

**THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

The stem should be meaningful and convey the central problem. A multiple-choice item functions most effectively when a student is required to compare specific alternatives

In general, the stem should contain everything the alternatives have in common or as much as possible of their common content. This practice makes an item concise. Exceptions include alternatives containing units and alternatives stated as complete sentences.

Items should not have two or more correct alternatives. and  
are not acceptable alternatives

Distractors should be designed to reflect common errors or misconceptions of students.

Use similar terminology, phrasing or sentence structure in the alternatives. Alternatives must use consistent language, including verb tense, nouns, singular/plurals, and declarative statements. Place a period at the end of an alternative if the alternative by itself is a complete sentence.

The length, complexity and specificity of the alternatives should be similar. For example, if the stem refers to a process, then all the alternatives must be processes. Avoid the use of absolutes such as and in phrasing alternatives.

When the alternatives consist of numbers and letters, they should ordinarily be arranged in ascending or descending order. An exception would be when the number of an alternative and the value of that alternative are the same. For example: (1) 1 (2) 2 (3) 0 (4) 4.

Alternatives that are synonymous or overlap in meaning often assist the student in eliminating distractors.