

Tips Specific to Writing Individual Test Questions

Information summarized from W. James Popham's *Test Better, Teach Better: The Instructional Role of Assessment*. For more related information, please visit the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's website at <http://www.ascd.org>.

Selected-Response Items (Binary-Choice Items)

- Generate binary-choice items in pairs, not singly.
- Phrase each item so that a cursory reading leads to an incorrect answer.
- Avoid negative statements, and never use double negatives.
- Restrict single-item statements to single concepts.
- Use an approximately equal number of items, reflecting the two categories tested.
- Make statements representing both binary categories equal in length.

Selected-Response Items (Matching Items)

- Use fairly brief lists, placing the shorter entries on the right.
- Employ homogenous lists.
- Include more responses than premises.
- List responses in a logical order.
- Describe the basis for matching and the number of times a response can be used.
- Try to place all premises and responses for any matching item on a single page.

Selected-Response Items (Multiple-Choice Items)

- The question or problem in the stem must be self-contained.
- Avoid negatively stated stems.
- Each alternative must be grammatically consistent with the item's stem.
- Make all alternatives plausible, but be sure that one of them is indisputably the correct or best answer.
- Randomly use all answer positions in approximately equal numbers.
- Never use "all of the above" as an answer choice, but use "none of the above" to make items more demanding.

Constructed-Response Items (Short-Answer Items)

- Choose direct questions over incomplete statements.
- Structure an item so that it seeks a brief, unique response.
- Place response-blanks at the end of incomplete statements or, for directions questions, in the margins.
- For incomplete statements, restrict the number of blanks to one or two.
- Make all response-blanks equal in length.
- Supply sufficient answer space.

Constructed-Response Items (Essay Items)

- Structure items so that the student's task is explicitly circumscribed.
- For each question, specify the point value, an acceptable response-length, and a recommended time allocation.
- Employ more questions requiring shorter answers rather than fewer questions requiring longer answers.
- Don't employ optional questions.
- Gauge a question's quality by creating a trial response to the item.