



Tips and Techniques

Testing Done Right

Scripture Verse: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26)

Preparing classroom tests has changed a lot over the past ten years as curriculum designers offer packaged test items which are based on the content presented in the curriculum. Still, there are times when teachers have to develop their own test items to determine the level of mastery. Even in an age in which rubrics appear to be king of assessment, teachers may still have to prepare a traditional test for assessment to be complete.

Creating a classroom test is like a French quiche. The chef very carefully selects just the right ingredients and blends them together in specified amounts to achieve the desired effect - a delicious entre. Following the recipe is critical for success.

So it is for the classroom teacher. Creating a good test happens by following a recipe for good test construction. Consider the following ingredients.

Appropriateness. Test items should adequately describe the instructional objectives and the content to be measured. The format of each item must be appropriate for the learning outcome measured. For example, when the objective is to identify the planets, a true/false question is not appropriate.

Relevance. Test items should require pupils to demonstrate the performance described in the specific learning outcome it measures.

Clarity. The test item should present a clear and definite task to be performed.

Conciseness. Presenting the item in simple, readable language, free from excessive verbiage, is an important ingredient in good test construction.

Technical Soundness. Test items need to be free from technical errors and irrelevant clues.

Independence. Each test item must be independent of the other items in the test.

Correctness. Items need to have an answer that would be agreed upon by experts.

BLENDING TOGETHER

Blending all of the test items together into a test requires several considerations.

1. Group together test items of the same type within sections of the test.
2. Arrange test items from easy to more difficult within sections of the test and the test as a whole.

3. Number the items in sequence.
4. Clearly, indicate the answer space and place the space relative to the test item.
5. Distribute the answers so there is no detectable pattern.
6. Construct the test free of typographical errors. Items are to be well spaced and legible.
7. Provide adequate directions for each section of the test and for the test as a whole. These directions should be clear and concise.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Each particular test format requires special considerations. Consider the following.

True-False. Construct items that can be clearly judged true or false. Eliminate specific determiners, such as usually, always. Avoid trivial statements. Do not use negative statements, especially double negatives. Attribute opinion statements to a source. Construct items that are of equal length and equal number.

Short-Answer. Design items that can be answered with a number, symbol word, or brief phrase. Avoid textbook language. State items so that only one response is correct.

Construct answer blanks of equal length. Place answer blanks at the end of the item. Eliminate all clues, such as a or an.

Matching. Construct two lists that are homogeneous. Use lists that are of equal length. Place responses that are brief and on the right-hand side. Place responses in alphabetical or numerical order. Provide directions that indicate the basis for matching. Place each matching item on the same page.

Multiple Choice. Use items that are free of irrelevant material. State all items in positive terms. Construct alternatives that are consistent with the item stem. Use alternatives that are brief, free of unnecessary words, similar in length and form and with only one correct and clearly best answer. Avoid "none of the above" and "all of the above" alternatives.

Essay. Design questions to measure higher-level learning outcomes and relevant to the intended learning outcome. Clearly indicate the task to be performed and the bases on which answers will be evaluated. Share any time limits and point values for each question.

Interpretive. Use material that is brief, clear, and meaningful. Base items directly on the introductory material and ask for interpretation not just recall or simple reading skills.

PREPARING STUDENTS

The *Study Power* series, by the American College Testing Program, which is no longer in print, identifies five tasks for teachers to prepare students for test taking.

- 1. Keep up with Assignments.** Encourage students to keep up with day-to-day assignments as to simplify later test review.
- 2. Review Regularly.** Provide an opportunity for students to review assignments regularly to improve understanding and recall of material.
- 3. Plan Ahead.** Provide plenty of notification ahead of time for each test.
- 4. Identify What to Study.** Help students identify important information, previous test material, and handouts that would enhance success on the test.
- 5. Review After the Test.** The review helps students learn from any mistakes. Provide opportunities for students to come to an understanding of the material that was missed. Assure them that just because the test is over, the information is still important.