
Understanding Constructed Response Items on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam



Office of Educational Accountability

What are Constructed Response Items?

Constructed response (CR) items are open-ended questions, typically requiring several sentences or a brief paragraph. In contrast to multiple choice items, CR items require that the student generate his/her own answer. As a result, well constructed CR items generate the ability to examine student thinking and often require higher level thinking.

CR items are not designed for memorization or the simple restating of information; rather, these items require the application of the students' knowledge. CR items are developed to engage students in higher level thinking (making comparisons, identifying patterns, evaluating points of view, making generalizations, synthesizing information).

CR items are scored using a rubric that provides varying degrees of credit. The various levels of the rubric are defined with specific information and examples.

Tips to Improve Constructed Response Answers in Mathematics and Reading

Mathematics

- Many mathematics constructed response items require a one or two word answer and then a description of how the student arrived at his/her answer. A good rule of thumb is to have students pretend that they did not already answer the first short answer question. They should then answer the second part of the CR item with a detailed description of how they arrived at their answer. The description should be understood independent of the first part of the question. Students should explain their thinking completely in writing. This means making each step clear enough that someone reading it would be confident that the student understood the mathematical process.

For example, consider the following 3rd grade WKCE released item:

Simon has 3 boxes with 8 crayons in each box.

Step A: How many crayons does Simon have?

Step B: Explain how you found the number of crayons that Simon has.

Use words, numbers, and/or symbols in your answer.

The answer for step B must be understood independent of the answer for step A. Thus, an answer "I multiplied" does not explain how the student received the answer 24 and would not receive total credit. A correct response would be "8 X 3 = 24" or "I multiplied the number crayons in each box by the number of boxes to get 24".

Reading

- Many reading constructed response items require an extended response to a question about a reading passage or paired passages. Most questions require that the students synthesize or extend the information presented in the passage. When answering these questions, students should respond to all parts of the question. Likewise, if the question requires evidence from the text, students must cite specific evidence in their answer.

For example, consider the following 5th grade WKCE released item about the passage, "New Year's Hats for the Statues"

Explain what might have happened if the old man had ignored the statues. Use details and examples from the passage to support your answer.

For this question, students must demonstrate that they understand the passage by using text-based information to predict what might have happened. The answer should also include highly relevant ideas and details from the text, including specific characters, events, or locations when appropriate.

Additional Tips for the Classroom

- Familiarize students with CR items by infusing them into the curriculum. CR items do not always need to be individual paper and pencil tasks. CR items can easily be worked into the classroom setting by having students explain their thinking to classmates. This type of activity encourages metacognition and better prepares students to articulate their thinking on paper.
- Students need to have a clear understanding of the purpose of CR items and the criteria for success. It is important to provide students with several examples of good CR item responses. These items can be generated from classroom activities or from released test items. Students should also be encouraged to evaluate their own work using rubrics.
- Use Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam released items available at <http://dpi.state.wi.us/oea/releaseitems.html> or released items from the National Assessment of Educational Progress <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrts/> as examples of constructed response items. Both sites provide items, rubrics, and samples of student work.
- Use results from constructed response items in a formative assessment manner. Use the students' responses to constructed response items to generate descriptive feedback for the students and guide their future learning activities.