

GW MD Program General Guidelines for Writing and Reviewing Multiple Choice Questions

In general, when writing questions please follow these guidelines to writing good multiple choice questions (adapted from NBME guidelines):

- ✓ The lead-in should be closed and focused, and ideally worded in such a way that the test-taker can cover the options and guess what the correct answer is. This is known as the “cover-the-options” rule. **In other words, as a final check to see if your question is good, cover all of the answers and be sure that you can still answer the question.**
- ✓ **Item and option text must be clear and unambiguous.** Avoid imprecise phrases such as “is associated with” or “is useful for” or “is important”; words that provide cueing such as “may” or “could be”; vague terms such as “usually” or “frequently” ; and absolute terms such as “never” or “always”
- ✓ **Use single-answer, multiple-choice questions with AT LEAST 4 answer options (A-D).**
- ✓ **All options should be homogeneous** so that they can be judged as entirely true or entirely false on a single dimension.
- ✓ **Spell out abbreviations,** particularly for first and second year medical courses
- ✓ Incorrect options can be partially or wholly incorrect.

Technical Flaws to look for when reviewing your questions...

- “None of the above” or “all of the above” are used as options
- Lead-in questions contain negative phrasing such as ‘All of the following EXCEPT...’ or ‘Which of the following is NOT...’
- Options are overly long or complicated
- Numeric data are not stated consistently
- Terms in the options or the stem are vague
- Language or structure of the options is not homogeneous
- Options are not in a logical order
- Stems are unnecessarily complicated

Always provide a justification for each question

Faculty should provide, for each exam question, the reasoning or justification for the right choice and explanations for why wrong options are incorrect. These rationales offer students another opportunity to review the content and to better understand the material.