



Writing Effective MCQs

Writing multiple-choice questions is challenging. This is a guide to help write effective multiple-choice questions.

Guidelines for Writing MCQs

1. Start With the Session Objective

Align each question to a specific learning objective or competency
Aim for application or clinical reasoning, not just recall
Ask yourself: “What decision should a competent learner be able to make here?”

2. Use a Clinical Vignette (When Appropriate)

Present a realistic patient scenario
Include only relevant details (avoid noise)
Ensure the vignette leads naturally to the question
Good stem lead-in:
“What is the most likely diagnosis?”
“What is the next best step in management?”

3. Write a Clear, Focused Stem

Write a clear focused stem that:

- Is complete and understandable on its own
- Contains a single, clear problem

Avoid:

- Unnecessary complexity
- Tricky wording or ambiguity

Rule: A strong learner should anticipate the answer before seeing options.

4. Construct Strong Answer Options

Include one clearly best answer
Use plausible distractors (common errors or misconceptions)
Keep options:

- Similar in length, structure, and grammar
- Mutually exclusive (no overlap)

Avoid:

- “All of the above” / “None of the above”
- Implausible or obviously wrong distractors
- Pattern clues (e.g., longest answer is always correct)

5. Avoid Common Pitfalls

Negative phrasing (“Which is NOT...”)
Tricky or misleading wording
Testing trivial facts
Using absolutes (“always,” “never”)
Clues from grammar mismatch between stem and options

6. Test Higher-Order Thinking

Move beyond recall:

- Diagnosis → Interpretation of findings
- Management → Next best step
- Investigation → Most appropriate test

7. Ensure Fairness and Inclusivity

Avoid cultural, gender, or social descriptors unless clinically relevant
Use neutral, respectful language
Ensure the question tests knowledge/skill—not background familiarity

8. Review and Improve

Peer review questions before use
After exams:
Check item difficulty
Review discrimination index
Revise or discard weak items

9. Quick Quality Checklist

- Aligned to an objective
- Tests application/decision-making
- Clear, focused stem
- One best answer
- Plausible distractors
- No cues or bias
- Clinically relevant

Bottom Line - Good MCQs don't test what learners remember — they test what learners can do with what they know.