

Suggestions for Writing Effective Multiple-Choice Questions

Here are some suggestions for writing effective multiple-choice questions. Use these to further your conversations about the effectiveness of the examples in your resource booklet

1. Don't give away any clues to the answer!

Make sure that you have no information in the question that will help a student identify the correct answer. Equally, watch out for hints in the answers, particularly grammar hints, that may point out the correct response to a student.

2. Make the problem clear to the student and make sure the answers are plausible.

Put the problem in the question stem so that the student has a clear indication of what is being asked. Also, don't include silly or implausible answers – this will only encourage the use of the process of elimination. Keep answers related to a particular theme.

3. Use multiple- choice questions as diagnostic questions

Multiple-choice questions can be used to diagnose students' misconceptions or common misunderstandings. If you accompany the correct answer with three incorrect answers, where each incorrect answer reveals a specific mistake or misconception, then you will gain valuable insight into why your students got the question wrong.

4. Ensure the question's content and cognitive demand aligns with the learning being tested.

It is important to check the action verb of the LO/LI in question. An effective and valid question should assess not just the appropriate content but also the appropriate cognitive level. Tap into higher cognitive levels by using stimulus materials such as graphs, diagrams or unknown situations where students have to apply what they have learned.

When you are finished discussing the examples, go back to your booklet and follow the next instruction.

Suggestions for Writing Effective Completion Questions

Here are some suggestions for writing effective completion questions. Use these to further your conversations about the effectiveness of the examples in your resource booklet.

1. Do not omit so many words from the statement that the intended meaning is lost.
Too many blanks may be confusing for the student and result in meaningless guessing. Either reduce the number of blanks to significant words only or include clear instructions to give the question context.

2. If possible, put the blank at the end of a statement rather than at the beginning
Asking for an answer before the student understands the intent of the statement can be confusing and may require more reading time. Support your students' thought processes by placing the gaps towards the end.

3. Make sure there is only one possible answer!
Students might not necessarily answer the question the way you intended. For example, the less effective question in example 4 could be answered with the following – **a rare occurrence, a miracle, a scary event, etc.** So make sure you write the question in such a way that there is only one answer that makes sense.

4. Avoid grammatical clues to the correct response
If the indefinite article is required before a blank, use a(n) so the student does not know if the correct answer begins with a vowel or a consonant.

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Suggestions for Writing Effective Matching Sets

Here are some suggestions for writing effective matching sets. Use these to further your conversations about the effectiveness of the examples in your resource booklet.

1. Use homogeneous content in a matching set.

Unrelated topics included in the same matching set may allow for over-obvious matches. To avoid students using the process of elimination to work out the answers, keep the content to one topic or issue.

2. Use uneven number items to match or allow responses to be used more than once.

If you have equal numbers of items in both lists, then the last item can be answered using the process of elimination. Try using a different number of items to help reduce guessing and the use of the process of elimination. Your students will also have to think more if they know that some items will be used more than once.

3. Place longer descriptions on the left with shorter response items on the right.

Rather than the student having to read through many long phrases to find a match, they only have to read the shorter phrases. Reducing the reading time in this way will be particularly helpful for students with reading difficulties.

4. Include clear instructions which state the basis for matching the stimuli with the responses.

Make things clear for your students by explaining whether or not a response can be used more than once and indicating where to write the answer.

When you are finished discussing the examples, go back to your booklet and follow the next instruction.

Suggestions for Writing Effective Subjective Response Questions

Here are some suggestions for writing effective subjective response questions. Use these to further your conversations about the effectiveness of the examples in your resource booklet.

1. Ensure the questions content and cognitive demand aligns with the learning being tested.

It is important to check the action verb of the LO/LI in question. An effective and valid question should assess not just the appropriate content but also the appropriate cognitive level.

2. Use prompts or stimulus material to tap into higher cognitive levels of learning

Using stimulus material can allow students to apply what they have learned to a new situation or think about information in a different way. Alternatively, provide some background information which they must link with what they already know.

3. Develop a marking scheme to accompany each item

It is good practice to decide on how the marks are to be allocated for a question, and what an acceptable answer looks like, **before** you begin marking the test. Having a marking scheme in place beforehand should help eliminate subjectivity and therefore help improve the validity of the questions.

4. Make the question and the nature of the response clear to the student

Unless clear instructions are given, the student's answer may make sense to them but might not be what the you were looking for. It is important to let students know what you expect in an answer.

When you are finished discussing the examples, go back to your booklet and follow the next instruction.