**Taxonomy of writing multiple-choice questions**

**Concepts**

1. Every item should reflect specific content and a single specific mental behavior, as called for in test specifications (two-way grid, test blueprint).

2. Base each item on important content to learn; avoid trivial content.

3. Use novel material to test higher level learning. Paraphrase textbook language or language used during instruction when used in a test item to avoid testing for simply recall.

4. Keep the content of each item independent from content of other items on the test.

5. Avoid over specific and over general content when writing MC items.

6. Avoid opinion-based items.

7. Avoid trick items.

8. Keep vocabulary simple for the group of students being tested.

**Formatting**

9. Use the question, completion, and best answer versions of the conventional MC, the alternate choice, true-false (TF), multiple true-false (MTF), matching, and the context-dependent item and item set formats, but AVOID the complex MC (Type K) format.

10. Format the item vertically instead of horizontally.

**Style**

11. Edit and proof items.

12. Use correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

13. Minimize the amount of reading in each item.

**Writing the stem**

14. Ensure that the directions in the stem are very clear.

15. Include the central idea in the stem instead of the choices.

16. Avoid window dressing (excessive verbiage).

17. Word the stem positively, avoid negatives such as NOT or EXCEPT. If negative words are used, use the word cautiously and always ensure that the word appears capitalized and boldface.

**Writing the choices**

18. Develop as many effective choices as you can, but research suggests three is adequate.

19. Make sure that only one of these choices is the right answer.

20. Vary the location of the right answer according to the number of choices.

21. Place choices in logical or numerical order.

22. Keep choices independent; choices should not be overlapping.

23. Keep choices homogeneous in content and grammatical structure.

24. Keep the length of choices about equal.

25. None-of-the-above should be used carefully.

26. Avoid All-of-the-above.

27. Phrase choices positively; avoid negatives such as NOT.

28. Avoid giving clues to the right answer

29. Make all distractors plausible.

30. Use typical errors of students to write your distractors.

31. Use humor if it is compatible with the teacher and the learning environment.

Haladyna, T. M., Downing, S. M., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2002). A review of multiple-choice item-writing guidelines for classroom assessment. *Applied measurement in education*, *15*(3), 309-333.