

# OAC Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2022

## HAPPY SPRING!

We invite you to read about what the Outcomes Advisory Council (OAC) and Waubensee faculty have been working on to improve student learning. As we continue to move forward in improving student learning, the OAC has had a dynamic and engaging year so far.

Highlights from fall 2021's and spring 2022's FDD include:

- Faculty meetings with OAC Liaisons to link outcomes data in AEFIS
- Faculty submitted their 2020 and 2021 Learning Improvement Reports and Plans
- Disaggregated Data Presentation
- Faculty Presentation on "Connecting the Dots"
- Reveal of the new [Quick-Guide Assessment Tool](#)



## WHAT'S INSIDE

Click a tile below to read the rest of the story...

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Many of us have experience with hand-me-downs: a coat from an older sibling that was a bit too big; a parent's old car that wasn't quite our style; the kitchen in our first house that was functional but didn't really fit our needs. Inherited items were hand-picked by the original user to suit their needs perfectly...

*Dr. Evan Thomas*

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Many people believe writing multiple-choice exam questions is easy. Some people have students submit questions, some randomly select questions from a publisher test bank, and some write new questions every semester. Alternatively, some treasure a good multiple-choice question for...

*Justin Hoshaw*

## WHAT'S COMING UP

- Many Dates** [Introduction to Quality Matters course offerings](#)
- February 17** [QM Research Online Conference: Active/Applied Research on Online Learning and Quality Assurance](#)
- February 18** [26th Annual Illinois Community College Assessment Fair: Focusing on the Future](#)
- March 17-19** [AAC&U New Orleans, LA](#)
- March 21** [Second term for ION Professional eLearning Programs start](#)
- April 1-5** [Higher Learning Commission \(HLC\) Chicago, IL](#)
- Save the Date**
- May 31-June 3** [NAFSA: Association of International Educators Denver, CO + Virtual](#)
- June 6-9** [Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education \(AALHE\) Providence RI](#)

## Inherited Course Learning Outcomes – Not quite the best fit?

[Dr. Evan Thomas](#)

Many of us have experience with hand-me-downs: a coat from an older sibling that was a bit too big; a parent's old car that wasn't quite our style; the kitchen in our first house that was functional but didn't really fit our needs. Inherited items were hand-picked by the original user to suit their needs perfectly, but that all went out the window as it was passed on to us.

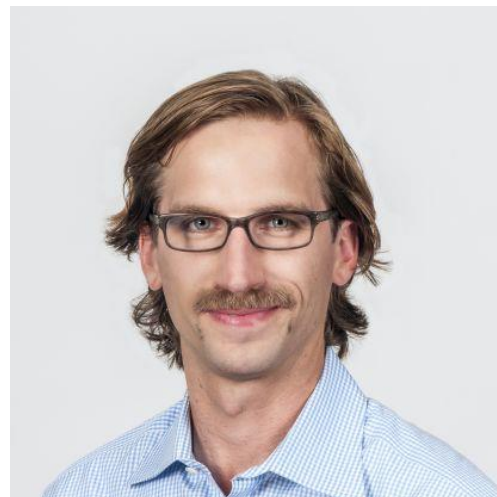
What do old things have to do with our Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)? Nothing, or everything, depending on how you choose to proceed. Unless you are a faculty member teaching a brand-new course that you designed, you likely "inherited" the course from a colleague. Depending on the timing of your hire, it is entirely possible and understandable that for the first semester you taught the course, you were more focused on content and assignments than you were on the CLOs that you inherited. Perhaps as you were planning your semester, you saw the CLOs and thought that they were not the "best" fit, but you either did not have time to change them, did not know the process to change them, or a little bit of both. If you have been teaching a course for a few semesters and have NOT looked at the CLOs – the time is now. If you have been teaching for a while and

have felt that the CLOs do not match the material you are teaching – the time to change them is NOW!

High quality CLOs allow us to set the goals for our courses, specify and select the appropriate Bloom's level for our courses, and can improve alignment between outcomes, assignments and assessments in our courses. Well-written CLOs are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

This article is NOT written as a tutorial on how to write effective outcomes, but to make sure you understand that you never have to be stuck with the "itchy, scratchy, too tight, won't start in the rain, no dishwasher" outcomes that you inherited – YOU can change them!

