

Aspects of Assessment Questions That are Challenging for ELLs

Following are components of Assessment questions that may be difficult for ELLs. Read each one and reflect on why it poses a challenge for ELLs before proceeding to the next slide with the answer.

Multiple Choice / True-False / Essay Test Questions

- 1) Multiple choice test questions are used to test knowledge of course constructs and common misconceptions. Questions consist of a stem and 3- 5 possible choices. They are easy to mark but very challenging to write. Similarly true / false statements are used to check comprehension of concepts. Look at the issues identified in the following slides and think about why they might be a challenge for ELLs before progressing to the following slide explanation.

Why are long, complex sentences a challenge for ELLs?

Example: What invention related to Hollywood did Thomas Edison , an American inventor, who was born in 1847, invent that is still popular today?

Answer:

Long complex sentences rely on key connecting words or punctuation to show the relationship between ideas. Sentences that have lengthy subjects and several clauses challenge the processing capacity of ELLs as they simultaneously try to decode the complicated grammatical structures and process the content at the same time. If the key word is missed or misunderstood, the meaning may be misinterpreted.

- 2) Why are negatives and double-negatives difficult for ELLs?

All of the following are true of Thomas Edison except...

Answer:

The meaning can be ambiguous and it is easy to not notice the negative word. Example: It's not unusual... could mean a) It's usual/common b) It's not usual but it happens sometimes c) It can emphasize a negative meaning – It's really common

- 3) Why are ambiguous statements or indefinite terms, absolute statements, and broad generalizations difficult for ELLs?

All the inventions by Thomas Edison made millions of dollars.

Answer:

If ELLs do not catch "all" and its meaning of 100%, they may misinterpret the question even though they may have had the knowledge being targeted by the question.

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Answer:

Vague or general questions are also a problem because unlike native speakers, ELLs may only have knowledge of one interpretation of a key word so they will answer from that perspective.

Example: Where was the Canadian Constitution signed? One could answer either Ottawa or at the bottom. ELLs may understand a different meaning of the word that still makes sense.

4) Why is the inclusion of extraneous information in a test question difficult for ELLs?

Thomas Edison was one of the first scientists to apply the principles of organized science and teamwork to the process of inventions. He is credited with inventing early versions of the electric lightbulb.

Answer:

Extra wording increases the cognitive load of the question and the time needed for ELLs to read and determine what is relevant. Avoid additional description or wording not necessary for the question.

5) In Multiple Choice options, why are statements that are too close to the correct answer and rely on subtle wording to differentiate difficult for ELLs?

The highest correlation of IQ scores between family members has been found for

- A. identical twins reared apart
- B. identical twins reared together
- C. fraternal twins reared together
- D. fraternal twins reared apart

Answer:

ELLs may fail to pick up on subtle word choice or modal distinctions that are very similar.

6) Why are essay responses difficult for ELLs?

Answer:

ELLs may need extra time to process the questions and think about how to write their response clearly. They may focus on the "form" of the essay at the expense of the content or focus on the content at the expense of the expected essay format.

