

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

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Hello. My name is Tim Brophy, and welcome back to Passport to Great Teaching Creative Assessment. In module 3d, we're going to focus on writing short answer, sentence completion, and extended response items.

So how do we define short answer? Short answer items you really just require one to three sentences to complete and are assessed by a rubric generally. A sentence completion item is a version of a short answer item where students are just expected to select from a set of choices or insert one or two words in a sentence to complete it.

So what are some short answer guidelines? Well, we want to make sure that the item can be answered with a number, a symbol, a word, or a brief phrase. So you're not looking for a long, extended response. So be sure that you write them with that in mind.

Then use a direct question. It's the same guideline that we recommended for writing all the other item types and for the same reason. This is the form of communication that's most common when soliciting a response. So you want to structure the item so the response is concise. So like the guideline we had for selected response items, just make sure the central idea is in the question and that the question is complete.

If the answer is numerical, just make sure the type of answer you want is made clear. Do you want a range of numbers? Do you want a single number? Do you want a count? Do you want a proof or an equation, whatever it may be? OK. Just make sure, too, that the items are free of clues-- same guideline we've used before.

And you want to avoid ambiguous or confusing or vague wording. And, of course, that applies to all the item writing we're talking about in this module. So make sure items are free of spelling and grammatical errors. It's often the case where a spelling error could cause a misinterpretation of the question. So be sure that you double check that as well.

So let's talk now about writing extended response items. First of all, what is it? Well, in most disciplines, the Extended Response, or ER item as I'll call it, OK-- there's usually essays or other written responses like a lab report or another kind of paragraph or two about something you've asked them. All right. So it's normally one page, about 300 words or longer.

In the arts and design areas, these could include musical compositions, improvisations, blueprints, architectural drawings, interior designs, arrangements, dance choreography, art works, et cetera. So most extended response items contain what is called a prompt. It's

also called a stimulus in some of the literature. That is what prompts the student to answer.

And these prompts can include excerpts from written texts. They could be a video. And it could be an audio recording. Whatever it is that contains information that students need in order to respond to the question.

So let's talk about some guidelines now for these extended response questions. First, you want to limit their response to measuring the specified course or program SLO. Now, you could make an exception to this if this is a big summative project or a signature work that you're having students do for the end of a course. It could address multiple SLOs. But for the most part, extended responses are going to focus in on one of the course or program outcomes.

All right. So if you're trying to dress more as SLOs than one prompt can accommodate, you really do need to prioritize the benchmarks in terms of importance and possibly make an additional question. So really look hard at just how many things you're getting at in your extended response question because you want to be sure that it's manageable for you on your end of the grading end of it, but also it's manageable for the student as well in the time period you've given them to respond.

So be really sure you give enough information in the prompt or the stimulus to make clear the kind of answer that you're expecting. Is it an actual demonstration performance? Are you asking for a video response? Are you asking for a recorded response? Are you asking for a written response? There are all kinds of ways to do that. All right.

So just make sure the prompt contains all the information that the student needs in order to understand what you're asking them. So don't assume the student's going to be able to read between the lines or figure out what might be missing. This is probably the most common error that we make when we're developing these kinds of questions that we don't quite give the student enough information to let them know exactly what we're looking for. So you want to be sure to spend some time really thinking about that when you're writing these kinds of questions.

Continuing, we want to avoid questions, though, that are so broad that a knowledgeable student could write several pages on the subject, unless that's what you want. But generally, we don't want that. We want to keep it manageable for not only the student, but for us as well.

Just make sure your question-- or your questions if there's more than one needed-- contain all the information the student needs. If you expect some kind of graphic, then make sure that that's clearly asked for. If you want them to produce a table or a drawing or something like that, be sure they know that they know what you want. OK.

You want to avoid asking students to tell you about how they feel about personal things or to relate personal experiences. Now, this could be perhaps appropriate in a reflection, but I would avoid asking for this directly from a student, especially in an extended response item on an examination because reflections are personal essays whereas an extended response item on an examination is not. OK.

So you want to use action words. Again, action verbs-- explain, discuss, illustrate, compare, show, describe. You don't want to use words like name, list, identify, if you can in an extended response question because you're going to then get a-- you're going to just get a list or short answers. And you don't want a short answer in an extended response item.

Now, there is a list of recommended verbs on page 10 at the UF SLO guide. You can look there for some ideas, and I've linked it here in this particular presentation.

And it's best really to write the scoring rubric for your extended response item at the same time you're writing it. All right. So this will allow you to really align well your item with the rubric levels. So as you write your prompt and the question, think about what you expect to see in a high scoring paper or a high scoring response and how these expectations are stated in the performance that you're measuring. So by doing them simultaneously, you'll have a much better chance at having good alignment between the two.

OK. So let's pause to think a little bit about what we've learned in this module. I'd like you to take a look at your tests again. And if you're currently using short answer, sentence completion, or extended response questions, take a moment to review a few of these. To what extent do they meet the guidelines in this module? All right.

And if you don't currently use these item types, what would you test using short answer, sentence completion, and/or essay questions? What value would these question types have for your teaching situation? Thank you. And I'll see you in module 3e.

