

Methodological guide for designing synchronous online oral tests

Synchronous online oral tests

Uoc

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1. Introduction

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

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

- To provide a **space for synchronous and 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.

The inclusion of the synchronous online oral test within the design of the course is fundamental for ensuring that these tests are effective and meet the needs and objectives of the course.

This process may involve various measures to ensure that these tests assess various aspects, such as the content covered or the learning outcomes of the course, showing consistency with the programme's competencies and learning outcomes.

2. Implementing tests in courses

Some issues must be taken into account when including synchronous online oral tests in courses, such as their objective, when they are added, and the type of questions that the students will be asked.

The main aspects to consider are listed below.

2.1. Identifying learning outcomes

The first step is to identify the learning outcomes of the programme and course which the synchronous online oral tests contribute to achieving. These outcomes are designated in the programme report, although each activity can use them as a base to define more specific ones. They must be clearly defined by the teaching staff to ensure that the test has a clear objective and is aligned with the expected outcomes.

Synchronous online oral tests can assess the acquisition of content or communication skills, critical reasoning capacity, the understanding of key knowledge and the practical application of theoretical knowledge, among other aspects.

After the objective of the oral test has been identified, it will be necessary to state whether the synchronous oral online test is to be included in the continuous assessment (within a continuous assessment activity or challenge), in the synthesis test, or whether it will be carried out as a final

assessment test. This decision is essential because it will impact the design of the course in two areas:

- the dynamics and timing of the course (when the synchronous online oral test will be applied) and
- the content related to the subject to be covered in the oral test (depending on whether it is in the continuous assessment, in the synthesis test or in the final assessment test).

2.2. Teaching staff carrying out assessments

A particular feature of this type of test is the role of the teaching staff carrying out assessments. This teaching staff will be responsible for carrying out the synchronous online oral tests, in either the continuous assessment or in the final assessment.

One of the tasks of the teaching and research staff will be to find professional experts in the field who can perform this assessment. To that end, the administrative staff involved in the tests will inform the teaching and research staff on how to include these teaching staff members in their classrooms, since they have specific tasks and a stipulated remuneration for each synchronous oral test carried out.



This teaching staff can be the same affiliated teaching staff as on the course or other professionals who are experts in the field.

To ensure the learning process is assessed appropriately, if they are not the course instructors, the teaching staff carrying out assessments must:

- *Have access to the classroom from the first day of teaching.* This access will allow the person performing the assessment to see how the classroom works, have access to announcements, review the content and learning outcomes, access the learning resources, follow participation in debates, and analyse assessments and feedback. This will provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the context and the students' progress.
- *Be introduced to the students.* They must communicate with the students, either through an announcement or email, in which they clearly explain their role and tasks during the semester. This introduction will help establish a relationship of trust and clarify expectations.
- *Have access to the students' submissions.* It is important that the person performing the assessment can review the work submitted by each student to see their writing style, examine the content of their activities, see how they respond to feedback received from affiliated teaching staff, etc. This includes access to the students' participation in debates and forums, which will enable a more comprehensive assessment of their learning process.

- *Access the feedback to students provided by the course instructors.* The person performing the assessment must be able to consult the feedback that students have received through SpeedGrader, announcements or the forums. This information is crucial for understanding how students' learning is guided, and how this feedback is applied in their subsequent work.
- *Monitor the progress of learning.* It is important that the teaching staff carrying out assessments monitor the learning process in the classroom continuously, providing them with a clear picture of each student's progress in the oral test.
- *Know the specific needs of the students.* The evaluator must have information about any special educational needs that a student may have (dyslexia, speech disorders, visual or hearing impairments, etc.) in order to adapt the oral exams to these needs and ensure a fair and equitable evaluation.

Other tasks related to the role of the evaluator are::

- *Be aware of the students' specific needs.* The person performing the assessment must have information about any special educational needs that a student may have (dyslexia, dyslalia, visual or hearing problems, etc.) to be able to adapt the oral tests to those needs and ensure that the assessment is fair.
- *Whenever possible (due to time, assignments, and roles), collaborate in the creation of POVS questions.* Working with the course instructors and the course coordinating professors (teaching and research staff), the teaching staff carrying out assessments, as well as with other assessors (if any), must participate in the creation of a list of questions to be used in the synchronous online oral tests.
- *Indicate the slots in the calendar for carrying out the synchronous online oral tests,* according to the instructions issued by the project coordinators.
- *Perform the oral test.* The teaching staff carrying out assessments will be responsible for administering the synchronous online oral test within the stipulated calendar and in the established slots.
- *Confirm the student's identity.* When the student logs in for the test, and before starting the recording, they must ask the student for an identification document to confirm their identity.
- *Assess the student.* They are responsible for assessing the students who have taken the synchronous online oral tests, taking into account the criteria established beforehand (providing the quantitative grade and completing the report).
- *Fill in the report.* After the synchronous oral online test has been completed, the teaching staff carrying out assessments must complete the assessment report, making sure that all the relevant information is recorded accurately and completely.



