

Nine hints for designing Multiple-Choice Tests

The following is a summary of hints for designing Multiple-Choice Tests. The first five hints are based on what the literature recommends using in Multiple-Choice Tests. The remaining four bare based on what is not recommended.

When designing a Multiple-Choice Test, it is recommended that you...

1. Focus on the key content in the question

By making the content of the question clear and focusing on a concept, an event or some other key content, for instance, you make sure the students will understand the question. An unfocused question may cause confusion as to what the question is actually about, which may be reflected in the response given.

2. Use simple vocabulary and clear wording

Clear and transparent wording without grammatical errors helps ensure that all students, even those who are linguistically challenged, have equal opportunities to be tested in their understanding of the academic content. This advice applies unless the aim is to test the students' linguistic understanding and not their understanding of the academic content.

3. Use homogeneous options

The intention of using homogeneous options is to retain the students' attention to the key point and content in which they are being tested. Moreover, this may help ensure that it is not possible to guess the correct answers, for instance due to more details in the description of the correct answer as compared to the distractors.

4. List options in a logical order

By listing the options in a logical order, for instance alphabetically or numerically, you avoid making a transparent pattern for the placement of the correct answers. Moreover, you make it easier for the reader to assess the options.

5. Limit the number of distractors

It may prove difficult to find distractors which are all equally plausible and resemble the correct answer as regards shape and language (see advice 3). It may therefore be an advantage to only use two to three distractors.

When designing a Multiple-Choice Test, you should not...

1. Use tricky and difficult questions

Students view tricky and difficult questions negatively and see them as an attempt to cheat them.

2. Use negatives in the question (as a main rule)

The use of negatives can render the questions more complex than necessary and you run the risk that the students overlook the negatives and therefore give wrong answers. As an alternative to negatives, you may use the true/false format.

This advice applies, unless it is essential to ask for instance what should be avoided, or which option differs from the others. If you decide to use negatives after all, these must be clearly marked, for instance by using CAPITAL letters, underscore or **bold** font.

3. Use “none of the above” or “all of the above”

The use of “none of the above” and “all of the above” increases the risk that the students misunderstand the options and also makes the test more difficult.

This advice applies, unless the question will otherwise be too easy, or unless the aim is to test the students' logical capacity rather than their understanding of the academic content.

4. Use humour (as a main rule)

It may be risky to use humour in tests as this increases the risk that some students misunderstand the joke and therefore give the wrong answer.

The advice applies, unless it is not an exam situation, and unless this reflects this type of teacher and the relationship between students and teacher. In case humour is used in a test, it is essential to make sure that the students cannot misunderstand the main idea behind the question.