

Writing Test Questions Well – Part 2 of 3  
By. Nanette Miner, Ed.D.

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 the second of three articles on designing appropriate test questions, we will discuss True / False questions and how best to design them.

I often hear that true/false questions are avoided because they are “too easy” for the participant; heck they have a 50/50 chance. The truth is, if you write a test question correctly, even a 50/50 chance isn’t good enough. Here are some things to keep in mind when writing true/false questions so that they are challenging for your participants and truly test their knowledge.

- ✓ In true/false questions, make sure your options are entirely true or entirely false – do not include answers that might be true under certain conditions. Example: Moss grows on a northern exposure; (except if it’s a really shady area).
- ✓ We tend to write more true statements than false ones, because it is easier; so be aware of that and try to give an equal number of each.
- ✓ Also, as is true with Multiple Choice questions (Part 1 of 3), our true statements tend to be longer than our false ones; so watch your word count and try to be consistent in length.
- ✓ Avoid what are known as “specific determiners” which signal the correct answer – most obvious are ALWAYS and NEVER. Rarely is anything always true or never true. The use of either of these words is usually a clue to the test taker to choose the answer that doesn’t include the specific determiner. Example: “i” always comes before “e”

These guidelines should help you to design true/false questions that are a challenge to your participants and truly test their knowledge.