For further information, please see section 5 of the [Guide on Synchronous Online Oral Tests \(for teaching and research staff\)](#).

2.3. Defining assessment criteria

a) Clarification of criteria

Defining the assessment is an essential aspect of the test design. The assessment criteria to be taken into account must be clearly understood, and they must be shared with all the teaching staff carrying out assessments in the synchronous online oral tests (if there are different classrooms and/or different teaching staff carrying out assessments).

Rubrics or a detailed list of the criteria that will guide the assessment can be drawn up in order to clarify this aspect, and to ensure that it is fair and objective.

The assessment criteria must be specified based on the programme's learning outcomes assigned to the course. They may be related to the acquisition of content or to oral expression skills, such as coherence in arguments, the correct use of subject-specific vocabulary, the ability to respond spontaneously, originality and creativity in answers, the practical application of the concepts worked on, etc.

b) Educational needs

As mentioned above, when administering the synchronous online oral tests it is essential to take into account the educational needs that some students may have informed us of in order to be able to take the appropriate measures (extending the test time, presenting the questions visually, increasing the size of the questions, tables or images on the screen, etc.).

This will contribute to a fairer assessment, adapted to the diversity of the students, and ensure that individual abilities and efforts are assessed appropriately.

2.4 Design of the question format

a) Creating a list of questions

This list can be described as an organized series of questions which is used to assess students' knowledge, skills and competencies in a given field.

These questions can be categorized according to various criteria, such as the topic, the level of difficulty, the type of question (practical cases, knowledge, etc.) and the competencies they aim to assess (reflection, critical capacity, analysis, etc.).

The lists of questions in the synchronous online oral tests must be varied, flexible, sequential, up-to-date, uniform and useful for verifying the student's level of knowledge of the course and the student's authorship of the work.