Detailed information about what makes outcomes effective can be found on the [WCC Faculty Development, Assessment website](#) with examples and many links to additional resources. When changing CLOs, please bear in mind that these changes will need to go through [Curriculum Council](#). There are also step-by-step guides to making changes to your courses, so please know that you are not alone when you decide to make changes to your Course Learning Outcomes!



[Dr. Evan Thomas](#),  
Assistant Professor of Biology  
Outcomes Faculty Liaison

### Not sure where to start with your assessment work this semester?

Check out the new [Quick Guide to Assessment at Waubonsee](#) tool.

Celebrate where you are now with assessment and quickly see how to move on to the next step.

See what fellow faculty are saying about the tool:

### EXCITED TO GET BACK INTO THE SWING?

Come join your fellow faculty in Outcomes Advisory Council.

We meet every other Tuesday from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm.

Future meeting dates include: 2-15-22, 3-1-22, 3-22-22, 4-5-22, and 4-19-22.

Don't miss the fun. We would love to see you there!

Just reach out to [ethomas@waubonsee.edu](mailto:ethomas@waubonsee.edu).

### Choo Choo – Jumping on the Rubrics Bandwagon

[Maya Tolappa](#)

Teachers love to teach; it is our passion. Grading, on the other hand, is not that riveting! It is tedious and repetitive. When grading assignments, I find myself providing the same feedback to students, submission after submission, class after class, semester after semester. This is especially true for me since I have a grading policy which does not award partial credit for imperfect work. They either receive 0 or 100%. Students can resubmit work as often as they wish to receive full credit.

This means that I grade a single assignment for one student multiple times. That is a lot of grading! Typically, I grade an assignment on 6 or 7 metrics. If any one of them is not met, the submission is awarded 0 points. Students tend to make the same types of mistakes, and I find myself writing out the same feedback comments again and again. I am not a good typist and my feedback comments frequently contain errors. Additionally, since I have so many assignments to grade (and re-grade), I only focus on what needs to be fixed without commenting on the aspects of the submissions that are correct.

In the past, I dabbled with the idea of rubrics but chose not to pursue the idea. I had attended sessions about rubrics and heard other instructors talk about them. Setting up rubrics seemed time consuming. Since I do not award partial credit, time spent creating them did not appear to provide any benefits. I, therefore,

concluded that rubrics were not relevant for my grading purposes.

However, all that changed when I had a meeting with Justin Hoshaw about a month ago where we discussed rubrics. We discussed my grading philosophy and the reasons I had avoided rubrics. He pointed out that using rubrics for grading allows one to gather data about errors made by students. This was a point that I had not considered before, and it was a real eye opener. Having the ability to gather statistics about student errors is very valuable. When teaching content, I can place emphasis on those areas where students make most of the mistakes and focus on how to avoid making them. Therefore, I started the time-consuming task of constructing rubrics for my assignments. I checked my text for errors and provided detailed explanations for each error.

Prior to using rubrics, I would write comments explaining why a specific metric was not met (leading to the submission being deemed unacceptable) without mention of the metrics that the submission had met. It occurred to me that my submission comments focused on errors, but never made mention of the metrics that they had met correctly in the submission. I was focusing on negative feedback instead of encouraging them with positive feedback.

Using a rubric lets me change this style of grading. Students will be able

### Before it's too late...

**Did you submit your Spring FDD assessment questions?**

**Have you linked your spring outcomes in Canvas to AEFIS?**

**We encourage you to reach out and set up an appointment with a liaison anytime this semester!**

to see the metrics they met, along with feedback on those they do not. It provides them with positive and negative feedback. They can understand the progress they have made and the effort needed to finalize their work. And, in keeping with my grading philosophy, Canvas allows me to override the points suggested by the rubric to 0.

At long last, I am going to join the rubrics bandwagon. I used them in one of my fall 2021 classes. I cannot wait to collect information from the rubric. It will help make me be a better teacher this semester and provide students with a better assignment experience. Thank you Justin!



