Guidelines for Writing Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice questions should be “single best answer” (also known as “A-type”), that help the reader to test their knowledge.

The questions may address issues of etiology, clinical presentation, differential diagnosis, diagnostic testing, natural history of disease, risk factors, management/treatment, potential complications, patient disposition, or other subjects pertinent to pre-hospital and hospital-based emergency medicine healthcare providers. For each question, you should indicate a single correct answer and provide a brief discussion of the correct answer (less than 100 words).

Elements of a multiple-choice question
- **Stem** - presents the clinical problem and question
- **Options** - provide one correct answer and four distractors (incorrect answer options). Options should be labeled A-E, and the correct answer could be any of the five letter options.
- **Rationale** – explains why the correct answer is correct, and why incorrect answers are incorrect

A Closer look
- **Stem**
  - Construct questions that present a clear problem and elicit a positive response, such as “What is the most appropriate initial treatment?” Ensure that questions end in a question mark, to clarify what you are asking.
  - Do not construct questions around exceptions and least likely diagnoses. For example, avoid: “You would expect all of the following to be elevated in the plasma of this 72-year-old female patient except...” Avoid negative constructions, such as “Which of the following statements is incorrect?”
- **Options and distractors**
  - Provide only one correct answer and a brief discussion of the correct answer (less than 100 words).
  - Distractors should be plausible and realistic, but the correct answer should be the best choice for the clinical problem presented.
  - The correct answer and the distractors should be similar in length and phrasing: the correct answer should not stand out from incorrect answers.
  - Do not include multiple answer options such as “All of the above” or “C and D.” Do not use “None of the above.”
- **Rationale**
  - Providing a rationale enables questions to be used as a learning tool. Please explain why the distractors are incorrect, as well as why the correct option is correct. Explanations should be thorough, but no longer than 100 words.