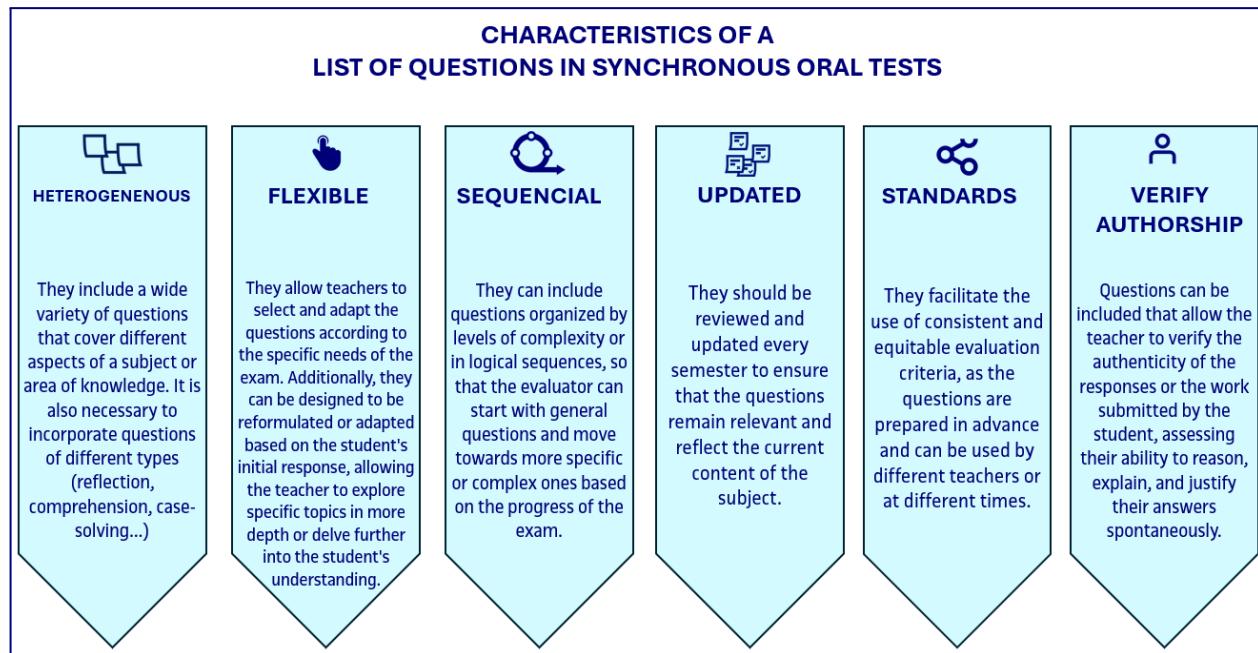


Figure 1. Characteristics of a list of questions in synchronous oral tests.

Creating a list of questions is crucial for ensuring that the synchronous oral tests are fair, efficient, standardized, heterogeneous, can be adapted to meet each student's needs and fulfil the objectives of the test. For this reason, it is important to create this list of questions with all the teaching staff involved, in order to guarantee consistency in the content assessed, ensure that all the expected learning outcomes are covered, and foster collaboration and consensus regarding the assessment criteria.



The teaching staff carrying out assessments must be familiar with this list, and indicate the questions they have asked their students in order to avoid repetition and consequent copying among students.

The longer this list is, the greater the ability to adapt the assessment to the students' various needs and levels. This will enable a more precise and thorough assessment of the competencies acquired, while minimizing the risk of repetition or predictability in the questions.

b) Types of questions

It is important to include different types of questions on a list so that students not only answer questions that are based on memory and content, but also questions that are practical, reflective and metacognitive. For example, open-ended questions can encourage a more thoughtful and detailed response, while questions related to a hypothetical situation can assess the student's ability to apply their knowledge in new contexts or real challenges.

The questions must cover the content worked on during the course. There may be different types of questions that can be combined during the test. The various types of questions include those listed below:

- **Reproductive:** This type of question, based primarily on memory, requires the student to remember and repeat specific information that they have studied. *For example: define concepts, produce enumerations, write chemical or mathematical formulas, recite laws or legal articles by heart, etc.*
- **Comprehension:** These questions assess the student's ability to understand and explain concepts or ideas. *For example: describe a concept, model, strategy, etc. in their own words.*
- **Reflection and analysis:** Reflection and analysis questions require the student to think critically about a topic, analyse information, or make connections between ideas. *For example: analyse how climate change impacts emerging economies, reflect on how Platonic philosophy affects modern thought, etc.*
- **Practical application of content:** These questions assess the student's ability to use knowledge or techniques in new or specific practical situations. *For example: explain how the principles of the circular economy could be applied to an SME, how a municipal council could address the issue of noise pollution, etc.*
- **Synthesis:** Synthesis questions ask the students to combine ideas, concepts or knowledge from various sources or areas in order to create a new and overall understanding of a topic. They are useful if the aim is to foster the ability to combine and connect ideas, create innovative solutions, or develop new points of view based on information acquired beforehand. *For example: explain what comprehensive solution you would propose to deal with the global energy crisis, summarize the relationship between two psychological schools of thought, etc.*
- **Assessment or evaluation:** These questions assess the students' ability to make judgements based on specific criteria, or to compare and contrast different points of view. *For example: give your personal opinion on the legalization of recreational drugs, discuss the various advantages and disadvantages of keeping nuclear power plants operational, etc.*