[Maya Tolappa](#),

**Assistant Professor of Information Systems**

### Moving the Assessment Needle: Better Outcomes Assessment Begins With Better Connections to Adjunct Faculty

*Michelle Lindquist*

A college's institutional culture is perhaps one of the single most important factors in determining how effective it is at providing services to all demographic populations of people it serves. While we often spend an inordinate amount of time focusing on how best to meet our students' needs (and rightly so), we often forget that those core needs go hand-in-hand with underserved and underappreciated adjunct colleagues who teach alongside us at our own institutions.

While reading a report from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), I was struck by two key words I have bolded in the following excerpt, "institutions' interactions with part-time faculty result in a profound incongruity: Colleges depend on part-time faculty to educate more than half of their students, yet they do not fully embrace these faculty members. Because of this disconnect, contingency can have consequences that negatively affect student engagement and learning." Incongruity and disconnect are certainly not words we want to have in our relationships with students nor with any of our teaching colleagues at Waubonsee, and they are certainly not wanted when it comes to planning, implementing, or refining assessment practices. So, what can we do about this, and how do we best try to involve and engage our adjuncts in relevant and meaningful ways?

First, it starts with positively acknowledging the huge role adjuncts play at our institution, and the wealth of knowledge and skills they bring to the table regardless if they are brand

new teachers or seasoned veterans. This quote in the CCSSE report by Roueche, Roueche, & Milleron is absolutely relevant to the aforementioned point, "Part-time faculty are sleeping giants; their sheer numbers and their impact on college instruction cannot and should not be ignored." If a department hopes to have any modicum of effective curriculum assessment, involving adjunct faculty in the discussion, planning, and implementation stages should be an understood necessity. For some larger departments or programs, this may be quite the challenge, but any challenge can be met with creative thinking and purposeful out-of-the-box action planning.

In Waubonsee's Academic Support Division, we have been working with our adjuncts closely for many years when presented with opportunities to do so. Developmental education is the perfect place for many adjuncts to begin their careers, but it is also the perfect place to form close and respectful partnerships between faculty, as my full-time teaching colleague in developmental math, Melissa Morgan, reminded me of in one of our recent Outcomes Advisory Council (OAC) meetings. Case and point, before coming to Waubonsee, I was an adjunct faculty member in the English Department at Rock Valley College, in Rockford, Illinois, for over ten years. I began my teaching career there as an English lab instructor before I moved on to teaching transfer-level English 101 and 102 courses. I worked alongside several full-time developmental English professors, sometimes co-teaching with two or

three of them in the same semester. Obviously, relationship building was a must in a context such as this. I only mention this because these early relationships influenced me to want to "pay it forward" myself with future adjuncts when I became a full-time developmental English professor at Waubonsee.

I remember those early feelings of incongruity and disconnectedness in my first year at RVC, but once those faculty partnerships formed and solidified over time, I felt a lot more confident and a lot more valued for my ideas and suggestions. I started going to more meetings and becoming more involved and finding myself at the center of curriculum planning in ways I never thought would benefit me. Even though I was officially mentored by a full-time humanities professor outside of the Developmental English Department, who was certainly helpful and insightful, I feel as though I learned most of my current pedagogical approaches from the frontline troops of developmental educators I worked with on a daily basis. I am a much better teacher today because of that solid, wraparound foundation they helped me to build – without their informal mentoring, I am not sure I would be who I am or where I am today as a teacher. I think that says a lot about how important it is to create and foster positive relationships between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty in departments and across all divisions.

Although I cannot speak directly to the experiences of my other full-time developmental colleagues, I can say



that my current assessment work and partnership with Bret P., for example, an English adjunct and colleague at Waubensee, has been very useful and integral to my own learning and teaching processes. I met Bret about five years ago at one of our faculty development days, and since then we have regularly worked closely together in a number of ways including planning courses, choosing textbooks, developing specific reading and writing activities, and coming up with assessment practices that best benefit developmental student rigor and performance. In fact, Bret and I developed a short, critical reading and writing assignment with an assessment component that we both use regularly in our ENG 085 classes. We have met many times, unofficially and informally, to talk about how we think our students do with this particular assignment, as well as to go over common issues and ways to address learning discrepancies in our students' capabilities to move forward into transfer-level English courses. From this direct and purposeful work with Bret, I have been able to put together other forms of assessment-related resources that have helped with rubric creation and larger grade norming sessions just to name a few. Bret and I do this work together because we are friends and teaching colleagues, and because we know that when we work together and plan together, we increase the ability to reach our students even more effectively than as isolated islands or individual silos of knowledge. (Although Waubensee is working on adjunct pay structures to include faculty in assessment work during faculty development days and during the semester, Bret has worked with me without pay, and I want to provide an acknowledgement and a complement of his direct motivation to want to be involved and make a difference. He reminds me a lot of me

when I was in his same position many years ago.)

