

# Testing

## What Is A “Good” Test?

## Writing Good Tests

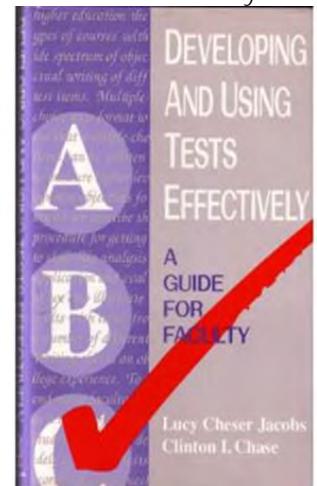


Students should anticipate success when preparing for a test. While a good deal of that success depends on their hard work and commitment to prepare, part of the success equation depends on our abilities to write good tests.

Writing good test is not as easy as it may seem. Each question should be carefully chosen to reflect the unit student learning objectives, which in turn reflect course learning objectives, and, in an ideal world, the overarching learning objectives of the **program**. In other words, tests aren't merely a means to an end (e.g., a letter grade). They can serve as a valuable diagnostic assessment tool for both student and faculty. When viewed as such, they not only measure student learning outcomes in relationship to courses and programs, but also hone test writing skills, thereby creating a stronger assessment process.

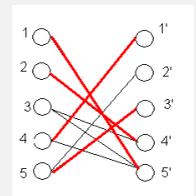
Writing viable wrong choices takes time. It is all too easy to include inadvertent cues. Things like unintentionally putting more verbiage in the correct answer than you put in the distractors, or taking direct quotes from the text itself and copying them to your test alerts those who read the material. Another overlooked clue comes from succumbing to the temptation to use extremes such as “Always”, “None of the Above” and “Never” in the distractors. Those responses are usually incorrect and students will notice. Yet, “All of the above”, choices typically are correct and are relatively easy for students to answer if they are prepared.

If you find yourself stuck in a test creativity rut, you may want to refer to a good test preparation manual like *Developing and Using Tests Effectively: A Guide for Faculty* (Jacobs and Chase, 1992), available for check out in the TennTLC Library. The authors have included information on many types of assessment from unit tests to capstone projects. Below are some examples drawn from their work.



*Developing and Using Tests Effectively: A Guide for Faculty*  
(Jacobs and Chase, 1992)

## Matching



### Advantages:

Maximum coverage at  
The knowledge level in a  
minimum amount of space/prep time  
Valuable to assess large content areas  
with lots of factual information

### Disadvantages:

Time consuming for students  
May not be appropriate for higher  
levels of learning

## Essay Questions

### Advantages:

- Students are less likely to guess
- Easy to construct
- Allows students to:
  - Demonstrate ability to organize knowledge, express opinions, and show originality
  - Present both sides of an argument
  - Analyze material
  - Compare/Contrast ideas
  - Establish Cause and Effect
  - Describe
  - Discuss components of a topic
  - Illustrate a process
  - Summarize content



### Disadvantages:

- Can limit the amount of material tested and therefore has decreased validity.
- It is subjective creating potentially unreliable scoring
- It is time consuming to score

\*Concerns related to subjective scoring can be mediated with a rubric.

## True-False



### Advantages:

- Can test large amounts of content since students can answer 3-4 questions per minute.
- Good at measuring knowledge and understanding

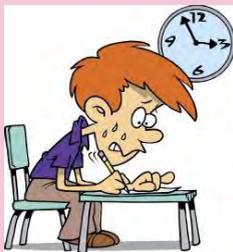
### Disadvantages:

- It is difficult to discriminate between students that know the material and students who do not since they have a 50-50 chance of getting the right answer by guessing

They can be used at higher levels by providing students with a data set or other written work such as a legal brief or excerpt from a literary piece. Then, create questions related to the presence or absence of certain criteria within the data.

Another way to increase the difficulty of a true/false question is to underline the key phrase and require students to correct false phrases. This reduces the 50/50 rule.

## Short Answer



### Advantages:

- Good for basic factual content (who, where, when, what)
- Minimizes guessing
- Student must know vs. recognize the answer

### Disadvantages:

- Difficult to assess higher levels of learning because the answers are usually limited to a few words
- Difficult to construct so that the desired response is clearly indicated
- May overemphasize memorization of facts
- Questions may have more than one correct answer
- Scoring is time consuming

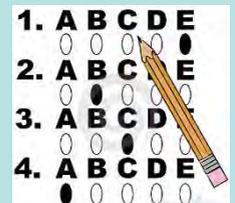
## Multiple Choice

### Advantages:

- Can assess knowledge and understanding at all levels
- Guessing is reduced
- Can cover broad range of content

### Disadvantages:

- Difficult to construct
- Difficult to come up with realistic distractors



Suggestions:

- *Keep distractors uniform in form content and length.*
- *Use wrong answers that students have given in class as distractors.*