

Good Multiple-Choice Item Writing 'Rules'

Rules regarding the **Structure** of the item

1. Do NOT use a 'cue word' in the stem and the keyed (correct) answer.
2. Make distractors of equal length.
3. Do NOT use absolutes such as 'all', 'always', 'no'. Stick with 'usually', 'frequently'.
4. No grammatical hints such as 'an'.
5. No grammatical hints such as 'are' or 'is' which suggests plural or singular.
6. No hints in the distractors. Repeating one word throughout the distractors provides a hint.
7. Students' opportunity to correctly answer an item must be independent upon their performance on another item. Do NOT link items.



Rules regarding **Structure**:

1. Multiple choice items will have four response options and only one correct answer.
2. Response options should be parallel in reference to parts of speech.
3. Response options should not overlap.
4. Avoid absolutes such as "only" or "never".
5. If the distractors are numeric, put them in either ascending or descending order. If the distractors are alphabetic and relatively short (one to three words), put them in alphabetical order.
6. Response options should not include: 'None of the above', 'All of the above', 'not enough information', 'Cannot be determined'.
7. The item stem should be a complete thought. The easiest way to tell if the stem is a complete thought is to cover up the response options and see if you know what you're supposed to do. Students should not have to figure out what you're asking.
8. Don't repeat the same word(s) at the beginning of each response – add the word(s) to the stem.

Rules regarding **Content**:

1. Each multiple-choice item should be written to measure only one eligible content statement.
2. Items should be clear and concise, and they should use vocabulary and sentence structure appropriate for the assessed grade level.
3. Distractors should be incorrect but plausible based on the topic of the question.
4. Ensure that there is only one true and defensible answer.
5. Avoid jargon and textbook language.
6. Avoid clichés.
7. Use common misinformation purposefully.
8. Use logical misinterpretations purposefully.



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Rules regarding **Style/Format**:

1. **NOT, MOST, MUST, ONLY, BEST, or LEAST** should be boldface and capitalized.
2. Plural forms should be used whenever possible to avoid gender-specific pronouns.
3. If the response options are phrases, they should not begin with a capital letter, nor should they have a period at the end.
4. If the response options are sentences, they should be capitalized and punctuated appropriately.
5. Get your thoughts down on paper as soon as possible. Then edit.
6. Ask peers for help. Get clarification if you have questions.