

11 “Rules” for Writing Effective, NBME-Style Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. MCQs with vignettes can test higher-levels of knowledge than simple MCQs
2. But not pseudo-vignettes
3. Question stems should be long and answer choices short and homogeneous
4. Don't be negative (No “which of the following is NOT...”)
5. Tables of answers are allowed
6. Use as many distractors as necessary to avoid giving away the answer
7. Questions should never be purposefully tricky or deceptive
8. Order answers alphabetically or numerically
9. Avoid giving away the answer (no cuing by having the right answer be the longest or more detailed, spelling or grammatical errors in distractors, having 2 choices similar with one correct)
10. Students should be able to answer the question before reading the options (no “which of the following is true?”)
11. The lead-in question should include “most likely” (or similar)

Compiled by Janet Lindsley, PhD, based on experiences writing and reviewing Step 1 NBME questions