- **Problem-solving:** These questions require the student to identify a problem, analyse the possible solutions, and determine the best way to solve it. *Examples: explain how you would deal with a conflict between two co-workers, explain what strategies you would use to improve a working team's productivity, etc.*
- **Creativity:** In this type of question, the student is asked to demonstrate their ability to think innovatively or originally. *Examples: explain the characteristics that a new technological product should have to improve a company's internal communication, imagine how freedom would be represented in a work of art, etc.*
- **Hypothetical:** These questions ask students to imagine a situation that is not real, and reflect on how they would act or what consequences it could have. *Examples: students imagine the proposals they would make if they were the head of the marketing department of a multinational company, discuss what classrooms would be like if the teachers were artificial intelligence, etc.*
- **Clarification of an activity or part of it:** This type of question helps us to confirm the authorship of an activity or to focus on a particular aspect of a submitted activity. *For example: justify a definition or decision included in a challenge or continuous assessment activity, explain some of the content covered in an activity in more depth, etc.*
- **Justification:** Justification questions ask students to argue and defend an opinion, decision or point of view, providing reasons and evidence to support their position. *Examples: justify why reading is necessary for children's intellectual development, adopt a position on the use of renewable energies as opposed to fossil fuels, etc.*
- **Critical thinking:** This type of question requires students to analyse, evaluate, and make critical judgements about a topic or issue. These questions are usually open-ended and do not have a right or wrong answer, but instead focus on the quality of the argument and the ability to consider multiple perspectives. Critical thinking questions help develop skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and solving complex problems. *For example: discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the current education system, reflecting on the ethical implications of the cosmetics industry's use of animals in experiments, etc.*
- **Comparisons:** These questions assess the student's ability to compare two or more concepts, ideas, phenomena or situations, and to point out the similarities and differences between them. *Examples: explain the main differences between two works of literature, compare Aristotle's and Kant's vision of "time", etc.*
- **Interdisciplinary or connection:** These questions call on the student to make connections between different knowledge areas or disciplines. *Examples: relate breakthroughs in biotechnology to ethical issues in medicine, analyse the influence of nineteenth-century literature on the social and political movements of the time, etc.*
- **Metacognition:** The metacognition strategy is aimed at enhancing cognitive skills and abilities in order to improve self-regulation and learning effectiveness. Questions asked within this strategy aim to make students reflect on their own learning process. They help develop the ability to be aware of what and how they learn, what strategies they use, and

how they can improve their academic performance. These questions encourage self-regulation and planning, and help students become more aware of their strengths and areas where they can improve. *For example: explain how they have reached a conclusion, justify the method used to solve a problem, reflect on other ways of working as a team, make a personal assessment of your progress on the course, etc.*

c) Structure and sequencing

In addition to defining the type of questions, it is important to design the structure of the synchronous oral test so that the questions are sequenced in a logical manner.

This can involve beginning with simpler questions to put the students in a more relaxed frame of mind, and progressing towards more complex questions or questions requiring a greater degree of reflection and in-depth study.

d) Flexibility and adaptability

Since synchronous oral tests can involve unexpected answers or discussions that unfold in unexpected ways, it is essential that the test format allows for some flexibility.

The teaching staff carrying out assessments must be able to formulate alternative questions to those on the list, depending on the answers provided by the student and the nature of the test. These questions may aim to personalize the assessment, reduce the likelihood of students sharing questions with each other, go into more depth about the answer given, promote critical thinking, further explore the student's competencies, or ensure and confirm academic integrity.

3. Administering the tests

The crucial point is when the oral test takes place. Here are some basic tips for administering synchronous online oral tests effectively:

Avoid...	Instead...
Maintain a cold and distant attitude with the students taking the oral test.	Show empathy and understanding, while maintaining a pleasant disposition.
Log into 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...
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 real-time interview where there's a dialogue with the student.
Improvise the questions during the test.	Have a list of questions and select some. 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; avoid ambiguous or overly complicated language that could confuse 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 aid.
Rush the student's response or interrupt the student during their response.	Give the student a reasonable amount of time to think and answer the question. Avoid interrupting them prematurely, but you must also manage your time to ensure that all the questions can be covered.

Avoid...	Instead...
End 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. However, you can take notes.
Complete the report a few days later.	Fill in the report as soon as possible so that you don't forget any details.

Table 1. *Tips for carrying out synchronous oral tests*

4. Settings for synchronous online oral tests in continuous assessment

When the synchronous online oral test is carried out as part of continuous assessment, the settings of this activity within Canvas must be taken into account.

This test can be approached in two ways:

- As a single graded activity within 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 settings for each type are listed below. The only major difference is in the scoring.

Features	As a single activity, continuous assessment activity or challenge	As a part of an activity, continuous assessment activity or challenge
The activity must be created by the teaching and research staff or the affiliated teaching staff responsible for editing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
It must be included in the course plan.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The title of the activity must be "synchronous oral test" or similar, but it must be identified as an oral test.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Features	As a single activity, continuous assessment activity or challenge	As a part of an activity, continuous assessment activity or challenge
The test question must describe what the test involves. For example: it could specify that it will be oral, synchronous, the estimated duration, the instructions for the test and all the information considered necessary for taking the test correctly.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In the activity settings, the activity must be “no submission”.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In the activity settings, the grade must be “grade with letter”.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Although it is not compulsory, two activity submissions should be created in multilingual classrooms (one per section).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The status of the activity must be “published”, at least within the period that the test is carried out.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The score will be the total for the continuous assessment activity or challenge grade.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Score must be divided among all the activities.

