TIPS FOR WRITTEN TESTS WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions ask for a (brief) description or explanation, a list, a calculation, etc. **With open-ended questions, the question itself must be clear, as well as the instructions regarding the type of answer you are looking for.** Questions like '*Do you agree with the above statement?*' are problematic, because they will be answered with 'yes' or 'no' without additional argumentation, which does not provide you with any actual information. A question like '*How do you feel about the above statement?*' is asking for a personal opinion, which you cannot judge as correct or incorrect. In your instructions, include an answer length limit (visually, by including empty lines or limited space, or by stating a maximum word count). This prevents long explanations and helps make the grading process more efficient.
There are ways to indicate the type of answer you are looking for. For example: list examples of ...: 1) ... 2) ... 3) ... For lists, be sure to specify the required number of items (Name 3 characteristics of...) and/or provide an indication of how many points will be awarded or subtracted for each correct or incorrect item.

> **Tip:** while creating a test, make sure to write out the full correct answer yourself, or even start by doing so first. Then review the way the question and the answer relate to one another.
> Tip: have one of your colleagues check whether the questions are clear. Do they interpret them as you intended? What kind of answer would they give? This is also useful for finding out how long it takes to write the correct answer.

Language use – avoid:
- ☐ Misconceptions because of ambiguous language use or because the question can be interpreted in more than one way.
- ☐ Spelling errors, grammatical errors, complex sentence structures, unnecessarily difficult terminology or jargon.
- ☐ Double negatives.
- ☐ Unnecessary negations; try to use positive wording or accentuate important words.

Information:
- ☐ Provide enough information to enable answering the question, but avoid including trivial or irrelevant information; only provide visual context information (an image, a graph, etc.) if it is necessary for answering the question.
- ☐ Specify whether the students must provide an explanation, argumentation, clarification, etc.
- ☐ Separate the question from the contextual information (case study, problem, etc.), also visually.
- ☐ Specify the maximum number of points that may be obtained for each question, so that students can decide for themselves the order they want to answer the questions in.

Relevance and level:
- ☐ Make sure that the questions are in line with the learning objectives, both in terms of content and in terms of level; to be able to answer the question, the student is required to make use of the material they were supposed to study.
- ☐ Do not use trick questions.
- ☐ Neither the question nor the information provided with that question or with previous questions in the same test contains any accidental hints that may help students answer it correctly.

Presentation:
- ☐ If a question consists of multiple sub-questions (for a case study, for example), ask those sub-questions separately and make sure to clearly distinguish between them (visually, through numbering, etc.).
- ☐ If a question refers to a drawing, piece of text, graph, etc., make sure that the reference is unambiguous, and take into account potential colourblindness.

Assessment:
- ☐ To ensure objective scoring and grading, draw up an answer model with a scoring system, and decide in advance how you want to award points in case of partially correct answers.
- ☐ If an answer is not the answer you had in mind, but technically not an incorrect answer to the question, that answer must be marked as correct. For example: What are characteristics of a high-quality assessment? You were hoping for three characteristics, as was discussed in class: valid, reliabel and transparent. You intended to ask for all three, but if a student would mention just two, you can't assess it as incorrect, based on the question. Or when looking at a more detailed level, other characteristics may apply (e.g. the appropriate length of a test). It is better to make sure to ask questions in a way that ensures intended and complete answers, for example: *Name the three overall characteristics of a high-quality assessment as defined by ..... in chaper X of the book .....*
- ☐ If you base your marking in part on the clarity of the phrasing, the structure of the answer, the level of detail, etc., clearly state this. For example, if the answer must incorporate the use of a certain method, mention this method ("Use the method XXXXX to calculate…. and show the results for each of the four steps… ")
- ☐ Handwriting, concise language use, grammatical or spelling errors, etc. may affect your assessment of an answer. Take these biases into account while marking.
- ☐ Be aware of innate flaws in marking caused by your knowing the exam inside out, knowing whose test you are marking, etc. For example, mark tests anonymously. If your method is first marking all first questions, then all second questions, etc., be aware that an incorrect answer will seem a lot more incorrect to you if you've just seen that question answered correctly in the past however many tests, and vice versa. Fatigue may also have a negative effect on your marking.
- ☐ Generally speaking, it is a good idea to mark all answers to a question first, and then move on to the next question, as it will focus your concentration on one specific question. However, be aware that if after marking a few tests you notice that the answer model is wrong and you adjust it, you will have to review that question in the tests you already marked. Make sure your marking is consistent.

Resource: **Step-by-step guide designing examinations** (BMS/CELT, University of Twente).