Another approach I find that is really integral to developing partnerships with teaching adjuncts is to meet them where they are, just like what we attempt to do with our students. Go to where they gather, and listen to their perspectives. Be willing to also hear some criticism yourself, because that is a part of this learning curve too. None of us can become better teachers without some constructive criticism informing our processes, especially with assessment. It is not just about us imparting our own ideas and philosophies, it is also about reciprocity and adjustment when it is most warranted and needed. Shifting the lens to an adjunct's viewpoint makes us more efficient with seeing our own blind spots, and full-time instructors are often infamous deniers that they have any issues with this. Sometimes a simple conversation with an adjunct over a mundane concept can reveal this discrepancy, and having the humility to accept it and adjust it is often the first step that addresses the incongruity issue mentioned earlier. As our Waubensee vision statement clearly reminds us, it is important that we remember to "welcome the diverse abilities, goals, and experiences of individuals standing on the threshold of discovery," which also includes the viewpoints and understandings of our adjunct colleagues.

Recently, we have become better at offering monetary support to adjuncts who wish to become more involved in our day-to-day teaching and assessment processes at Waubensee. However, much more can still be done, especially with the help and generosity of all full-time colleagues. Every department and its members should strive to include their adjuncts in faculty develop-related assessment activities, inform and provide them

ample opportunities for professional development (like enrolling in ACUE, or registering for conferences), familiarize them with academic support related to discipline-specific learning (tutoring and library resources), and ensure that partnerships and connections are being formed regardless of whether or not formal mentorship roles exist. It starts mainly with faculty-to-faculty communication, because a lot of adjuncts don't know their full-time teaching colleagues, which is also true vice-versa. Include them in on as many teaching conversations as you can throughout each semester; invite them to larger correspondences, meetings, or committee gatherings with other colleagues from multiple divisions; include them as observers or participants on your Canvas course shells; send them "I'd like to get to know you better" emails; ask to be invited and participate in adjunct-specific meetings with the assistant deans, even though they can sometimes be at inconvenient times. Learn about who they are and what they have to offer, because you might be surprised at how valuable their backgrounds and experiences are in moving the assessment needle in the right direction.



*Michelle Lindquist,*  
Associate Professor of English  
Developmental Education

# HOT OFF THE PRESS

## Getting the Most out of Canvas' Quiz Data

[Eamon Newman](#)

Did you know Canvas collects a ton of information about student performance beyond just the score that appears in the gradebook?

But what does 'a ton' mean in this context? In most quizzes, about 20 different data points are captured for each question, for each student. Depending on the size of the quiz and the class, you might have *a ton* of data at your disposal! But with all of that information being captured, how do we access it, and what can we even do with it?

Some of the more common uses might include identifying what quiz questions are working well, finding gaps in student learning, pinpointing problems if too many students are getting the wrong answer on a question, and even narrowing down which wrong answers students are choosing.

The quickest way to the quiz data can be found by navigating to a quiz and clicking the 'Quiz Statistics' link:

### Related Items

[Quiz Statistics](#)

[Moderate This Quiz](#)

[SpeedGrader™](#)

Here, you should be presented with an option to filter by section (if applicable), run a 'Student Analysis' or an 'Item Analysis'.

'Student Analysis' will give you a quick overview of student attempts, answer choices, and results in a .csv file. 'Item Analysis' will give you a .csv file containing the raw data for all the questions. In most cases, opening the .csv files in Excel, Google Sheets, LibreOffice Calc, etc. will provide the quickest way to decipher and display the data. If you are already familiar with using Power Query or similar data shaping tools, this is probably great, but Canvas also automatically generates a visually appealing and easy to navigate report using the wealth of data that is collected.