Table 2. Settings of activities with synchronous online oral tests in continuous assessment

To summarize the table above, the settings of the synchronous online oral tests in continuous assessment in Canvas will follow the pattern below or a similar one (depending on the characteristics of the test):

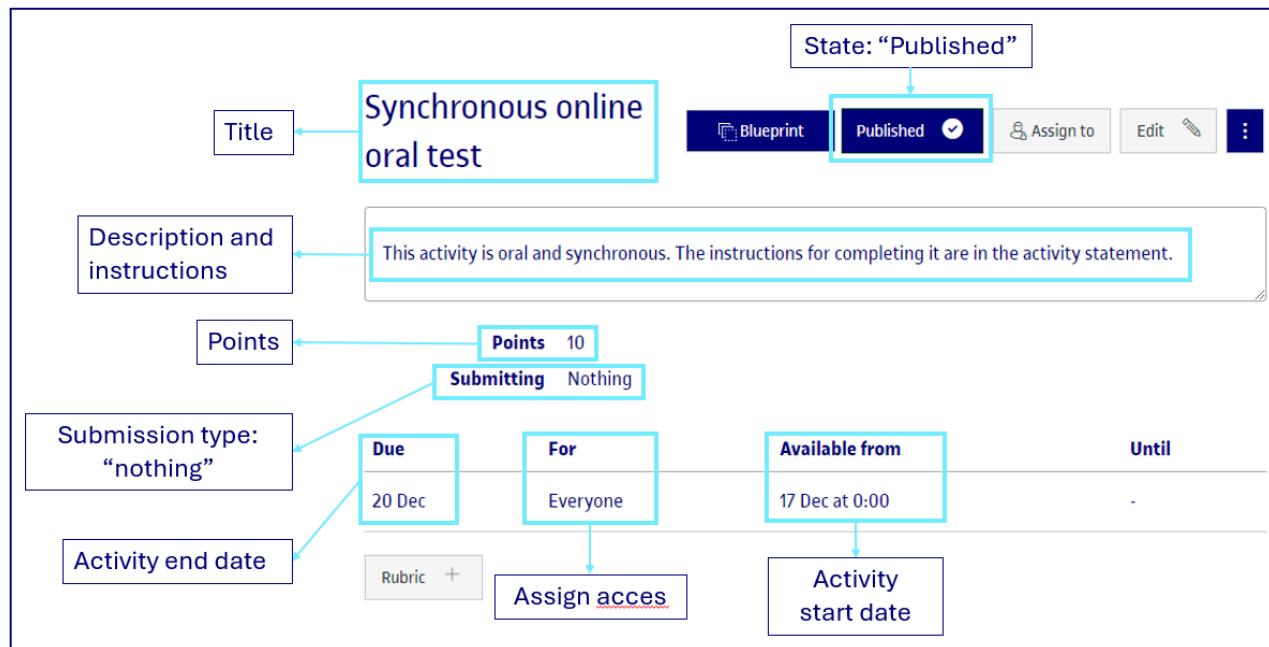


Figure 2. Overview of the submission of the activity in the synchronous online oral test.

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

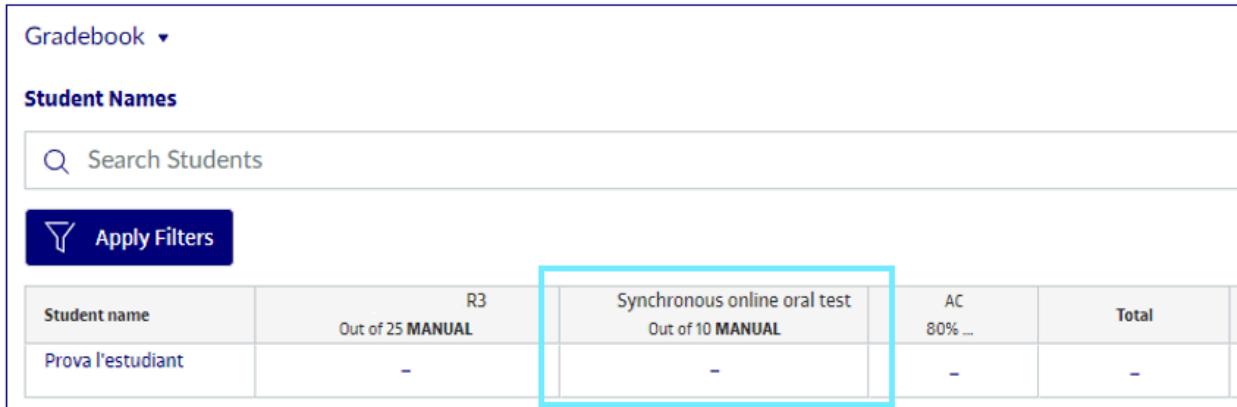
Unit 4 is worth 10 points. In this case, there is a single activity within the challenge where the synchronous online oral test is worth the total score.

