CONSTRUCTED-RESPONSE ITEMS

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

By the end of this module, you should be able to define what a constructed-response item is, identify the benefits and challenges that constructed-response items present, know the four parts of a well-designed constructed-response item, and use the assessment blueprint to design assessment items.

KEY CONCEPTS

Constructed-Response Items

Constructed-response items ask students to write, or "construct," the correct answer.[1] We use answer keys to score simpler constructed-response items, such as fill-in-the-blank items. We use scoring guides to score more complex constructed-response items, such as short- and long-answer items.

Constructed-response items offer some benefits that selected-response items do not.

→ Constructed-response items are less susceptible to error from guessing because students have to generate an answer versus selecting it from a list of potential answers.

→ It is easier to assess higher-order thinking skills with constructed-response items than it is with selected-response items.

Constructed-response items also come with challenges.

→ Constructed-response items can take longer to score.

How to Design Constructed-Response Items[2]

A typical constructed-response item contains four parts: An item number, directions, a prompt and response space. Some constructed-response items also include a scoring guide.

An *item number* orients students to where the item fits within the assessment. The best practice for this part is self-explanatory:
  → Number each item.

Directions provide students with instructions about how to answer the item.
  → Include how long students have to answer the item.
  → Include how many points the item is worth.

The *prompt* asks the question or describes the task.
  → Make sure prompts are clear. If you use a vague prompt, you may not measure what you intend to measure.

Here's an example of a vague prompt.

What does the term mammal mean? (3 points)

How might we make the prompt in this item clearer?

The original item leaves open the possibility of a wide variety of answers from students. We can make this prompt clearer by asking students what we want to know, which is whether they can list the characteristics of mammals. For example, a revised prompt might read:

Name three characteristics of mammals. (3 points)

  1. _____
  2. _____
  3. _____

Finally, the *response space* should be adequate for students to record their answers.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Assessment Items

1. A well-designed constructed-response item usually contains four parts: an item number, directions, a prompt and response space. It is good practice for the directions to include both _____ and

   _____.

2. Describe one benefit and one challenge of constructed-response items.

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Answers

1. A well-designed constructed-response item usually contains four parts: an item number, directions, a prompt and response space. It is good practice for the directions to include both _____ and

   _____.

   A well-designed constructed-response item usually contains four parts: an item number, directions, a prompt and response space. It is good practice for the directions to include both how long the student should spend on the item *and* the number of points the item is worth.

2. Describe one benefit and one challenge of constructed-response items.

   Constructed-response items are less susceptible than selected-response items to error from guessing because students have to generate an answer versus select it from a list of potential answers. However, depending on the type of constructed-response item, they can take longer to score.

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[1] Kansas State Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy Project"; Ohio Department of Education, "How to Design and Select Quality Assessments"; Relay Graduate School of Education, *Designing and Evaluating Assessments* (2014); and Rhode Island Department of Education, "Deeping Assessment Literacy."

[2] Relay Graduate School of Education, *Rules for Multiple Choice Item Design* (2013).