

Module 3d: Writing Short Answer, Sentence Completion, and Extended Response Items

Passport to Great Teaching
Timothy S. Brophy

Definition

Short answer items generally require one to three sentences to complete and are assessed by a rubric


Short Answer Guidelines

Make sure that the item can be answered with a number, symbol, word, or brief phrase.

Use a direct question. This guideline is the same as the recommendation for writing other item types and for the same reason - that is the form of communication that is most common.

Structure the item so that a response will be concise. In other words, like the guideline for selected response items, make sure the central idea is in the question and is complete.


Short Answer Guidelines



If the answer is numerical, make sure the type of answer you want is made clear.
Make sure the items are free of clues.
Avoid ambiguous, confusing, or vague wording. This rule that applies to all item writing.
Make sure the items are free of spelling and grammatical errors.

Writing Extended Response Items

Definition



In most disciplines, extended response (ER) items are usually essays or other written responses (i.e. lab reports) normally one page (300 words) or longer.
In the arts and design areas, these can include musical compositions, improvisations, blueprints, architectural drawings, interior designs, arrangements, dance choreographies, art works, etc.
Most extended response items contain a <i>prompt</i> , also called a <i>stimulus</i>
Prompts can include excerpts from written texts, videos, or audio-recordings that contain information that is needed in order to respond to the <i>question</i> .

Guidelines for ER Questions

Limit the response to measuring the specified course or program SLO.
If you are trying to address more SLOs than one prompt can accommodate, then you will need to prioritize the benchmarks in terms of importance or possibly make an additional question.
Give enough information in the prompt (stimulus) to make clear the nature of the desired answer.
Make sure the prompt contains all the information the student needs in order to understand the task. Don't assume that the student will be able to read between the lines or figure out what might be missing.

Guidelines

Avoid questions that are so broad that a knowledgeable student could write several pages on the subject.
Make sure the question (or questions if more than one is needed) contains all the information the student needs. If you expect some type of graphic, then make sure that is clearly asked for.
Avoid asking students to tell how they feel about personal things or to relate personal experiences.

Guidelines

Use action verbs in the question that encourage extended responses, such as <i>explain, discuss, illustrate, compare, show, describe</i> . Avoid using verbs like <i>name, list, and identify</i> , as these words are likely to encourage the student to make lists or give short answers. (See the list of recommended verbs on p. 10 in the UF SLO Guide for some ideas)
It is best to write the scoring rubric at the same time that you write the extended response item. This will allow you to align the item with the rubric levels. As you write the prompt and the question, think about what you expect to see in a high-scoring paper and how these expectations are stated in the performance you are measuring.

Pause to Think

- If your tests currently use short answer, sentence completion, or extended questions, review these. To what extent do they meet the guidelines in the module?
- If you do not currently use these item types, what would you test using short answer, sentence completion, and/or extended essay questions? What value would these question types have for your teaching situation?