This is how it looks in the challenge (Figure 3) and in the Gradebook (Figure 4):



The screenshot shows a Moodle module structure for 'Unit 4. The Space'. The challenge section contains a single activity titled 'Synchronous online oral test' with a due date of '20 Dec'. This activity is highlighted with a blue border. The other activities in the challenge are 'Competencies', 'Introduction', and 'Resources', each with a checkmark in the 'Grade' column.

Figure 3. View of the module where the submission of the synchronous online oral test activity has been added when it is the only submission in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.



The screenshot shows a Moodle Gradebook for 'Student Names'. The student 'Prova l'estudiant' has a grade of '-' for the 'Synchronous online oral test' activity, which is highlighted with a blue border. The activity is worth 'Out of 10 MANUAL'. The student also has grades for 'R3' (Out of 25 MANUAL) and 'AC' (80% ...), both of which are '-'.

Figure 4. View of the Gradebook when the synchronous online oral test is the only activity of 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.

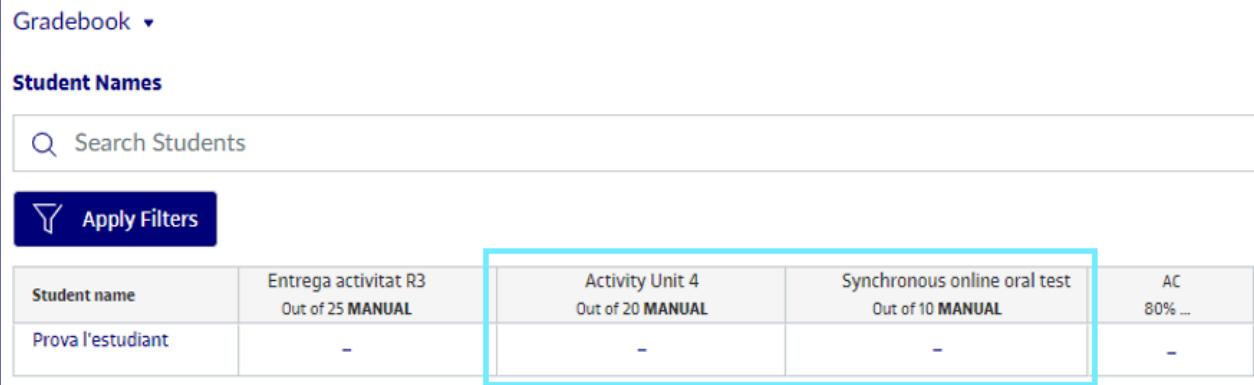
Unit 4 is worth 30 points. In this case, two activity submission are set up within the challenge, with the synchronous online oral tests worth 10 points and activity R4 worth 20.

This is how it looks in the challenge (Figure 5) and in the Gradebook (Figure 6):



The screenshot shows the 'Unit 4. The Space' module. It includes sections for 'Competencies', 'Introduction', and 'Resources'. The 'Activity Unit 4' section is highlighted with a dashed blue border and contains the text '20 Dec | 20 pts'. Below it, the 'Synchronous online oral test' section is highlighted with a solid blue border and contains the text '20 Dec | 10 pts'. Both sections have a checkmark icon and a three-dot menu icon to the right.

Figure 5. View of the module where the submission of the synchronous online oral test activity has been added when there is more than one submission in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.



The screenshot shows the Gradebook interface. It has sections for 'Student Names' and a search bar. Below is a table with student data. The 'Activity Unit 4' and 'Synchronous online oral test' columns are highlighted with a blue border. The table data is as follows:

Student name	Entrega activitat R3 Out of 25 MANUAL	Activity Unit 4 Out of 20 MANUAL	Synchronous online oral test Out of 10 MANUAL	AC 80% ...
Prova l'estudiant	-	-	-	-

Figure 6. View of the Gradebook when there is more than one submission in the challenge or continuous assessment activity.