

Short Answer Questions:

WHAT ARE SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS?

Short-answer questions are open-ended questions that require students to create an answer. They are commonly used in examinations to assess the basic knowledge and understanding (low cognitive levels) of a topic before more in-depth assessment questions are asked on the topic.

STRUCTURE OF SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Short Answer Questions do not have a generic structure. Questions may require answers such as complete the sentence, supply the missing word, short descriptive or qualitative answers, diagrams with explanations etc. The answer is usually short from one word to a few lines, often students may answer in bullet form.

Example:

1. MHz measures the _____ of the computer.
2. List the different types of plastic surgery procedures.
3. In economics, state Gresham's Law.

Y	Declarative	CHARACTERISTICS
P	Functioning	
	Timely to Set	
	Timely to Answer	
	Timely to Correct	
P	Timely to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
Y	Can substitute with Computers	
Y	Passive	
	Active	
	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

Y	Yes
P	Possibly

Above shows the general characteristics of the assessment method and the type of skills that are *typically* assessed by the method. Both Blooms' taxonomy and Biggs' Solo taxonomy are indicated.

Y	Knowledge	Blooms Level of Taxonomy	MEASURABLE QUANTITIES	
Y	Comprehension			
Y	Application of Knowledge			
	Analysis			
	Synthesis			
	Evaluative Skills			
Y	Pre-structural	Quantitative		SOLO Taxonomy
Y	Uni-structural			
Y	Multi-Structural			
	Relational Level	Qualitative		OTHER QUANTITIES
	Extended Abstract Level			
	Leadership			OTHER QUANTITIES
	Life long Skills			
	Creative skills			
	Writing Skills			
	Team Work			
	Communication Skills			
	Presentation Skills			
Y	Memorizing Skills			
	Practical/ Physical Skills			
	Think under pressure			
	Project Management			
	Time management			

ADVANTAGES OF SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Short Answer Questions are relatively fast to mark and can be mark by different assessors, as long as the questions are set in such a way that all alternative answers can be considered by the assessors.
- Short Answer Questions are also relatively easy to set compared to many assessment methods.
- Short Answer Questions can be used as part of a formative and summative assessments, as the structure of short answer questions are very similar to examination questions, students are more familiar with the practice and feel less anxious.
- Unlike MCQs, there is no guessing on answers, students must supply an answer.

DISADVANTAGES OF SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Short Answer Questions (SAQ) are only suitable for questions that can be answered with short responses. It is very important that the assessor is very clear on the type of answers expected when setting the questions, because SAQ is an open-ended questions, students are free to answer any way they choose, short-answer questions can lead to difficulties in grading if the question is not worded carefully.
- Short Answer Questions are typically used for assessing knowledge only, students may often customize Short Answer Questions with rote learning. If assessors wish to use Short Answer Questions to assess deeper learning, careful attention (and many practices) on appropriate questions are required to administer.
- Accuracy of assessment may be influenced by handwriting/spelling skills

HOW TO DESIGN GOOD SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS?

- Is a short answer item an appropriate assessment of the learning objective?
- Does the content of the short answer question measure knowledge appropriate to the desired learning goal?
- Is the item clearly worded and stated in language appropriate to the student population?
- Is there only one clearly correct answer?
- Can the item be answered briefly and concisely using a single word or short phrase?
- Does the positioning of the item blank promote efficient scoring?
- Does the desired knowledge represent a key word or phrase?
- Is there a limited number of blanks in the short answer item?
- Do instructions clearly specify the desired knowledge and specificity of response?
- Set the questions explicitly and precisely.
- Direct questions are better than those which require completing the sentences.
- For numerical answers, let the students know if they will receive marks for showing partial work (process based) or only the results (product based), also indicated the importance of the units.
- Let the students know what your marking style is like, is bullet point format acceptable, or does it have to be an essay format?
- Prepare a structured marking sheet; allocate marks or part-marks for acceptable answer(s).
- Be prepared to accept other equally acceptable answers, some of which you may not have predicted.

GRADING STANDARDS

Short answer questions tend to be short, and have more precise answers, thus, it is possible for each question, list all the possible answers/points.

A simple Short Answer Questions Rubric:

Simple Short Answer Questions						
	5	4	3	2	1	Total
Defining Answers/Points	Answer all points	75% of all the points answered	50% of all the points answered	25% of all the points answered	0% of all the points answered	

For example, if there are 6 possible arguments to a question, and the student scores all 6 arguments, he will get full mark in that question. If he scores only 4 arguments, he will get a relative mark. You may also decide to be lenient, if there are 6 arguments in a question, and the student scores any 4 out of 6, he will get full mark, this would be an assessor decision, however, this decision must be clear and consistent.

If a more essay type of answer is requested, the following rubric maybe suitable: (From Rubric Studio, <http://www.rcampus.com/rubricshowc.cfm?b=%25%2D%2B%3B2R%5D8%20%0A&sp=yes&>)

	Excellent 4 pts	Good 3 pts	Fair 2 pts	Poor 1 pts	Total
Definition	Definition is strong and clear.	Some details and definition is generally correct.	Limited or weak definition.	Question has not been attempted or answer is completely incorrect.	
Supporting Details	Many additional details to support definition or concept.	Additional details show understanding of concept.	Some extra information.	Few or no details, only slightly related to topic.	
Writing Conventions	Skillful control of language and mechanics. Sentence structure is strong and effective in communicating information.	Generally acceptable vocabulary, relates to topic. Few spelling/ grammatical errors that do not affect meaning.	Some vocabulary related to topic. Some grammatical errors related to spelling, punctuation.	Limited or inappropriate use of vocabulary related to topic. Many errors in spelling and grammar.	

WEB REFERENCES AND RESOURCES:

Short Answer Questions Assessment

UW-Madison Teaching Academy
<http://teachingacademy.wisc.edu/archive/Assistance/course/answer.htm>

Institute for Interactive media and Learning, University of Technology Sydney
http://www.impl.uts.edu.au/assessment/types/short_answer/index.html



Tips for Students answering MCQs

Michigan State University

<https://www.msu.edu/course/prr/320/web/tipsexam.html>

Test Taking Tips.Com

<http://www.testtakingtips.com/test/short.htm>

Faculty Resources Quick Tips, Park University

<http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/shortanswer.html>

To Reference these pages

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