

Writing Test Questions Well – Part 1 of 3
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Very often an organization wants to prove the effectiveness of its training by administering some type of test at the end of the training. Unfortunately, most trainers are not skilled in writing test questions. It is much more than simply writing 20 questions about the content. You can skew the results of the test (and therefore get inaccurate feedback about the effectiveness of the training) if your test questions are not designed correctly.

In this first of three articles on designing appropriate test questions, we will discuss multiple choice questions and how best to design them.

Typically, when someone is not skilled at writing multiple choice questions, the correct response will always be the longest one – try to be aware of this and keep your answers to the same length.

It's MUCH easier to provide 3 alternatives than 4. Don't make it hard on yourself. Your responses should include one right answer and three incorrect but *plausible* ones.

One of the ways to ensure you have plausible, but incorrect, answers is to ensure that each of your choices is logically consistent.

Right	Wrong
Check off all answers that are primary colors:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Red	<input type="checkbox"/> Red
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue	<input type="checkbox"/> Blue
<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> White
<input type="checkbox"/> Orange	<input type="checkbox"/> Ponies

Your plausible but incorrect answers don't have to be terribly difficult – keep in mind that you are testing people who have new knowledge and limited skill/experience – don't come up with answers that would stump *you*, come up with answers that would stump the unskilled person. By the same token, the right answer shouldn't jump out from the list.

If your answer begins with a vowel, the preceding question should end with "a(n)"; if it ends with *an* – which is grammatically correct – the question itself automatically triggers the trainee to choose the answer that begins with the vowel.

Example: The Interstate is also known as an: <input type="checkbox"/> Expressway <input type="checkbox"/> Highway <input type="checkbox"/> Route

Do you see / hear how ending the question with *an* forces you to choose Expressway?

All choices should begin with similar phrasing or sentence structure.
For Example:

Right	Wrong
The time to cross the street is: A. When the light turns green B. After you have looked both ways C. If the road is clear	The best time for fly fishing is: A. Morning B. Afternoon C. April to May, after the ice pack has melted

Beware of *All of the Above*. If you're going to provide "all of the above" (or "none of the above") as one of your choices, you should include it in **ALL** of the choices. If you have 15 multiple choice questions and only 1 or 2 have the option of "none of the above," it's a clear signal that the right answer is none of the above.

These guidelines for developing well written multiple choice test questions should help to ensure that you are able to accurately gauge your trainee's level of learning.