

Why Do Multiple-choice Questions Help Learning?

One of the most obvious pros of [multiple-choice questions](#) is that the actual answer is visible. Seeing it could well trigger a student's memory and enable them to give a correct answer if it's eluding them. Also, more of them can be posed in a test.

There are many different types of question which educators use to help children and adults to learn subjects.

Multiple-choice questions are often used, where a number of different answers are provided but only one of them is correct.

Another method used is oral questions, which require the student to speak the answers rather than write them or type them.

Essay answers are sometimes required in exams and tests. In this instance, the student has to respond with a detailed argument to a question. There are also questions posed which demand a short answer of, perhaps, one or two words or a sentence.

Let's look at the advantages and disadvantages of these different forms of question and how effective they are in helping someone to learn about a particular academic subject.

The Advantages of Multiple-Choice Questions

One of the most obvious pros of this form of questioning is that the actual answer is visible.

In many cases a student may very well know the answer to a question but they are unable to recall it due to issues with memory or feeling pressurised in an exam situation. Seeing the answer could well trigger the memory to enable a correct answer to be given.

Multiple-choice questions are short and sharp which means that more of them can be posed in a test situation to give a student a more thorough examination of how much they understand about a given subject.

Online resources use multiple-choice questions because they help children to concentrate on a test. It also helps when the correct answer is given in an interactive test with an explanation of why it is right.

The Advantages of Oral Questions

Some subjects are best learned using this mode of testing, particularly languages.

Clearly, speaking an answer in French or Spanish will accelerate language learning although it is important to be able to write words down so you can read, as well as speak, them.

It can also be argued that oral questioning is also an effective way of testing how much a student knows about a subject.

There is no time to think of an answer or consider alternative answers.

The student needs to be able to provide quick answers to spoken questions and draw rapidly upon the knowledge they have.

The Advantages of Essay Questions

This type of question enables a student to demonstrate their depth of understanding about a given subject. Answers can vary in length but students know they need to know a lot about subjects to be able to respond creatively, usually with an essay which gives a discussion-style response.

There is no way of bluffing your way through this type of questioning by guessing the correct answer so it could be argued that it provides a thorough and rigorous test of knowledge.

The Advantages of Short Answer Questions

Requiring short answers in this way is often employed by testers to analyse the basic knowledge of terms and facts about a subject.

No options for answers are given as they are with multiple-choice questions. So, the student is required to know the answer and this is a major advantage of this style of question.

These are short and sharp questions so more can be asked in an examination enabling the assessor to challenge the student on a wider breadth of information about a subject.

The Disadvantages of Different Styles of Exam Questions

So, we've looked at the advantages of the various types of questions students are likely to face in tests and exams. But there are disadvantages to consider with each of them too.

With multiple-choice questions, for example, the student can get the answer right with a lucky guess. There is also no requirement to elaborate on answers, so it is not a comprehensive test of a student's broader knowledge of a subject.

The disadvantages of oral questions are that they are time consuming since each individual student would need to be tested away from the rest of a class to prevent others copying their answers. Oral questions are also more pressurised, and this could prevent a student from giving the correct answer even when they do know it.

As we've seen, the essay-style of question can elicit a broader test of knowledge. But, conversely, the fact that longer answers are required means that fewer questions can be posed in an exam or test. So, fewer areas of the subject can be tested, in this respect.

Short answer questions rely on a student recalling the answer to specific questions, so they might not suit students who feel pressurised in exam situations.

There is also the element that students can get correct answers with lucky guesses since there is no requirement to elaborate on an issue.