Developing Matching Test Items

Matching questions generally involve pairing a set of stems or premises (e.g., causes) with a set of responses (e.g., effects). Matching questions are best suited for assessing recognition and recall, although well-crafted matching questions can be used to assess higher-order thinking. For example, students might be asked to match constructs with new examples, or principles with new applications. Matching questions have several advantages. Because all items have the same set of options, matching questions tend to be quick to write and easy to process for the test takers. They are also efficient to mark, reducing back-end workload.

Tips for developing matching questions

1) Avoid a 1:1 match between stems and responses. Consider allowing students to use the same response multiple times, or add dummy responses that have no match. This reduces the effectiveness of response-elimination strategies.
2) Ensure matching set options are homogeneous and that all possible responses are plausible matches for the stems. Otherwise, test-savvy students will eliminate unlikely matches.
3) Ensure your options are arranged in logical order to increase readability and reduce the chances of accidental error.
4) Give clear, unambiguous directions in an introductory sentence. Let students know that options may be used more than once. Identify the key relation between stems and responses (e.g., “Match the brain structures with their functions”).
5) Keep it simple. Avoid unnecessarily lengthy stems or responses. Consider limiting the number of items to 10 or less.

Further Reading


