

The Truth about LockDown Browser: The Inside Scoop

By Russell Davidson, CTEL Associate Director for Digital Education



What is LockDown Browser?

Respondus is a technology company that develops assessment applications for the educational sector. One of its notable products used at Detroit Mercy is LockDown Browser. Lockdown Browser is a web browser similar to Chrome and Firefox, however, exclusively for testing. While a student is testing in LockDown Browser, they are locked into their test. Students cannot view other websites (unless the instructor authorizes access to a particular page for reference). They cannot, for example, use Chat GPT to author an essay response. Nor can they browse the course site or review an online textbook.

A student can copy text from one part of their exam to another; however, they cannot copy text before launching LockDown Browser then paste it after. Students cannot copy (or screenshot) exam questions to share later. Students cannot open other software on their computer, like chat tools, PowerPoint, or digital notes. As the name suggests, LockDown Browser locks down the student's computer for the duration of their test. Once students have finished their test (and closed LockDown Browser), they may resume their normal computer use.

But Students Also Have Phones ...

LockDown Browser also has a feature called Monitor, which, when activated, records the student's test-taking behavior for later review. Monitor employs basic eye and head tracking as well as the student's microphone to record their testing. If it detects potentially suspicious behavior, such as the student looking away at a phone or cheat sheet, or if it detects external noises, like someone providing answers, Monitor sets flags on its recording of the student's test. After testing is complete, the instructor can go to the *Respondus LockDown Browser Dashboard* in their course site to view the testing results. They can review flagged test attempts to determine if the activity indicates cheating or some more innocuous activity, such as a cat momentarily blocking the camera view. It is important to remember that the instructor still determines whether questionable behavior is definitively cheating. *Monitor does not automate this part of the review process.*

When students launch a LockDown Browser test that uses Monitor, they are required to run through a series of steps that may include advice about setting up a proper testing area and recommending some assessment best practices. The steps may also include a testing environment survey where the student is asked to pan their camera around their testing area to show they do not have a phone, notebook, or “study buddy” in the vicinity. It may also include a step in which the student is asked to show the camera their photo ID. The set-up process can be partially customized to include or exclude these steps based on the instructor’s preferences. For example, if an instructor allows a blank sheet of paper for note-taking during the exam, they may modify the set-up instructions to tell the students they must show their blank sheet as part of the environment survey.

Screen Recording and Remote Live Proctoring

Respondus has added screen recording to Monitor, allowing instructors to view both the student and their on-screen activity when reviewing flagged incidents. LockDown Browser, together with Monitor, now includes an option for faculty who want to proctor an online test in the same way they would proctor in a face-to-face environment (with a feature called Remote Live Proctor). Remote Live Proctor allows you to use Teams or Zoom (or even Collaborate) to watch your students take their exams in real-time rather than review recordings after the fact. The CTEL’s [Using Respondus Monitor with Live Proctoring](#) page provides more information on setting up and running this type of exam.

Student Concerns

Some students have an issue with being required to use LockDown Browser. These concerns, as relayed to the CTEL, generally fall into one of three categories: 1) “It’s so easily bypassed why even bother,” 2) “It will harm my computer,” 3) “You can’t require students to record themselves,” and 4) “We don’t have the appropriate hardware.” None of these assertions are true. LockDown Browser is not easily bypassed.

“It’s so easily bypassed why even bother”

Respondus has done an excellent job of quickly blocking student efforts to get around the LockDown Browser requirement. There are plenty of guides on the internet that suggest techniques for getting around LockDown Browser, but the CTEL has yet to find a technique that works. If you come across one that seems to do what it claims, please pass it along to ask-CTEL@udmercy.edu. We would be very interested in giving it a try (and passing it along to the folks at Respondus if it works).

“It will harm my computer”



LockDown Browser will not damage a computer and does not run in any capacity when closed. It does not slow a computer down, nor does it install any tracking software (head and eye tracking is done by Respondus on their servers and only while Monitor is running). The CETL recommends that students restart their computer after using LockDown Browser to restore services (e.g., Teams and Discord) that LockDown Browser deactivated for the duration of the test.

“You can’t require students to record themselves”

It is true that the University encourages our faculty to carefully consider whether or not they require active student cameras during live online classrooms. Some students may not be comfortable giving their peers a look into their homes or at family members or housemates. However, this does not mean that faculty cannot include this requirement in their syllabus if they believe it is important. This argument is not as applicable to Monitor because the video is not visible to classmates. Monitor recordings are accessible only to teaching faculty (and Blackboard administrators at the CETL) and cannot be downloaded without special permission from the CETL.

“We don’t have the appropriate hardware”

LockDown Browser with Monitor runs on Windows, Apple, and Chromebooks. LockDown Browser alone (e.g., without Monitor) can run on an iPad. Students who do not have access to the necessary hardware may take their Monitor-required tests on campus in their campus Testing Center, a computer lab, or the McNichols Campus Library. The University prioritizes students’ dignity and makes every effort to provide equitable solutions for those without computers with webcams, ensuring a respectful and inclusive approach to proctoring.

The CETL recommendations for adopting Lockdown Browser:

- [Give a Test With Lockdown Browser](#)
- [Follow Remote Proctoring Best Practices](#)

In essence, we recommend:

- Include your remote proctoring plan in your syllabus
- Students will need to download and install LockDown Browser
- Provide a download link and installation instructions well in advance of your first remote proctored test. The CETL has download and install instructions you can share with your students, found here: [Download & Install LockDown Browser - Detroit](#)



Mercy CETL

- Provide students with low-stakes unlimited attempt practice quizzes that require LockDown Browser before requiring students to use on formal assessments
- When offering practice assessments, use the exact settings you will use on a real test - if you are using Monitor and including an environment survey, make sure your practice quiz includes Monitor with an environment survey. The CETL recommends you *require* this practice quiz, because the students who are most likely to encounter an issue are also the most likely to skip it and be unprepared come exam time.

Questions?

If you need assistance or have questions about using LockDown Browser (or any other instructional technology tool available at the University), contact the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning by phone at (313)-578-0580 or email ask-CETL@udmercy.edu.