

Guidelines for Constructing Multiple-Choice Items

A standard multiple-choice question consists of two standard parts: a problem (*stem*) and a list of suggested solutions (*options*). The stem is best written in the form of a complete question or statement. The list of options contains one correct or best option (*answer*) and a number of incorrect or inferior options (*distractors*). See example below:

3. What is chiefly responsible for the increase in the a USA during the last fifty years?	overage length of life in the	— stem
distractor —	a. Compulsory health and physical education courses in public schools.	
answer —	*b. The reduced death rate among infants and young children	— options
distractor —	c. The safety movement, which has greatly reduced the number of deaths from accidents.	— ориона
distractor —	d. The substitution of machines for human labor.	

This document provides guidelines to writing good multiple-choice items and concludes with a checklist when reviewing each multiple-choice item.

Test items

- Construct each item to assess a single written objective.
- Make sure the item can be answered without looking at the options.
- Avoid "tricky" and overly complex items.
- Avoid textbook, verbatim phrasing
- Use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Present the answer in each of the option positions approximately an equal amount of times, and in random order.
- * Focus on important concepts; don't waste time testing trivial facts.

<u>Stems</u>

- Base each problem on a specific item stated clearly in the stem.
- Include as much of the item in the stem, but do not include irrelevant material.
- State the stem in positive form (in general).
- Avoid superfluous information.
- Avoid negatively phrased items (e.g., those with *except* or *not* in the lead-in question).
- Don't begin stems with the phrase, "Which of the following is true (or false)?" or "Each of the following statements is correct EXCEPT."

Options

- Word the options clearly and concisely.
- Use plausible distractors.
- Include one and only one correct or clearly best answer in each item.
- Write options that are grammatically consistent and logically compatible with the stem; list them in logical or alphabetical order.
- Write distractors that are plausible and the same relative length as the answer.
- Avoid using absolutes such as, *always*, *never*, and *all* in the options; also avoid using vague terms such as *usually* and *frequently*.
- Avoid using *none of the above* or *all of the above*
- Do ask questions with a varying number of options.
- Keep the options mutually exclusive.
- Keep the options homogeneous in content.
- Keep the options free from clues as to which response is correct.
- Keep options parallel in form.
- Keep options similar in length.

References

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- Testing Memo 10: Some Multiple-choice writing Do's and Don'ts. Blacksburg, VA: Office of Management and Research Services, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.