e-Assessment
Types of questions used for e-assessments
Selected response examples

Guidelines for writing effective multiple choice questions

In order to develop well-structured questions then there are numerous guidelines that should be followed. There are many sources available on the Internet and in various texts that provide detailed instructions on how to develop ‘good’ questions. Some of the key recommendations are detailed below:

- The question author/tutor should avoid including words in the stem and in the options as this often points to the key.

- It is often the case that the longest option (in words) is the correct choice as it often requires a greater deal of specificity in identifying the key to avoid ambiguity.

- Avoid unnecessary information within the stem, i.e. making the question too long, because including ‘padding’ will often make the question difficult to follow, particularly for students with reading problems such as dyslexia.

- Use negatives sparingly, including double negatives will often make the path to the correct solution very difficult.

- Avoid complex words in the stem. The inclusion of a technical or obscure word could result in a student not being able to answer a question due to lack of grammatical skills which may not be pre-requisite to a module.

- Each question item must be independent. In order to offer a level of security within testing it is often possible to randomise the order of questions within a test, therefore the expectation of having one question following on from another is not advisable.

- Make distracters clear and unambiguous - it is very easy to assume that a distracter is suitable without taking into account all possible scenarios.

- Take care not to include ‘and’ or plural expectation in a question stem that is specific to a single optional element.

- Try to avoid words such as ‘always’ and ‘usually’ in options as this will often show the correct option and permit some leeway concerning ambiguity.

- If using ‘complete the answer type questions’ then ensure that enough information is held in the question, i.e. try to avoid the stem needing information from the options to provide question clarity or completeness.
• Sensible distracters → all of equal likelihood. If we desire validity of questions e.g. one out of four then it must avoid totally and obvious invalidity of distracters.

• As much of the question included in the stem – avoid duplication in options.