

Pomlun, M., Sunbye, N., & Kelley, J. (1999). Exploring gender differences to constructed-response reading items. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 3*, 55-68.

Key Words: culturally responsive instruction, response to reading

Summary: This article explores gender differences among adolescents in Kansas using their constructed responses to selected texts. It also discusses factors contributing to gender format differences.

Assumptions:

As large-scale reading assessments include different item formats, it is becoming clearer that there are performance differences between males and females that are related to different formats.

Findings: The study measured 100 adolescent (grades 7 and 10) males' and females' ability to respond to constructed test items. Female adolescents had advantages over male adolescents for several variables in constructed formats. Gender differences in reading comprehension, as measured by number correct, appeared to explain male-female differences in reproduction and mechanics. However, female participants had advantages in handwriting, words written, T-unit length, and unrelated responses.

Conclusions: Females may perform better in written formats because their understanding of the task is clearer. Further study needs to be done on how prior knowledge affects outcome. Females write more and may score better because effort is often a criterion in grading. Consideration should be made for male adolescents' brief responses.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Before students take high-stakes tests, help them see the importance of such issues as legibility and length of response.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Help teachers explore ways to help students learn about the features of written test responses.