There are several common kinds of test items. For objective tests, students answer multiple choice questions, matching items, and fill-in-the-blank items. The other kind of test items are short-answer responses and essays. The following are explanations and examples of these along with tips for educated guessing, if applicable—after all, sometimes even though we study hard, a bit of test anxiety might cause a sudden mental block!

**Explanation:**

These test items offer several answer choices. The test prompt (or question) is known as the "stem" for which you
choose one or more of the answer options.

Examples:

1. A simile is
   - a comparison without using “like”
   - a comparison using the word “as”
   - a comparison using either “like” or “as”
   - none of the above

2. Memory devices include
   - acronyms
   - inference
   - acrostics
   - associations
   - 1, 3, and 4
   - all of the above

Tips

Make sure that all the rules of grammar apply when you match the stem with the option. for example, in example item number 2, above, notice that them stem directs you to look for a plural answer because “devices” is plural. Number 5, then, is the correct answer (answers 1, 3, and 4 are all plural).

Educated Guessing

- Choose “3” or C, which is more often than not the correct answer (as in example item number 1, above).
- Choose the longest or most inclusive answer, also as in example item number 1, above.
- If the test item is for a math quiz, choose the in-between number, or one of the in-between numbers. example: 1) 432, 2) 77, 3) 12, 4) 2,098. Your chances are better by choosing either 1 or 2.

Explanation

This kind of test item features two columns, a numbered column and a lettered column. Students are asked to match the correct answer with the correct stem.

Example

1. NASA ___organization device
2. headache ___ acronym
3. graphic organizer ___ symptom of test anxiety

**Tips**

Count the number of items in each column. If there are more on one side, ask if an answer can be used more than once.

**Explanation**

These are items for which you must fill in a word or words.

**Example**

Fill in the ____________ questions are featured frequently on exams.

**Tips**

Fill-in-the-blank questions usually expect you to write one word per blank. If more than one word is expected, there will be more than one blank space or the blank will be long.

**Explanation**

This type of test item usually involves a short answer of approximately 5-7 sentences. Typical short answer items will address only one topic and require only one “task” (see “essay test items,” below, for a test item requiring more than one task).

**Example**

Define the term “mnemonic.”

**Tips**

Since many short answer test items ask the student to define a term, here are several ways to expand a definition to achieve the 5-7 sentence desired response (depending upon the course and the teacher’s requirements, that is):

- the dictionary definition
- an informal definition (in your own words, for example)
- give an example of how the term is used
- give the category in which the term is used, for example, what kind of essays belong in the “expository” genre (argument, explanation, cause and effect, etc.)
The history (etymology) of the term
- include antonyms
- include synonyms
- tell what the term is not (some terms mean more than one distinct thing, for example, a “whatchamacallit is not only a slang term but also a candy bar.

**Explanation**

This type of test is usually a multi-part prompt requiring several paragraphs or pages to answer. You can make use of writing formulas, for example how to write a basic, five-paragraph essay suitable for most classes. However, for writing classes the task will be expanded as per the type of writing class and the level of writing sophistication required.

**Example**

Contrasted with short answer items where usually one task is required to fully answer them (such as a simple definition), there are typically several tasks required to fully answer an essay prompt. For example in the following prompt below, I have underlined all of the tasks and decisions required to fully address the prompt:

*Many people believe Mark Twain’s book Huckleberry Finn is racist and should not be included on high school reading lists. Others believe that Twain correctly portrayed race relations in the Southern part of the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and, in fact, by telling the story he exposed the negative racial attitudes existing then. Do you think the book should be kept on reading lists? Explain why or why not in relation to today’s emphasis on “political correctness.”*

**Tips**

- Review terms often used in essay exams before taking the exam:
  - compare—show similarities between items
  - contrast—show differences between items
  - sometimes both comparing and contrasting is required
  - define—give a concise meaning (see how to expand definitions, above)
  - describe—recount, characterize, or relate information in narrative form
  - discuss—examine, analyze, and present pros and cons regarding the topic. Detail is essential
  - enumerate—incorporate (which might require listing or outlining) major points in order
  - explain—clarify and interpret the material including explaining how and/or why. Detail is essential
- Do NOT merely summarize the plot of the work if this is an essay for an English class or a literature class.

**UNIT 6, EXERCISE 3.1**

List how many tasks need to be accomplished in order to fully respond to the essay prompt below, or another one your instructor will provide for you.
Select a novel or a play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the themes of the work as a whole.