



A Trusty Tool to Help Develop Better Classroom Test Questions

# ITEM WRITING QUICKSHEET

**Stem:** the question itself

**Distractors:** incorrect answers

**Options:** all potential answers

**Key:** correct answer

## BEFORE GIVING THE TEST

*I can confirm that every item:*

- Contains subject matter vital to and within the scope of the class
- Has a supporting reference with page or lecture slide number
- Has been read aloud

## STEM CHECKLIST

*Every item in the test:*

- Is a direct question or an incomplete statement.
- Avoids “NOT,” “NEVER” and “EXCEPT”
- Avoids an unfocused stem  
(e.g., The stem is only “Sonographers are:” )
- Has no mid-stem fill-in-the-blanks
- Has clear & simple grammar / vocabulary
- Minimizes irrelevant information
- Avoids repetition of terms in options
- Avoids absolute terms (e.g., “always”)

Guideline (success): informed student can answer correctly without looking at the options

## OPTIONS CHECKLIST

*All item options are:*

- Structured with one clearly correct answer
- Objective, not subjective
- Grammatically consistent with the stem
- Of similar structure and length
- Plausible (not fictional)
- In logical order
- Free of overlapping numeric ranges
- Free of repetitive words (move to stem)

Guideline (fail): student could answer correctly based on the item structure alone (not knowledge)

## ESSAY / SHORT ANSWER CHECKLIST

*Every essay item has:*

- Numbered or lettered answering points
- A suggested answer length
- A question that is not too broad
- Been actually answered by me and possibly another colleague

## AFTER THE TEST

*Every item on the test has been:*

- Subject to a statistical item analysis
- Reviewed with the class
- Modified using student feedback
- Secured with test booklets returned
- Banked for future potential use