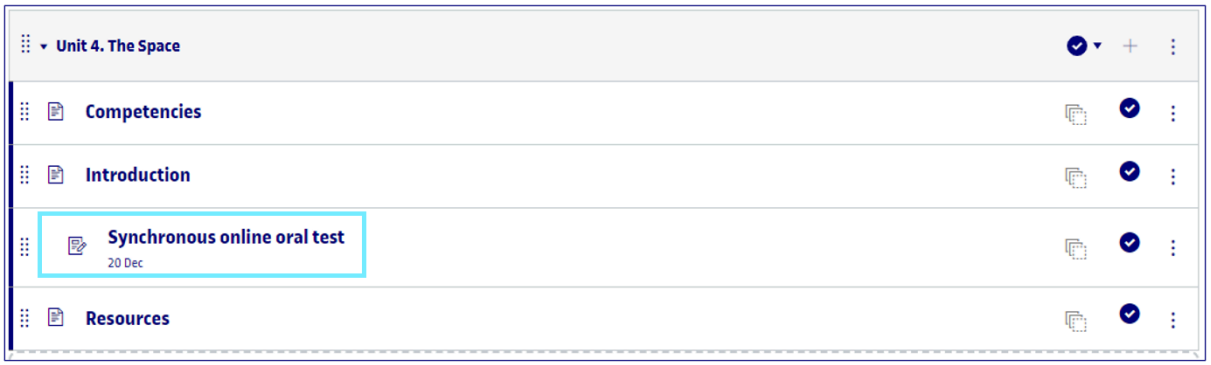

Figure 4. View of the module with the synchronous oral online test activity when it is the only activity in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.

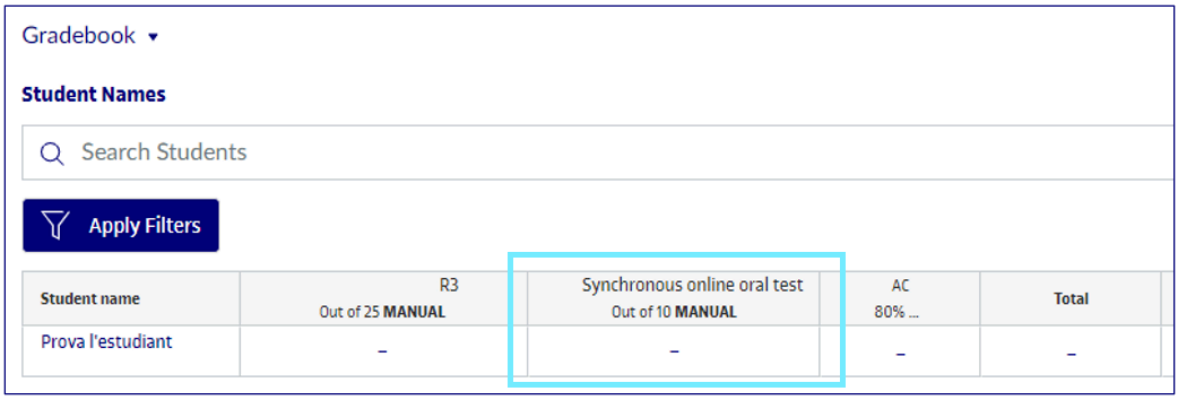

Figure 5. View of the Gradebook when the synchronous online oral test is the only activity in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.

Example B. View of a synchronous oral online test when there is more than one activity in a continuous assessment activity or challenge.

Challenge 4 is worth 45 points. In this case, there are two activity submissions within the challenge, with the synchronous online oral tests worth 20 points and activity R4 worth 25.

This is how it looks in the challenge (Figure 6) and in the Gradebook (Figure 7):

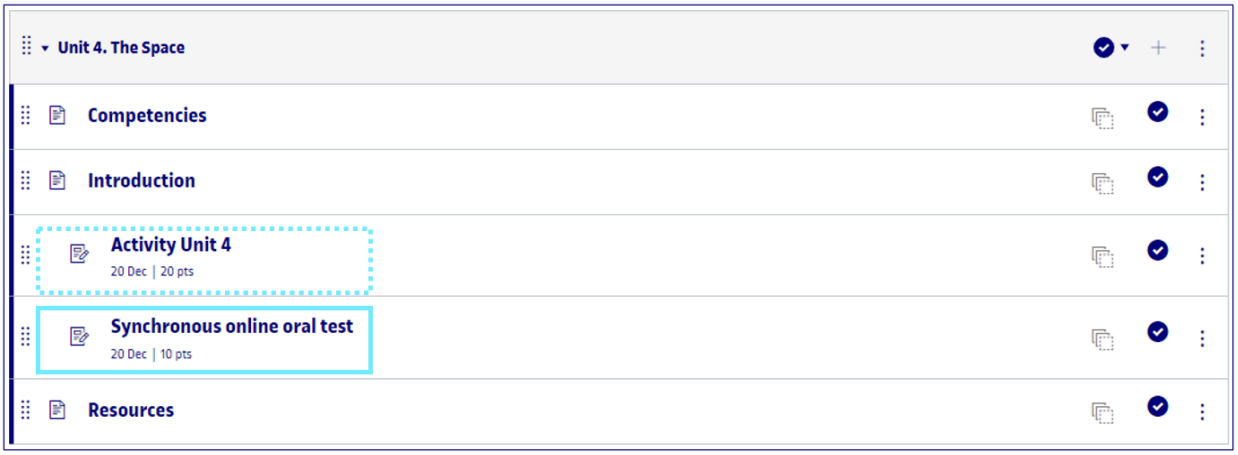

Figure 6. View of the module with the synchronous online oral test activity when there is more than one submission in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.

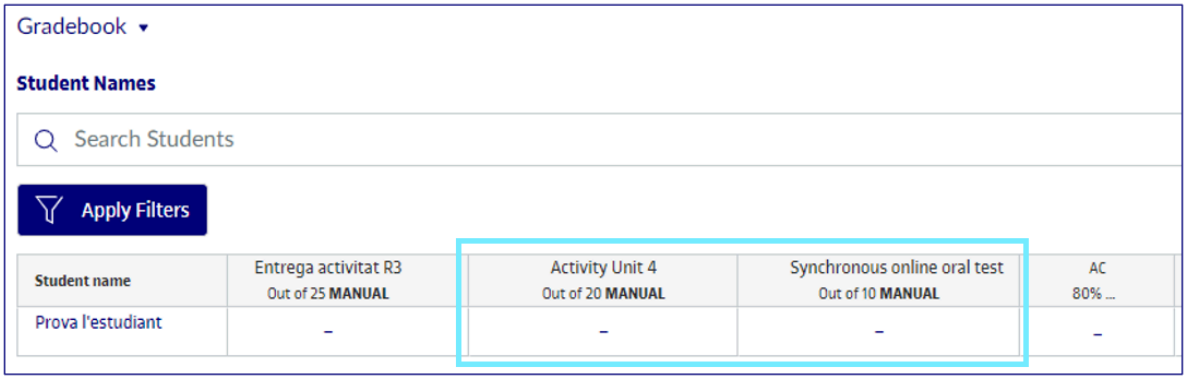

Figure 7. View of the Gradebook when there is more than one submission in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.