

From 9/7/06 Assessment Workshop by Gail Ryser

- Most test items provided in publishers' test banks measure only recall; develop original scenarios and vignettes to measure understanding and application.
- Avoid over-specific, opinion-based, and trick questions.
- Format multiple-choice questions vertically instead of horizontally. (Putting answers in a vertical row increases the ease of readability, especially for students with some types of graphic disabilities.)
- Narrow the width of the questions on the page, even if you then have to use 2 columns of questions. Again, this format increases readability.
- Avoid negative words and except in your question stems.
- Generally avoid fill-in-the-blank statements in your question stems. These are especially difficult for ESL students. If you do write one, put the blank at the end of the statement.
- It is difficult to write plausible distracters (incorrect answers). 3 seems a natural limit; you don't need to strain to get 4 or 5. Put the distracters in logical (ascending or descending chronological, spatial) order.
- Avoid "all of the above" and "none of the above" answers. These challenge students' test-taking skills more than their knowledge and understanding. One exception: "None of the above" is an acceptable option for a quantitative question.
- Regarding statistical analysis routinely provided by the Testing Center on test results:
 - Item difficulty—optimum numbers are .5 to .8 (50%–80%)
 - Item discrimination—determines whether students who scored well on the exam got the question right, and vice versa. Generally, .4 and above figures are best. However, easier questions do have lower discrimination.
 - Reliability—optimum is .8 and above; .7 is ok.