

ABSTRACT:

Agata Galkiewicz

University of Potsdam

A Difficult or Easy Start? The Effects of Question Ordering on Test's Performance.

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To reduce cheating in written tests and exams, assessors often randomly vary the ordering of questions across students. However, little is known about potential unintended side-effects of question ordering. This paper examines if it makes a difference for overall test performance whether students randomly have to start with easier or more difficult questions. Using data from online tests conducted in one of the largest German universities, we find that placing difficult questions at the beginning of a test increases its final result, but does not affect long-term academic achievements. The effect is the strongest for the first cohort affected by the pandemic, a more advanced course and the most important assessments. Our results suggest that randomization of questions order should be performed at least more cautiously.