In the summary section of the report, Canvas provides the following:

- Average Score ( $\mu$ )
- High Score



- Low Score 😞
- Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )
- Average Time (time to completion)

Canvas also calculates detailed information for each quiz item. The type of information will vary slightly depending on question type. For multiple-choice questions, students are grouped into categories based on their choices and performance for that question:

|           |               |      |                                 |   |                        |
|-----------|---------------|------|---------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Steve     | 9 respondents | 64 % | <div style="width: 64%;"></div> | ✓ | 64% answered correctly |
| Alex      |               | 0 %  | <div style="width: 0%;"></div>  |   |                        |
| Tim       | 1 respondent  | 7 %  | <div style="width: 7%;"></div>  |   |                        |
| Markus    | 3 respondents | 21 % | <div style="width: 21%;"></div> |   |                        |
| No Answer | 1 respondent  | 7 %  | <div style="width: 7%;"></div>  |   |                        |
|           |               |      |                                 |   |                        |

A discrimination index is also generated for each question which provides an approximate measure of how well each question can tell the difference between students who do well and students who do not. If the discrimination index is very low for a particular question, it means a large number of students who did well overall, missed that question:

**+0.15**

Discrimination Index ?

The discrimination index is a great resource for the multiple-choice questions, but other question types like essays and file uploads require manual grading. For those, a unique table is generated for each question

separating students into the top 27%, middle 46%, and bottom 27%:

Answers which scored in the top 27%

Answers which scored in the middle 46%

Answers which scored in the bottom 27%

View in SpeedGrader

And finally, Canvas provides an action report for each student. This can be accessed by choosing the 'Show Student Quiz Results' option for a given quiz:

The screenshot shows a quiz management interface with a 'Published' status and buttons for 'Preview', 'Edit', and a dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is open, showing options like 'Show Rubric', 'Preview', 'Lock this Quiz Now', 'Show Student Quiz Results (14 students submitted so far)', 'Message Students Who...', 'Delete', 'Send To...', 'Copy To...', and 'Share to Commons'. The 'Show Student Quiz Results' option is highlighted in red.

After selecting a student, their action report for that quiz can be accessed by clicking the 'View Log' link:

## View Log

On the log screen, the data on the stream shows what actions students took and when. Each action is timestamped and listed sequentially. The most recent attempt is displayed, but data from previous attempts (if applicable) is still available:

## Session Information

Started at Fri Jun 02 2017 13:45:11 GMT-0600 (MDT)

Attempt **1** 2

## Action Log

- 00:02 ○ Session started
- 00:14 ○ Answered the following questions: #4 #5 #6 #7
- 00:17 ○ Viewed (and possibly read) question #1
- 00:17 ○ Viewed (and possibly read) the following questions: #2 #3 #4
- 00:17 ⊗ Stopped viewing the Canvas quiz-taking page...
- 00:17 ✔ Resumed.
- 00:20 ○ Answered question: #3
- 00:32 ○ Viewed (and possibly read) the following questions: #5 #6

This type of information can be great for determining exactly where students are spending their time and may be struggling on quizzes. Combined with the discrimination index, you can really learn a ton about your quiz questions! If you would like to learn more, Instructure provides some additional explanations on their Canvas Community pages for [quiz logs](#) and [quiz statistics](#).



[Eamon Newman](#),

Assistant Dean for Online Learning and Flexible Delivery

Check out our website!

Everything you need to know can be found a click away!

From tips and tricks to professional development resources and how-to guides, we've got you covered.

Visit our [Assessment Website](#) today!

## A Resource for Writing Good Multiple-Choice Exam Questions

*Justin Hoshaw*

Many people believe writing multiple-choice exam questions is easy. Some people have students submit questions, some randomly select questions from a publisher test bank, and some write new questions every semester. Alternatively, some treasure a good multiple-choice question for all of the many pitfalls that can become exam questions and since they understand the challenges, they fiercely protect their questions. I'm betting it's been awhile since you last reviewed recommendations for writing (or selecting) good multiple-choice exam questions. Since there isn't a graduate class on writing good exams and I haven't yet come across a professional development class on designing exams, I thought I would share some ideas with you here.

