



## 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	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>
P	Functioning	
	Take Time to Set	
	Take Time to Answer	
	Take Time to Correct	
P	Take Time to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
Y	Can substitute with Computers	
Y	Passive	
	Active	
	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly    Y =Yes

### Advantages of Short Answer Questions

- Short Answer Questions are relatively fast to mark and can be marked 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 assessment, 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 memorize 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.
- Accuracy of assessment may be influenced by handwriting/spelling skills
- There can be time management issues when answering Short Answer Questions

## How to design a good Short Answer Question?

1. Design short answer items which are appropriate assessment of the learning objective
2. Make sure the content of the short answer question measures knowledge appropriate to the desired learning goal
3. Express the questions with clear wordings and language which are appropriate to the student population
4. Ensure there is only one clearly correct answer in each question
5. Ensure that the item clearly specifies how the question should be answered (e.g. Student should answer it briefly and concisely using a single word or short phrase? Is the question given a specific number of blanks for students to answer?)
6. Consider whether the positioning of the item blank promote efficient scoring
7. Write the instructions clearly so as to specify the desired knowledge and specificity of response
8. Set the questions explicitly and precisely.
9. Direct questions are better than those which require completing the sentences.
10. 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.
11. Let the students know what your marking style is like, is bullet point format acceptable, or does it have to be an essay format?
12. Prepare a structured marking sheet; allocate marks or partial-marks for acceptable answer(s).
13. Be prepared to accept other equally acceptable answers, some of which you may not have predicted.



## Marking Rubrics

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

### A simple Short Answer Questions Rubric:

Simple Short Answer Questions						
	5	4	3	2	1	Total
<b>Defining Answers/Points:</b>	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&>)

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
<b>Definition:</b>	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.
<b>Supporting Details:</b>	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.
<b>Writing Conventions:</b>	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

- Short-Answer Questions, UW-Madison Teaching Academy  
<http://teachingacademy.wisc.edu/archive/Assistance/course/sanswer.htm>
- Short-answer Questions, Institute for Interactive media and Learning, University of Technology Sydney  
[http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment/types/short\\_answer/index.html](http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment/types/short_answer/index.html)



### Tips for Students answering SAQs

- Tips for Writing Short Answer Essay Exams, Michigan State University  
<https://www.msu.edu/course/prr/320/web/tipsexam.html>
- Short Answer Test Tips-Help, Test Taking Tips.Com  
<http://www.testtakingtips.com/test/short.htm>
- Developing Short Answer Items, Faculty Resources Quick Tips, Park University  
<http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/shortanswer.html>

### To Reference these pages

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