

Some Common Design Issues in Multiple Choice Questions

One problem when discussing the design of MCQs is that the specific subjects of the questions themselves can get in the way of a general discussion on MCQ design. Below is a series of questions that are completely free of subject bias. Each of these questions contains a design problem, obvious or less obvious, that leads people to be able to spot the "right" answer. See if you can spot these answers and identify the 8 design issues.

Question 1

The usual function of grunge-prowlers is to remove

- A grunges
- B snarts
- C trigs
- D grods

Question 2

Antigrottification occurs on

- A spring mornings
- B summer evenings provided there is no rain after dusk
- C autumn afternoons
- D winter nights

Question 3

Lurkies suffer from trangitis because

- A their prads are always underdeveloped
- B all their brizes are horizontal
- C their curnpieces are usually imperfect
- D none of their dringoes can ever adapt

Question 4

Non-responsive frattling is usually found in an

- A gringle
- B janket
- C kloppie
- D uckerpod

Question 5

Which of the following are exceptions to the law of lompicality?

- A the miltrip and the nattercup
- B the bifid pantrip
- C the common queeter
- D the flanged ozzle

Question 6

Which must be present for parbling to take place?

- A phlot and runge
- B runge
- C stuke and runge
- D runge and trake

Question 7

One common disorder of an overspragged uckerpod is

- A copious vezzling
- B intermittent weggerment
- C non-responsive frattling
- D uneven yerkation

Question 8

Which one of these is the correct answer?

- A
- B
- C
- D

Some answers and observations

Question 1

Most people pick A. This is because the option contains a word from the stem, which is a sort of give-away. Therefore avoid using words from the stem in one particular option, especially if it is the correct answer.

Question 2

Most people pick B. This seems to be because it is longer and therefore appears more probable. Therefore, try to keep all options to the same length, within reason. Also, it is a qualified option whereas the others are unqualified; a qualified option may seem more likely to be correct.

Question 3

Most people pick C. This is mainly because of the word "usually", which seems more probable than always, none or all. It is best not to mix definites and indefinites, although all definites or all indefinites is fine.

Question 4

Almost everyone picks D. The "an" in the stem gives this away. Many questions like this have found their way into print - some even into examinations!

Question 5

The most probable option is A. This is given away by the plurality of the stem, and the singularity of B, C and D.

Question 6

Most people choose B. It's a bit harder to explain why this is - it seems to be something along the lines of "if B isn't right, none of them can be right, as they all involve "runge". Take care with overlapping options.

Question 7

This is trickier. However, most people go for C. The main reason is that the topic has already come up in Question 4 where the indefinite article gave away the answer. So, take care not to set questions where earlier ones give away the answer.

Question 8

The correct answer is, of course D! Most people would have recognised the pattern 1-A, 2-B, 3-C, 4-D, 5-A and so on. So, D seems ripe for coming up on question 8.