

Checklist for Reviewing Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs)

Stem

- Addresses a single problem/question
- Is worded positively unless knowing what “not to do” is important
- Contains only relevant information
- Includes as much of the item as possible
- Ends with a question that can be answered by hiding the alternatives

Alternatives

- 2-3 options are sufficient in most instances (avoid padding with implausible distractors)
- “one-best-answer” is recommended
- Distractors are based on typical errors/misconceptions made by students
- Homogeneous in nature
- Grammatically parallel
- Mutually exclusive
- Plausible

To prevent students from guessing the correct answer (“testwiseness”) avoid the following:

- Distractors that don’t follow the stem grammatically
- Obvious distractors
- Correct answers that are considerably longer than the distractors
- Repeating keywords from the stem in one of the alternatives
- “All of the above”
- “None of the above”
- Absolute terms: always, never

To reduce confusion, avoid the following:

- Tricky distractors
- Qualifying statements: usually, sometimes, maybe
- Alternatives that take too long to read
- Repeating words in the alternatives that could be part of the stem
- Negative alternatives
- Numerical data not stated consistently
- Unclear language