MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEM-WRITING GUIDELINES/RULES/SUGGESTIONS/ADVICE AS DERIVED FROM 46 AUTHORITATIVE TEXTBOOKS

Source: Haladyna, T.M., and Downing, S.M. (1989) A taxonomy of multiple-choice item-writing rules, Applied Measurement in Education. pp. 37-50.

General Item-Writing (procedural)

1. Use either the best answer or the correct answer format.
2. Avoid the complex multiple-choice (Type K) format. (e.g., A and D, A and C, All the above, None of the Above, A, B and C, etc.)
3. Format the item vertically, not horizontally.
4. Allow time for editing and other types of item revisions.
5. Use good grammar, punctuation, and spelling consistently.
6. Minimize examinee reading time in phrasing each item.
7. Avoid trick items, those which mislead or deceive examinees into answering incorrectly.

General Item-Writing (content concerns)

8. Base each item on an educational or instructional objective.
9. Focus on a single problem.
10. Keep the vocabulary consistent with the examinees' level of understanding.
11. Avoid cuing one item with another; keep items independent of one another.
12. Use the author's examples as a basis for developing your items.
13. Avoid overspecific knowledge when developing the item.
14. Avoid textbook, verbatim phrasing when developing the item.
15. Avoid items based on opinions.
16. Use multiple-choice to measure higher level thinking.
17. Test for important or significant material; avoid trivial material.

Stem Construction

18. State the stem in question form or completion form (*note: recent research findings favor question form over completion).*
19. When using the completion format, don't leave a blank for completion in the beginning or middle of the stem of the question (*note: recent research findings favor question form over completion – thus, avoid completion format).*
20. Ensure that the directions in the stem are clear, and that wording lets the examinee know exactly what is being asked.
21. Avoid window dressing (excessive verbiage) in the stem.
22. Word the stem positively; avoid negative phrasing.
23. Include the central idea and most of the phrasing in the stem.

General Option Development

24. Use as many options as are feasible; more options are desirable (*Recent research suggests four to five options)*.
25. Place options in logical or numerical order.
26. Keep options independent; options should not be overlapping.
27. Keep all options in an item homogeneous in content.
28. Keep the length of the options fairly consistent.
29. Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase "all of the above."
30. Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase "none of the above."
31. Avoid the use of the phrase "I don't know."
32. Phrase options positively, not negatively.
33. Avoid distractors that can clue test-wise examinees; for example, avoid clang associations, absurd options, formal prompts, or semantic (overly specific or overly general) clues.
34. Avoid giving clues through the use of faulty grammatical construction.
35. Avoid specific determiners, such as "never" and "always."

Correct Option Development

36. Position the correct option so that it appears about the same number of times each possible position for a set of items.
37. Make sure there is one and only one correct option.

Distractor Development

38. Use plausible distractors; avoid illogical distractors
39. Incorporate common errors of students in distractors.
40. Avoid technically phrased distractors.
41. Use familiar yet incorrect phrases as distractors.
42. Use true statements that do not correctly answer the item.
43. Avoid the use of humor when developing options (*recent research suggests benefits for humor properly inserted into exams, yet more research is necessary)*.