

Writing Multiple Choice

Education

A well-built multiple-choice item can test understanding. Most are built badly.

The distractors are the item. The correct answer is the easy part.

Rules for the stem

Ask a complete question, not a fragment

Avoid negatives, and never double negatives

Keep the wording out of the answer key

Put shared wording in the stem, not the options

Test one idea per item

Rules for the options

Every distractor must be a real misconception

Keep options the same length and grammar

Avoid all of the above and none of the above

Three good options beat five padded ones

Order options logically, not by convenience

If a pupil can eliminate a distractor without knowing the content, the item is measuring test-taking rather than learning.