

MCQ checklist

Writing good MCQs is a skill. The following checklist and guidance on good and bad practice will help guide you in creating good MCQs.

Checklist

- Are the learning outcomes being supported or assessed?
- Are the questions challenging enough?
- Can the answers be easily guessed?
- Are the questions written in clear, straightforward language and sentences?
- Do they contain any words which might be misinterpreted or have several meanings?
- Could there be multiple potentially correct answers depending on the context or point of view?
- Are all the answers plausible/realistic?
- Are all the answers a similar length?
- Are any questions posed negatively? (i.e. Which of these is Not true? – this is confusing so should be avoided).
- Is there suitable feedback provided for every answer?
- Does the feedback for incorrect answers take care to not give the correct answer away?
- Does the feedback for the correct answer advance the learning further or suggest additional areas for the student to explore?

What makes a good MCQ?

Good MCQ questions should be clear on what they are trying to achieve, and this should not be merely fact checking and recall.

- Does it check understanding of a concept?
- Does it check understanding and the application of a technique?
- Does it check previous understanding?
- Does it provide reinforcement?
- Does it reassure the learner?
- Does it keep the learner engaged?

What makes a bad MCQ?

- **Questions can be guessed** – questions can seem pointless and the answers provide no useful data.
- **Questions test only a vague understanding** – full knowledge or application isn't needed.
- **Irrelevant testing** – the questions have been written because they were easy to write. They do not test key learning points.
- **Insufficient challenge** – questions do not address the complexity and academic level of the material.
- **Misreading issues** – confusing question phrasing or formats mean that learners can answer incorrectly by mistake; this is demoralising for the learner and creates misleading data.

Do's and Don'ts when writing MCQs

Do vary the position of the correct answer in the options available.

Do keep answer options similar in length, make sure they all are phrased in a similar tone, and are grammatically correct.

Do, if possible, avoid all of the above or none of the above options, as these are nearly always the answer and do not test the learner's knowledge.

Do use clear, straightforward language and sentences, and avoid words which might be misinterpreted or have several meanings.

Do avoid ambiguous questions where there could be multiple potentially correct answers depending on the context or point of view.

Don't use question types that ask the learner to finish a sentence. Rephrase the question so it is a full sentence.

Don't use negative questions or options.