I would never refer to myself as a good test taker and perhaps that's why I think and reflect on this topic so much. I want to ensure I am doing everything I can to help my students succeed on their exams. After all, I know they aren't easy exams. I think it's important for my students to understand that there is always only one clearly best answer. My goal is not to trick students or require them to make difficult judgments about two options that are nearly equally correct. My goal is to design questions that students who understand the course outcomes will answer correctly and students who do not understand the course concepts will answer incorrectly. That said, I often gain new ideas and perspectives on what good multiple-choice exam questions look like. In

the wake of SAT and ACT scores being debated in higher education, it is a good time to reflect on this topic. Also, while I love talking about rubrics (perhaps you've experienced this), I've been hoping to talk about multiple-choice exam questions for years.

To ensure we are speaking the same language, multiple choice questions are composed of one question (stem) with multiple possible answers (choices), including the correct answer and several incorrect answers (distractors).

### General Considerations

1. A little humor can go a long way. A little humor or even just placing less difficult items or tasks at the beginning of an exam can help students with test anxiety to reduce their preliminary tension and thus provide a more accurate demonstration of their progress.
2. Focus on what matters. Students can get frustrated after spending hours studying material that wasn't on the exam. Communicating to students that exams will consist of course outcomes that were reinforced with topics from lecture, ideas from discussion, graphics from the textbook, and examples from class activities will go a long way in helping students feel that their time is valued and worth the investment. This can be further broken down into two considerations.
  - a. Teaching in a content heavy course results in hundreds of questions that I could ask students about for every chapter.

While there are a multitude of questions I could ask, I focus exam questions on my learning objectives. These objectives reinforce the course outcomes and help me avoid asking about unnecessary details or facts that students won't be likely to use down the road.

- b. I spend a decent amount of time in lecture addressing content misconceptions and for a long time I reinforced those issues on exams. Students continued to struggle with these questions no matter how much we discussed them and regardless of the class activity that I used. Then one semester I reviewed several misconception exam questions prior to the exam and students still significantly struggled with the questions. I still address these misconceptions in class, but I no longer include these types of questions on my exams. A few weeks of hearing one thing is just not realistic to expect that to replace twenty plus years of hearing something else, especially combined with exam anxiety.

### Reviewing the Stem

3. State the stem as a direct question rather than an incomplete statement. The stem should be meaningful by itself. Avoid stems such as "which of the following is a true statement?" If you don't give a darn, then at least have the blank at the end of the stem and not at the beginning or middle, but don't say I didn't warn you.
4. Avoid using negative terms in the



stem. Questions that include phrases like “which of the following are NOT” or “which of the following is FALSE” will often confuse students that actually know the material. Capitalizing the first letter or the word may help some students, but it is still not ideal.

5. The stem must be clear and unambiguous. Any vague terms, like normally, usually, possibly, may, should be avoided.

6. Eliminate unnecessary information or excessive verbiage in the stem. A long or wordy stem may end up testing students’ reading ability and not the intended concepts. Many students also find this overwhelming and start to disengage. Use simple, precise, and unambiguous wording. Avoid repetitive phrases by including in the stem any words that are repeated in every choice.

### Evaluating the Choices

7. Evaluate question format.

- a. Avoid making your correct answer the longest or shortest answer.
- b. Balance the placement of the correct answer. This can be done by simply tallying the answers up (and adjusting what’s necessary) or having a computer program scramble the answer choices.
- c. Use at least four choices to reduce the impact of guessing, but no more than six. For more information on avoiding multiple-guess questions, refer to page 11 on Ben Clay’s [Is This a Trick Question](#) resource.

8. Create questions with one correct answer. Choices should be mutually exclusive and not overlapping.

- a. Avoid the use of “all of the above.” If you do use this question type, do not make this option the correct choice all of the time, as many students have

been trained to always pick this option. This also undermines the learning since students merely need to recognize two correct options to get the answer correct.

b. Avoid the use of “none of the above.” You will never know if students know the correct answer.

c. As many exams have gone electronic and change the order of choices for different test takers, using “all of the above” may not actually have options above that choice. Although some recommend simply listing out the relevant alternative options to avoid this issue, many students are confused by the resulting wordiness. My recommendation is for all of the choices to be mutually exclusive. Avoid overlapping choices by using the answer with all or some of the correct statements and replacing the overlapping choices with distinct distractors.

