

## Advice for writing good multiple-choice questions. <sup>1</sup>

The usual format for multiple choice questions is to pose a question in a *stem* and offer several (4-5) brief possible answers. One is the *key*, or correct answer and the others—called the *distracters*—are plausible but incorrect.

### Example

In 2003, the specialized area of psychiatry concerned with its application in the general medical setting was approved as a formal subspecialty by the American Board of Medical Specialties. Which of the following became the official name of this subspecialty?

- A. Consultation-liaison psychiatry
- B. Psychiatry in the medical setting
- C. Liaison psychiatry
- D. Medical psychiatry
- E. Psychosomatic medicine

*Distracters*

*Key*

*stem*

### Overall, the question should

- Test important material
- Be appropriate to the level of training
- Be supported by data or references

### The stems should

- Be focused and clear
- Contain the majority of information
- Lead to only one possible answer
- Be positively phrased

### The distracters should

- Be incorrect
- Be short and to the point
- Be independent (i.e., one cannot deduce answer through process of elimination or by noticing the similarity between possible answers)
- Be free of vague quantifiers such as “usually,” “mostly,” “rarely”
- Avoid “all of the above” or “none of the above”
- Be similar in content, length, and grammar

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Academic Psychiatry, 34:4, July-August 2010, 310-316.