

Rules for writing multiple-choice questions

1 Prepare multiple-choice items as direct questions rather than incomplete statements

Incomplete statement format

The capital of Australia is in _____

Less effective

Direct question format

In which of the following cities is the capital of Australia?

More effective

2 Use only a single, clearly-defined problem and include the main idea in the question

Students must know what the problem is without having to read the response options.

3 Emphasize higher-level thinking

Use memory-plus application questions. To do this, place the concept in a life situation or context that requires the student to first recall the facts and then apply or transfer the application of those facts into a situation.

a 'memory only question'

a

Which description best characterizes whole foods?

- a. orange juice
- b. toast
- c. bran cereal
- d. grapefruit

← less effective

'memory-plus application' question

Sally's breakfast this morning included one glass of orange juice (from concentrate), one slice of toast, a small bowl of bran cereal and a grapefruit. What 'whole food' did Sally eat for breakfast?

- a. orange juice
- b. toast
- c. bran cereal
- d. grapefruit

← effective

4 Use plausible distractors

All of the wrong answer choices should be completely reasonable. Answers given in previous open-ended quizzes can provide realistic distractors.

5 Use only one correct option (or be sure the best option is clearly the best option)

The item should include only one correct or clearly best answer. Alternatives should be mutually exclusive and not overlapping.

6 Keep all answer choices the same length

Answer options should be about the same length and parallel in grammatical structure. Avoid making your correct answer the long or short answer in the group.

7 Avoid clues to the correct answer

Avoid answering one question by giving the answer somewhere else in the test.

8 Avoid negative questions

Students may be able to find an incorrect answer without knowing the correct answer.

9 Avoid the 'all of the above' or 'none of the above' options

This can encourage guessing. You will never know if students really know the correct answer.

10 Mix up the order of the correct answers

Keep correct answers in random positions and don't let them fall into a pattern that can be detected.

11 Use simple sentence structure and precise wording

- Write questions in a simple structure that is easy to understand
- Use words that should be familiar to your students
- Avoid extremes – never, always, only
- Avoid nonsense words and unreasonable statements
- Have the test reviewed to find mistakes, clues, grammar and punctuation problems

References

BYU Faculty Center. (2001). *14 Rules for Writing Multiple-Choice Questions.pdf* (application/pdf Object) (p. 5). Retrieved from <https://testing.byu.edu/resources>

Malamed, C. (2012). 10 Rules For Writing Multiple Choice Questions: The eLearning Coach. *the eLearning coach*. Retrieved June 4, 2012, from http://thelearningcoach.com/elearning_design/rules-for-multiple-choice-questions/