

Guidelines for Writing Multiple Choice Questions
Ruth-Marie E. Fincher, M.D., MACP¹

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on important concepts • Write items that can be answered without looking at options • Include needed, but no superfluous, information in stems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use long stems, short options • Be sure options are grammatically correct with wording of stem • Write plausible distractors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same relative length as the correct answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid negatively phrased stems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if you <i>must use</i>, options should be <i>very short (1 word)</i> and phrased positively • Avoid absolutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - e.g. always, never, all, none • Avoid vague terms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - e.g. frequently, usually, generally • Avoid “tricky” or “trick” questions • Do not repeat a word from stem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cues correct answer • Avoid mutually exclusive or overlapping options

¹ The “Art” of Writing MCQs, presented by Ruth-Marie E. Fincher, M.D., MACP, Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Medical College of Georgia School of Medicine during the Tufts University School of Medicine faculty development workshop: Constructing Effective and Integrated Exam Questions, March 20, 2009, Boston, MA.