

Spring Meeting of Adjunct Faculty

BEST PRACTICES FOR ASSESSING STUDENT WORK

Senior Associate Dean Beth Thornburg
April 20, 2015



SMU

Exams



SMU

Exams Construction Generally

- » Knowledge, memory, critical thinking
- » Consistent with syllabus (coverage and weight)
- » Consistent with time spent during the semester
- » Doable in allotted time

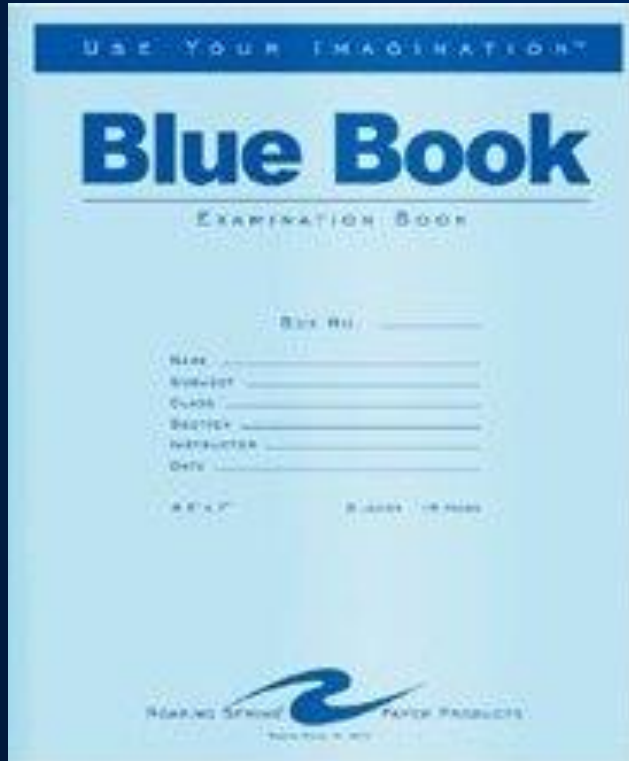


Essay Exams



SMU

Components



- » Content: Fact Situation + Call of the Question
- » Sources of Inspiration

Fact Situation

- » Chronological
- » Paragraphing
- » Uncluttered (facts, parties, dates)
- » Functional names (e.g. “buyer”) work better than party names (“plaintiff”) or cute names (“Harry Potter”)



The Call of the Question



- » Clear
- » Tasks
 - › Law application
 - › Assign role
 - › Assign viewpoint
- » Unless you are testing issue spotting, consider multiple “calls” when there are multiple parts to the desired response.

Multiple-Choice Exams



SMU

Format – 3 Parts

» Stem

- › Vignette (application)
- › Pure doctrine question (recall)

» Call of the Question

» Options

- › Correct Answer (“key”)
- › Distractors (plausible wrong answers)

Writing Good Stems

» Goal

» Vignettes: like essay questions, but shorter

- › Set up the law/fact application
- › Avoid extraneous ones
- › Check assumptions

» Difficulty should lie in distractors, not the stem

Writing Good Questions

- » Goal
- » Framing desired answers
 - › Law/fact application
 - › Lawyering task (see Case pp. 8-9)
 - › Avoid negative (“which is NOT”)
 - › Avoid truncated sentences (“Buyer can recover if . . . “)



Writing Good Options

- » Concise
- » Parallel in structure
- » Approximately the same length
- » Responsive to the question
- » Good sources of plausible distractors:
 - › Common misunderstandings
 - › Responses that miss a step in required reasoning

Generally avoid:

- » Long, complicated options
- » Vague frequency terms (“rarely”/ “usually”)
- » Absolute frequency terms (“always” or “never”)
- » Be very careful if using “all/none/some of the above”



Improve this Question

Beatrice, driving her brand new red Mercedes north on Hillcrest, crashes into Benedick, driving his beat up old Toyota across Daniel. Beatrice, who suffered permanent damage to her vision (and she hates wearing glasses), sues Benedick for negligence, seeking damages for lost income prior to trial, past medical expenses, past and future pain and suffering, and past and future mental anguish. If the case goes to trial on this pleading, Beatrice may:

- » a. recover damages for the injury to her car
- » b. not recover damages because she will have to take a lower-paying job that doesn't require good eyesight
- » c. Beatrice may recover all damages proximately caused by Benedick's negligence
- » d. recover future expenses for her eye doctor because of the damaged vision except she could if most people with the same injury would have required them

Rubrics

Clarifying Exam Grading
Setting Expectations



SMU

What is a rubric?

» Detailed written grading criteria

- › Explain what students should learn
 - › Explain how they will be evaluated
- ## » More informative than numbers, they describe what different levels of proficiency look like


Rubric Template

(Describe here the task or performance that this rubric is designed to evaluate.)


	Beginning	Developing	Accomplished	Exemplary	Score
	1	2	3	4	
Stated Objective or Performance	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.	
Stated Objective or Performance	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.	
Stated Objective or Performance	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.	
Stated Objective or Performance	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.	



This column lists issues, elements



These columns
explain qualities
of performance



Examples

- » Class Participation (it's more than butts in seats and asking an occasional question)
- » Blogs (writing assignment)
- » Trial Advocacy (could range be explained more specifically?)
- » Exam (Sparrow handout, pp. 12-13)

Advantages of using rubrics

» For teachers

- › Clarifies our own expectations
- › Keeps grading more consistent
- › Leads to better student work
- › Saves time (in the long run)

» For students

- › Helps them understand expectations
- › Helps them understand where their performance fell short
- › Makes them more conscious of their learning (which aids transfer)



“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.”



SMU