Test Questions¹

Writing Test Questions

Writing test questions may be time consuming; however, taking sufficient time to write a good exam can eliminate some of the grading difficulties.

When writing test questions:

- Start early. Spread the work over the entire unit.
- Name critical points for readings, lectures, entire units, etc.
- Write a preliminary question for each reading and lecture immediately after you read, lecture, or attend class.
- List the content and skills the student needs to learn in order to answer the questions successfully.
- Name the activities and assignments that will help the students learn this material.
- Write clear instructions and questions that indicate characteristics necessary for successfully answering the question.

Grading Test Questions

Consider using Primary Trait Analysis (PTA) to assist with your grading.

- It may take more time upfront in the semester to produce, but assigning grades will be much less troublesome.
- It will be easier to maintain and justify criteria to your students if they are written out.
- It will also help ensure that the last exam is graded on the same level as the first exam, since the criteria will remain the same.
- If you spend enough time creating a clear PTA, you may not need to spend as much time writing comments.
- Set appointments with students who performed poorly on exams rather than writing comments on the exam. If students fail a question they will probably have some hypotheses regarding their performance and a meeting with the instructor may prove to be more illuminating than written comments they may not completely understand. This is an ideal teaching and learning opportunity; take advantage of it.
- PTA will help you be more confident and know why you graded as you did.
- Critique your criteria as well as the students. If you have a trusted colleague or mentor, ask them to take a look at your criteria. Draw upon their abundant experience.

Strategies for Time-Effective Grading\(^2\)

1. Separate commenting from grading, and use them singly or in combination according to your purpose.
2. Do not give to all students what only some need.
3. Use only as many grade levels as you need.
4. Frame comments to your students’ use.
5. Do not waste time on careless student work.
6. Use what the students know.
7. Ask students to organize their work for your efficiency.
8. Delegate the work.
9. Use technology to save time and enhance results.

Designing Assignments That Are Worth Grading\(^3\)

1. Begin by considering what you want your students to learn.
2. Select tests and assignments that both teach and test the learning you value most.
3. Construct a course outline that shows the nature and sequence of major tests and assignments.
4. Check that the tests and assignments fit your learning goals and are feasible in terms of workload.
5. Collaborate with your students to set and achieve goals.
6. Give students explicit directions for their assignments.

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\(^3\) Walvoord and Anderson. (17-18).