



The One-Page Guide to Writing Multiple-Choice Questions

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In writing questions to evaluate students in law school, keep in mind that you are preparing students for the practice of law. Avoid testing recall of isolated facts and less important concepts. Focus on assessing the ability to apply fundamental legal principles to realistic fact patterns. Every question should pass the “who cares” test.

The Stem

The "stem" is the fact pattern that precedes the actual task being demanded of an examinee. The stem should contain all of the facts needed for a knowledgeable examinee to answer that question. Make sure your stem:

- is concisely written in standard English (avoid legalese)
- contains all of the facts necessary to answer the question correctly
- contains the minimum number of actors needed to test the legal concept you are addressing
- minimizes the amount of quoted material used to test the legal concept you are addressing
- uses common nouns to describe actors ("the client" rather than "Client" or "Joe")
- avoids sensationalism, extraneous novel-like material, and humor
- avoids gender, ideological, racial/ethnic, or rural/urban biases
- avoids inclusion of facts intended to trick examinees

The Lead-in

The "lead-in" is a short, focused question that asks the examinee to perform a particular analysis. The lead-in must be answerable without reference to the options (avoid "Which of the following is correct?")

The Options

The "options" are the lettered choices given to the examinee as potential answers to the lead-in. One of the options, the *key*, must be clearly better than the other options (called *distractors*). Make sure your options:

- are parallel in language and structure
- are as concise as possible (one-word or short-phrase options are great)
- DO NOT contain new facts (all facts must be introduced in the stem)
- DO NOT contain conditions ("Yes, but only if . . ."; "No, unless . . ." options should not be used)
- DO NOT involve extra layers of analysis (each option should stand alone; avoid "A and B are correct, but C is incorrect")
- DO NOT employ any variation of "All of the above" or "None of the above"

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