

Module 3c: Writing Answer Choices

Passport to Great Teaching  
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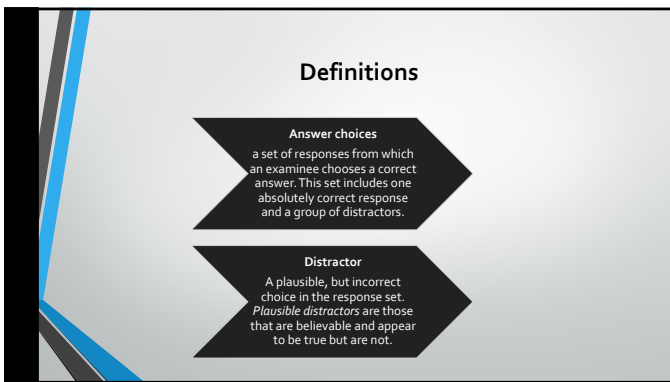
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### Definitions

**Answer choices**  
a set of responses from which an examinee chooses a correct answer. This set includes one absolutely correct response and a group of distractors.

**Distractor**  
A plausible, but incorrect choice in the response set. *Plausible distractors* are those that are believable and appear to be true but are not.

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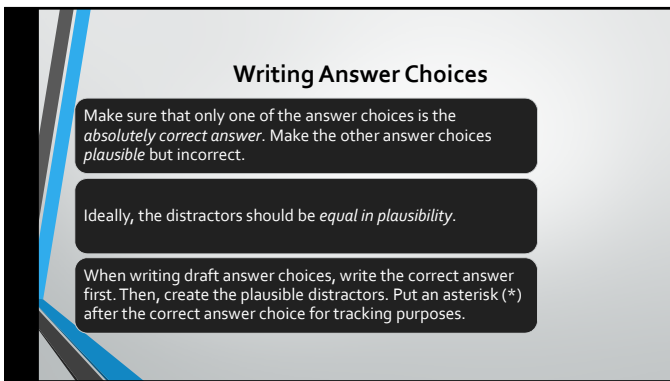
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### Writing Answer Choices

Make sure that only one of the answer choices is the *absolutely correct answer*. Make the other answer choices *plausible* but incorrect.

Ideally, the distractors should be *equal in plausibility*.

When writing draft answer choices, write the correct answer first. Then, create the plausible distractors. Put an asterisk (\*) after the correct answer choice for tracking purposes.

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### Writing Answer Choices

Ideally, keep the length of answer choices about equal.

Avoid using the choice *none-of-the-above* or *all-of-the-above*.

Avoid the choice *I don't know*.

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### Writing Answer Choices

Phrase answer choices positively as much as possible.

Avoid giving clues to the right answer in the item options.

Using a stem that asks for the *best* answer requires careful wording for the distractors as they all may have a degree of correctness (thus the term *best*), but the correct answer has to be the *best* choice.

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### Writing Answer Choices

Don't make a distractor *humorous*.

Choices must not be overlapping. This applies primarily to ranges in numerical questions.

Keep the *content* of the answer choices as *homogeneous and parallel as possible*.

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### Example 1 – from Dance

**Let's examine this item:**

1. An audition that involves the spot choreography is a

- A. dance audition
- B. callback
- C. prepared monologue or solo
- D. cold reading

**Issues:**

- The stem is not a question.
- The answer choices are not equal in length (they range from 1 to four words in length).
- Answer choices are not all plausible (the answer choices are not all related to dance, which effectively eliminates some distractors from consideration), and clues lead the respondent to option 1, the correct response.

This needs to be revised.

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### Example 1 - Revised

**Let's examine this revision:**

1. Which of the following is the main purpose of a dance audition?

- A. Demonstration of technique
- B. Listening to music
- C. Taking a break
- D. A costume fitting

**Why this is better:**

- A student who knows the components of a dance audition will read the stem, and immediately know the correct answer (A).
- The answer choices are equal in length.
- The distractors are plausible.
- There are no clues.

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### Example 2 – from Theatre

1. What characteristics would you use on stage to portray a person who is old and sick?

- A. Move slowly and stooped
- B. Speak loudly
- C. Walk tall and straight
- D. None of the above.

**Issues:**

- the stem is not clear – "characteristic" is used to mean "action" or "movement," which can be confusing
- Three of the answer choices have four words, and one has two words.
- Answer choice D, None of the above, violates the "only one correct response" guideline

This needs to be revised.

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### Example 2 - revised

Let's examine this revision:

1. Which of the following stage actions *best* portrays a person who is old and sick?
  - A. Stoop and move slowly.
  - B. Speak loudly and harshly.
  - C. Walk tall and straight.
  - D. Crawl on the ground.

**Why this is better:**

- the **stem** focuses on the type of action, not a characteristic
- There is one clear, **correct answer (A)**
- All distractors are **plausible** but only one answer is **best**
- All distractors are **equal in length**

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### Pause to Think

- Review the answer choice sets for the items you reviewed in Module 3b. Do they meet the guidelines presented here? If not, how would you change them?

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