

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING SOUND PAPER AND PENCIL TEST ITEMS

Consult *Student-Centered Classroom Assessment, 2nd Ed.*, Chapter 8 & 9 for examples and greater detail on guidelines.

General Guidelines (apply to all item formats)

1. Keep wording simple and focused:
 - a. Follow rules of grammar
 - b. Eliminate superfluous material
 - c. Come to the point
 - d. Test mastery of material, not ability to figure out what you're asking
 - e. Aim for lowest possible reading level
2. Ask a question (minimize use of incomplete statements).
3. Avoid providing clues within and between items:
 - a. Avoid use of specific determiners such as "always" and "never"
 - b. Avoid grammatical clues (e.g., "a" and "an", present and past tense, singular and plural, etc.)
 - c. Avoid information clues (e.g., the stem of one item gives away the answer to another)
4. The correct answer should not be obvious to those who have not mastered the materials tested.
5. Highlight critical words such as MOST, LEAST, EXCEPT, and NOT, because they are easily overlooked.

Multiple Choice

1. State the whole question in the test item stem.
2. Keep responses brief and parallel in:
 - a. Length
 - b. Use of specific determiners
 - c. Grammatical construction
 - d. Level of generality
3. Avoid repetition of material in each of the response options.
4. Limit use of "all or none of the above".

5. Be sure there is only one correct or best answer (best answer items should be worded to ask for BEST answer).
6. OK to vary number of response options across items within the same test.

True/False

Make them entirely true or false as stated.

Matching

1. Include only homogeneous items. Do not mix dates, events, names, etc. in a single exercise.
2. Maximum length is 10, shorter is better.
3. Provide more responses than there are things to be matched.
4. Provide directions for the match to be made. Indicate if a response can be used more than once or if an item has more than one match.

Completion or fill-in

1. One blank per item (put blank toward end).
2. Length of blank should not be a clue.

Essay

Exercises

1. Avoid general, all encompassing questions.
2. Goal: test structure of knowledge and/or thinking.
3. Point direction to appropriate response in the essay exercise.
4. Give points and/or time allocation.

Scoring

5. Outline acceptable response in advance.
6. Set policy regarding non-achievement factors, i.e., writing.
7. Score in the blind, if possible.

8. Score all responses to one exercise at a time (faster!).
9. Score holistically or analytically, but with criteria clearly established.

Formatting Test Items

1. Be consistent in the presentation of an item-type.
2. Keep all parts of a test question on one page.
3. Avoid crowding too many questions on one page.

Arranging Test Items

1. Group the questions on the test by item-type--that is, put all completion questions together, all multiple choice, all true/false, and so on.
2. Begin with some very easy questions to give students a chance to "break into" the test.

Writing Directions

1. Write clear, explicit directions for each type of item.
2. State the point value of each item-type.
3. Indicate how the answer should be expressed by the student. For example, should the word TRUE or FALSE be written or simply T or F? Should numbers be rounded to the nearest tenth? Should units, such as months, meters, or grams be included in the answer?

Producing Tests

1. Avoid writing tests on the chalkboard.
2. Type tests for duplication--unless your handwriting is very clear and neat.
3. Proofread the test carefully.
4. Duplicate clear, readable copies.
5. Ask a colleague to review or to take important tests.

INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION--10 SPECIFIC IDEAS

1. Develop a table of test specifications in advance of teaching the unit, so as to define a clear vision of the instructional and assessment target.
2. Share the objectives and table of test specification with each student at the outset of the unit, so as to provide them with a clear vision of their target.
3. Involve students in the development of the objectives and table of specification.
4. Review and modify the vision of targets on your own or along with students as the unit unfolds.
5. Develop assessment exercises along the way--a few each day as the unit unfolds, so as to assure a close match between daily instructional priorities, and so the test will be done and ready to go when it is needed at the end.
6. Involve students in writing some of the items, so as to help them zero in on the targets.
7. Have students analyze the questions on the test after they take it to see if they agree that they really do reflect the agreed upon target.
8. Have students predict their performance on the test based on their knowledge of the agreed upon target.
9. Have students analyze their own responses in terms of the various components of the target to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.
10. Keep tables of test specifications and lists of unit objectives in one file and save the associated test items for reuse when you reteach that unit again in the future. Note cells of the table or individual objectives where students did not do so well, so you can revise instruction next time.