

Tests or Threats

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Tests are perceived by many students as a threat and not as a tool for self-evaluation and self-improvement. There may be different reasons for such an appraisal from the students. One of them is the fear of unknown. A question paper or a booklet represents unknown. Another important reason is the test itself. Some frame questions to make students confused or to teach them a lesson; a dangerous form of taking revenge.

If, as teachers, we observe certain guidelines in framing questions, many of our tests would serve their ultimate purpose of evaluation and improvement of both students and teachers.

Psychologists have identified two types of remembering: one is 'recall' and the other is 'recognition'. Various tests, both subjective and objective, can be categorized as either one or the other type. In completing questions and essay questions, 'recall' is tested, but in multiple choice questions, True-False items and matching questions, 'recognition' is tested. One of the common types of examination is the essay type questions. If the aim of examination is to find out whether students can write, organize and express well, this type is recommended. But we should have a clear idea as to the points that should be covered in an essay. So, clarity of the question should be ensured. It is a good idea to read first the answer of questions in all the answer books. This will enable us to determine the relative level of difficulty and performance among all students. The advantage here is that students can relate, compare, contrast, draw conclusions, and make interpretations. They can also evaluate the relative importance of facts and ideas. The subjectivity of scoring can be eliminated to some extent, if students are asked not to write their names, but num-

bers. They can also be told to underline points and to be precise with regard to facts and ideas.

As mentioned above, there are different types of objective tests. The most popular is the multiple choice type, which can be used to test discriminative decisions among answers or distractors. These distractors must be attractive. All of them must be of equal length. It is very important to note that no pattern should be formed here. The author has heard of a teacher who has designed the answers in such a way, that when all the correct alphabets (answers) are put in its order, it would read 'GOOD LUCK'. Each of these questions and distractors should have precise meaning. One advantage in objective tests is that a student's answers are specific and there is no room for 'filling the space'. Also teachers can cover a large area of subject. There is no subjectivity in scoring. But the greatest problem is about guessing. A comparatively long test would compensate for guess work. But intelligent guess work is in a way good, compared to blind guessing, which must be discouraged. Also, objective tests do not encourage a student in independent and creative thinking in controversial topics. Only facts can be tested in this type. Blair and Simpson warn us against some common mistakes in framing objective tests. According to them, the following should be avoided: trivial details, textbook phrases, phrases which unintentionally give answers, trick questions, questions which give answers to other questions, and items having no correct answers.

True-False items are also popular. This is good to test whether they remember facts. They must be clear statements complete in themselves without any need for qualifications or context. As mentioned, all statements must be of equal length and no pattern should be formed. It is important to avoid double negatives and double

barrelled items in which one part is true and the other false. This will be better to test the depth of knowledge in that topic.

Yet another type of questions are matching type, which are suitable when we want to know whether students recognize certain relationships between bits of information. This, according to Frandsen, can be between facts like, events and dates, events and persons, events and places, terms and definitions, principles and applications, tools and uses, causes and effects, and conditions and results. There can be a few extra unmatched items also. Completion questions are also widely used. But these can be used only when there is a unique word, phrase or number as the answer.

There are some general points to be borne in mind during framing questions. Avoid complex words and sentences as they will only serve to create confusion in students' minds. The directions should be very clear. For example, a direction like "answer any four questions, and Q.No.7" is confusing for a student who is anxious in an examination hall. This direction should be something like, "Answer any five questions including Q.No.7". The questions should not be either too easy nor too difficult. So after a test, it is good to calculate the discriminative index of each item by item analysis. Thus, we can constantly improve the items. Such a good test would differentiate good and poor students, identify their strengths and weaknesses, provide self-understanding for teachers and improve both students and teachers.

In conclusion, we can say that a combination of essay and objective type questions would be ideal in the present educational atmosphere and conditions in our country.

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