

## Writing Multiple-Choice Test Items

In order to write good multiple-choice items you will need to be familiar with these key terms:

- **Item:** Term used to refer to test questions and prompts
- **Stem:** The part of a multiple choice item that poses the problem or question
- **Options:** The answer choices that students can select in response to the stem

### General Suggestions

1. Write a few items each day, and then assemble them just before the test.
2. Base each question on the outcomes that you have set for your course, not trivial details. ([link to course outcomes page](#))
3. Keep the vocabulary consistent with the students' levels of understanding.
4. Make certain that items do not provide clues for other items.
5. Begin the test with your simpler items.

### Tips for Writing Stems

1. Use a single, clearly-stated problem or question.
2. Describe the problem fully and avoid irrelevant information.
3. Provide most of the information in the stem so that the options can be kept short.
4. State the stem as a question, or as an incomplete statement if needed to avoid awkward wording.
5. Be as brief as possible and avoid undue complexity.
6. Proofread to avoid double negatives, idioms (such as “toss-up” or “nest-egg”), passive voice and absolutes (such as always, never, all, etc.).

### Tips for Writing Options

1. Include a total of 3 to 5 options.
2. Make options similar in grammar, length, complexity, and style.
3. Move repeated text to the stem if possible.
4. Write the correct option first, and then write the incorrect options in a parallel style.
5. Make all options plausible to students who do not know the correct option.
6. Decrease the possibility of students guessing by avoiding options such as “all of the above” or “both A and B.”
7. Use “none of the above” with caution, and only when there are absolutely correct answers.
8. Vary the positions of the correct options.
9. Proofread your options to make sure that only one option is correct.