9. Be grammatically correct.

Students may be more likely to select the correct answer by finding the grammatically correct option.

10. Avoid clues to the correct answer.

- a. Avoid answering one question in the test by giving the answer somewhere else in the test.
- b. Have the test reviewed by someone who can find mistakes, clues, grammar, and punctuation problems before you administer the exam to students.
- c. Avoid using extremes like never, always, and only.
- d. Avoid nonsense words and unreasonable statements. All alternatives should be plausible. Long gone are the days for college exam questions to contain obviously wrong distractors (remember, I said a little humor was okay, but just a little). The

purpose of distractors is to assess which students have achieved the learning. Implausible alternatives do not accomplish that goal.

### Emphasize Higher-Level Thinking

11. Use memory-plus application questions. I often hear people talk about how multiple choice questions are only for assessing lower level Bloom’s learning, but that doesn’t need to be the case nor is it always the case. Memory-plus application questions require students to recall principles, rules, or facts in a real life context. The key to preparing memory-plus application questions is to place the concept in a life situation or context that requires the student to first recall the facts and then apply or transfer the application of those facts into a situation. If you are new to this type of question, it may be helpful to seek support from others who have experience writing higher-level thinking multiple-choice questions.

12. In constructing multiple choice items to test higher order thinking, it can also be helpful to design problems that require multi-logical thinking, where multi-logical thinking is defined as “thinking that requires knowledge of more than one fact to logically and systematically apply concepts to a ...problem” ([Morrison and Free, 2001, page 20](#)).

While higher-level thinking questions can be great, it can also be a reason students struggle with a particular question. Upon reflection, perhaps it is okay more students struggle, perhaps the class needs more coaching for this type of question, or perhaps the class would be better served by not utilizing a higher-level thinking question.

As an advocate for good multiple-choice exam questions, I also believe

it is important to recognize that they have their limits. I am envious of faculty that have moved away from multiple-choice exams, and I look forward to the day when I can join their ranks (after all, I was never a good test taker). Perhaps your time is limited for grading or designing new exams, you don't know where to start with project-based exams, you are leery of group projects, or you have previously dealt with student complaints about your constructive feedback. Whatever the hesitation may be, I do recommend that you explore alternatives to multiple-choice questions when other item types are more appropriate (like

when assessing questions with limited distractors or assessing problem-solving and creativity).

**Resources:**

[14 Rules for Writing Multiple-Choice Questions](#)

[Writing Effective Test Questions](#)

[Is This a Trick Question?](#)

[Writing Good Multiple-Choice Test Questions](#)

[Writing Multiple-Choice Test Items That Promote and Measure Critical Thinking](#)



*Justin Hoshaw,*  
Associate Professor of Biology  
Outcomes Faculty Liaison



**A ROUND OF APPLAUSE GO OUT TO:**

- Drea Brus, Assistant Professor of Health Information Technology
- Jon Nichols, Assistant Professor of English
- Maya Tolappa, Assistant Professor of Information Systems

Thank you all for sharing your assessment stories with us at spring Faculty Development Days

**Questions? Reach out to:**

- Justin Hoshaw, Associate Professor of Biology and Outcomes Faculty Liaison
- Dr. Evan Thomas, Assistant Professor of Biology and Outcomes Faculty Liaison
- Dr. Kathleen Gorski, Dean for Learning Outcomes, Curriculum and Program Development

**Special Thanks to our 2020-2021 Outcomes Advisory Council for all of their commitment to improving learning for our students.**

Spencer Brayton | Michelle Lindquist | Melissa Morgan  
Justin Kline | Drea Brus | Tracy Limbrunner | Dr. Marjie Schoolfield  
Mike Moran | Sharon Garcia | Jon Nichols | Sarah Quirk  
Steve Kifowit | Lorrie Stahl | Elier Iseli | Heather LaCost  
Dr. Sara Gregory | Dr. Hoitung Leung  
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The OAC Newsletter is a publication of Waubonsee Community College for its staff and faculty members. Have an idea for a story? Contact Dr. Evan Thomas, [ethomas@waubonsee.edu](mailto:ethomas@waubonsee.edu). Deadline for the next issue of the OAC Newsletter is April 1<sup>st</sup>.



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