

# Multiple Choice Questions

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### DESCRIPTION

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) are an assessment form that permits testing of a student's correct understanding of a potentially large range of topics. The questions consist of a question that can range from a bald statement ("What date was the battle of Hastings) through to a more complex scenario. Beneath the question the student is offered usually four answer options to choose from. Only one answer contains the correct answer to that question or scenario. The student can only be awarded the mark for the correct choice.

### Virtues

- Little or no marking for staff (some can be marked electronically)
- Enables a large and comprehensive syllabus to be included into a single paper
- Requires students to commit to learning a topic
- Can be combined with other assessment forms in the same exam, for example, short answer questions
- Requires student to develop revision methods that assist strong recall (as opposed to coursework)
- Can build confidence in students who feel they are building a concrete body of knowledge
- Can be practised online in mock tests with online answers offered as part of the feedback

- Can track success of a question (easy- hard-impossible)
- Can graduate marks across a paper, eg 10 easy, 10 difficult, 10 advanced
- Negative marking can incentivize precise learning.

### Drawbacks

- Spoilt papers if marked electronically
- Can encourage rote learning not understanding
- Requires an single objective answer to the scenario as opposed to many possibilities
- Correct answers can be guessed
- Can be challenging to frame a question that tests judgment and understanding (as opposed to just knowledge)
- Gives the marker no insight into the students deeper understanding of the topic
- Requires road-testing before used in summative exam to reveal any oversights or errors
- Large question bank needed
- Need to rotate questions so not appear in resit
- Plagiarism in exam hall easier than in many other settings
- Need to decide if implementing negative marking or adjusted marking for wrong answers
- Hard for risk averse students, who might overthink
- Negative marking system can lead to disproportionate fail/low pass rate if questions not nuanced.

## FURTHER READING

Gwinnett, C. and Cassella, J (2009) The trials and tribulations of designing and utilising MCQs in HE and for assessing forensic practitioner competency  
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/ndir.1.7p.pdf>