

Measure What Matters. Evidence-Informed Tactics for
Better and More Relevant Multiple-Choice Questions

Write Better
**MULTIPLE-CHOICE
QUESTIONS**
To Assess
LEARNING



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Sharon's Introduction

The reality TV show *The Great British Baking Show* is wildly popular. It's essentially a performance assessment for master bakers. The intrigue centers on a group of people who prove their skills via a series of challenges. The challenges are a comprehensive assessment of contestants' technical, creative, and time management skills. If you make it to the finals on *The Great British Baking Show*, you KNOW you are a stellar baker. So do all the viewers and other bakers who are part of the show. Your ability to produce one delectable baked good after another is ample evidence of your master baker status.

After I read Patti Shank's wonderful new book, I thought about *The Great British Baking Show* and its huge fan base. Clearly, many of us enjoy seeing people challenged to demonstrate competence. We also value assessments as consumers. We want evidence of competence in the form of certifications or licensing (accountants, lawyers, physicians, teachers, fitness trainers, therapists, and more.) We want evidence of quality and competent operations when we select restaurants, lawn services, hair stylists, hotels, or cars. Star ratings, coupled with reviewers' feedback, help us feel confidence in the competence of the people providing the experiences we buy.

The right assessments similarly:

- Help learners verify they understand what's being taught as they complete a course.
- Help course developers verify that learners learn what the developer intends them to learn.
- Help assess learner competence and ability to apply knowledge or perform a skill after they complete a course.
- Let people reflect on their own learning, which helps them retain the learning.

In short, well-crafted assessments provide evidence that someone does or doesn't know something or can or cannot do something. And that evidence indicates whether a company has generated a good return on its investment in a training or education solution.

Conversely, badly designed and poorly constructed assessments waste time and money. Joining them in the money-wasting department are courses that dump content on learners without any in-course or post-course assessment. High-quality assessment helps us measure what matters.

Patti Shank comes to the rescue with this book. I've been a Patti Shank fan for a long time as she delivers consistently practical advice on how to apply learning science research in the practice of creating learning. She does exactly that with this book—delivering clear, research-based explanations and practical step-by-step guidance.

The book does two things. First, it provides an overall primer on assessments and the terminology you need to understand, such as validity and reliability. Second, it gives readers a practical “how-to” guide to create the most common assessment item: multiple-choice questions.

Patti guides us in how to avoid common mistakes of poor assessment design and poor multiple-choice item construction. Her explanations, examples, and exercises work together to build readers' knowledge and skill. In other words, Patti tells AND shows. This blend of explanation, example, and practice makes the book valuable for both novice content developers and seasoned L&D professionals. Why? Because few of us, unless we are trained psychometricians, have expertise crafting quality assessments.

In education and training, organizations waste a ton of money creating content called “training” or “courses” that don't end up teaching anyone anything. If organizations are going to spend money developing training, those same organizations should care about assessing whether people acquired knowledge or skills from that training.

Patti's book provides the roadmap to how to accomplish this goal in a realistic way. Best of all, from my perspective, it's a book I can return to again and again for “just-in-time” guidance to help me design and write good assessments or help me coach clients who edit or rewrite well-crafted assessment items and make them...well...NOT well crafted.

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