

Getting Ready: Checklist For Constructing Better Tests*

Well-constructed tests help motivate students and reinforce their learning while enabling instructors to assess students' mastery of course objectives. Tests also provide feedback about teaching, often showing what was and was not communicated clearly. Designing tests is one of the most challenging tasks confronting college instructors. Use this checklist to assess your test construction and test administration strategies.

Planning the Test

- _____ Integrate test construction with other course planning activities.
- _____ Mix types of items (multiple choice, true/false, essay) on a written exam or mix types of exams (a performance component with a written component).
- _____ Test early in the term and consider discounting the first test if results are poor.
- _____ Test frequently to help students avoid getting behind, and to give you multiple sources of information to use in computing the final course grade.
- _____ Test various topics in proportion to the emphasis you have given them in class.
- _____ Clearly communicate your expectations to students.
- _____ Determine how you will assign points before administering the test.

Constructing the Test

- _____ Present a clearly formulated task in each test item.
- _____ State each item in simple, clear language, free of nonfunctional material, extraneous clues, and race, ethnic, or sex bias.
- _____ Construct items so one item doesn't aid in answering another.
- _____ Avoid separate items that depend upon answers to previous items, to reduce the chance of perpetuating an initial mistake over the course of succeeding items or tasks.
- _____ Use a little humor or place less difficult items or tasks at the beginning of an exam to help reduce test anxiety.
- _____ Write clear and complete instructions for all sections of the test.
- _____ Proofread written exams carefully and check collation to be sure no pages are missing.

Administering the Test

- _____ Allow ample time for test completion.
- _____ Anticipate in advance special needs of learning disabled students and decide whether to allow the use of dictionaries, extra time, separate testing sites, or other special conditions.

- _____ Bring more copies of the exam than you think you will need.
- _____ Minimize interruptions during the exam by telling students you will write on the board any instructions or corrections that need to be made after the exam has begun.

True-False Items

- _____ Write statements so they can be unequivocally judged true or false.
- _____ Make statements brief and use simple language.
- _____ Use negative statements sparingly. Eliminate double negatives.
- _____ Avoid specific determiners (e.g., *always*, *sometimes*, *may*).

Multiple-Choice Items

- _____ Present a single clearly formulated problem in the stem of the item.
- _____ State the stem in positive form, wherever possible. If you do use negative wording, emphasize it by underlining or using caps.
- _____ The intended answer should be correct or clearly best. Make distracters plausible and attractive to the uninformed.
- _____ Make alternatives grammatically consistent with the stem, parallel in form and free from clues to the correct answer.
- _____ Avoid the alternative "all of the above." Use "none of the above" only when appropriate.
- _____ Vary the relative length of the correct answer, to eliminate length as a clue.
- _____ Balance the proportion of correct answers (e.g., A, B, C, D) and avoid patterning when sequencing answers (e.g., A, B, A, B).

Matching Items

- _____ Each matching item should contain only homogeneous material.
- _____ Keep the list of items short with brief responses on the right.
- _____ Make the list of responses longer or shorter than the list of premises to provide an uneven match.
- _____ In the directions, clearly state the basis for matching and indicate whether responses can be used more than once.

Short-Answer Items

- _____ State the item so a single, brief answer is possible.
- _____ State the item as a direct question whenever possible.

Essay Questions

- _____ Restrict each question to the measurement of complex learning outcomes.
- _____ The thought processes involved in answering essay questions should have been demonstrated and practiced prior to the testing situation.

Performance Testing

- _____ Clearly specify the performance outcomes to be measured.
- _____ The instructions should clearly describe the test situation.
- _____ Design observation forms well, and ensure that they are appropriate for the performance being evaluated.

*Groniond, N.E. (1982). *Constructing achievement tests*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice- Hall.