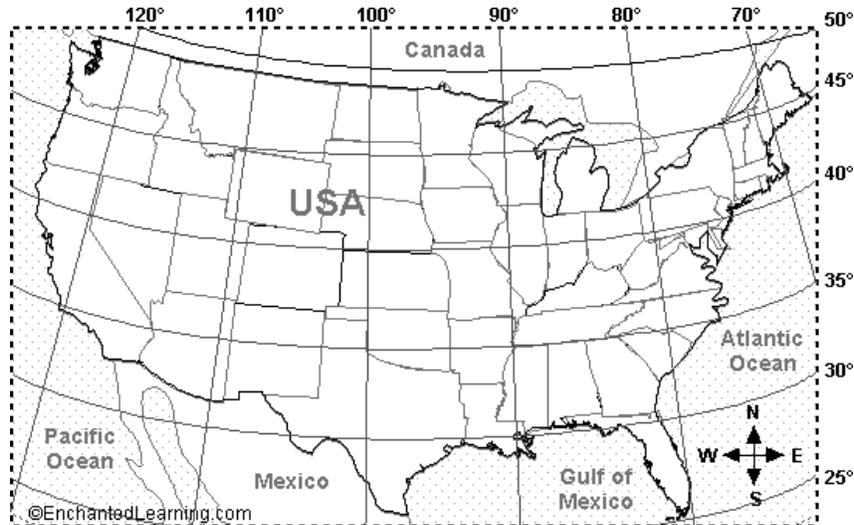


## Considerations for Articulating and Assessing Students Using Written-Response Questions

1. To broaden the sampling of course content, provide more short-response questions. Extended-response essay-type questions require more time to answer than short-response questions, which limits the sampling of course content that can be tested—and, more often than not, tend to encourage rambling.
2. Identify the **type** of response necessary to fulfill the directions, for examples: “List three (3) characteristics...,” “In one complete sentence...,” “In four to five sentences...,” “Draw and label a diagram...,” and “In 100 words or less...,” etc. Limit the space provided to reflect the amount of writing required.
3. Require each student to answer all the short-response questions. Allowing students to select a sample of questions to answer affects the reliability of scoring, makes it difficult to reflect on student learning, and discourages students from studying all course material.
4. Phrase prompts in ways that challenge students to think at higher levels of complexity: describe, explain, compare, contrast, apply within a context, hypothesize given circumstances, evaluate using criteria, justify using accurate and relevant evidence, and persuade using factual and logical arguments. Avoid words like “discuss” or “reflect on” that do not direct students to think purposefully.
5. Indicate the proportional value of each question in comparison to the total grade.
6. Be explicit in your directions:
  - Weak:* What are the characteristics of Shakespearian sonnets?
  - Stronger:* List three (3) characteristics of Shakespearian sonnets. (3 points)
  
  - Weak:* Compare and contrast the theories of B. F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov.
  - Stronger:* Compare and contrast the theories of B. F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov by explaining two (2) ways that they were similar and two (2) ways that they were different. (8 points)
  
  - Weak:* Explain how Nitrogen is used in farming.
  - Stronger:* Write three short paragraphs in which you explain THREE (3) of the processes that use Nitrogen in farming. For each process, share at least ONE (1) argument supporting its use and at least ONE (1) argument against its use. Conclude each paragraph by providing a reason or rationale for whether you would or would not recommend using that process. (12 points)
7. Create a rating guide to maintain consistency in scoring. A rating guide includes the criteria for earning full, partial, and no credit and provides specific acceptable responses for accruing credit (points) and anticipates the types of erroneous, ambiguous, and unacceptable responses. A well-developed rating guide would ensure that a colleague could score your students in your absence. *Sample rating guides appear below.*
8. Let students know the degree to which grammar, punctuation, spelling count. If it’s not a writing test—should it? Regardless, count any recurring error only once.
9. Interact with the students’ writing by commenting and/or using marginalia. In addition to standard editing marks, provide students with a list of the types of symbols use you and what they mean, for examples: Star = Excellent point; Heart = Love this!; Smiley face = Made me laugh/feel good; Sad face = Made me feel sad/empathy; Question mark = Something is unclear here; Exclamation point = Shocking; Check mark = Met a requirement; Wavy line under or beside text = Choppy language/difficult to understand; etc.

10. Consider using document-based questions (DBQ's). DBQ's provide students with one or more graphics (text to read, pictures, graphs, charts, maps, flow charts, x-rays, etc.) and then ask them to answer questions based on that information. Often DBQ-prompts begin by referencing the graphic, such as "Based on the data presented in Table 1 above, what..." DBQ's encourage students to use thinking skills rather than rely strictly on recall.

**Sample DBQ:**



Q2a. Name the states that extend below latitude 30 degrees N (in the contiguous United States) and draw arrows to them on the map above. (6 points)

Q2b. Name the state that is located entirely between 40-45 degrees N latitude and between 90-100 degrees W longitude and circle it on the map above. (2 points)

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**Rating Guide for Question 2a above:**

**Q2a. Score of 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1**

Award 1 full point (up to a maximum of 6 points) for each state correctly named and for each arrow correctly drawn to that state.

Acceptable answers: Texas, Louisiana, Florida with corresponding arrows

Unacceptable answers: Any other states and/or cities; blank answers; arrows drawn to wrong states

**Q2b. Score of 2 or 1**

Award 1 full point for correctly identifying Iowa as the state (0.5 points for The Hawkeye State) and 1 full point for circling it on the map.

Unacceptable answers: Any other state, illegible responses; wrongly circled state; no response

**Sample Rating Guide**  
(For illustrative purposes only)

Q1. Name THREE (3) state that begin with the letter W. (3 points)

**Score of 3.0, 2.0, or 1.0:**

Award 1 full point (up to a maximum of 3.0) for each *different* state that begins with the letter W.

**Acceptable responses:** Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

**No points awarded for:**

**Incorrect responses:**

Examples: Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Waco; West Seneca; White Plains; Texas

**Vague responses:**

Examples: The one above Oregon; the state known for its cheese; the state John Denver sang about

**No response**

Sources:

<https://www.k-state.edu/ksde/alp/resources/Handout-Module6.pdf> for tips about writing questions

<https://www.enchantedlearning.com/usa/activity/latlong/> for DBQ example 2a and 2b

NYSED ELA and Social Studies Examinations for format of DBQ's and Rating Guides

*...and from learning from various educational textbooks and journal articles and personal experiences over the years*