Figure 6.3	Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple-Choice Items	
	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
	Allows for assessment of a wide range of learning objectives, from factual to evaluative understanding	Quality items are difficult and time-consuming to develop
	Analyzing patterns of incorrect responses may provide diagnostic information	Tendency for items to focus on low-level learning objectives
	Permits wide sampling and broad coverage of content domain due to students' ability to respond to many items	Assessment results may be biased by students' reading ability and test savvy
	Allows the comparison and evaluation of related ideas, concepts, or theories	May overestimate learning due to the ability to utilize an elimination process for answer selection
	Permits manipulation of difficulty level by adjusting the degree of similarity among response options	Does not measure the ability to organize and express ideas
	Amenable to item analysis	Generally does not provide effective feedback to correct errors in understanding
	Objective nature limits bias in scoring	
	Easily administered to large numbers of students	
	Efficient to score either manually or via automatic means	
	Limits assessment bias caused by poor writing skills	
	Less influenced by guessing than true–false items	

Adapted from *Effective multiple-choice items,* by B. J. Mandernach, 2003c. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/multiple.html

Multiple-choice items consist of two parts: a stem and a number of response options. In other words, the multiple-choice item presents a problem and a list of possible solutions. Both of these parts are important to the creation of a good test item.

The stem. The stem establishes a problem in the mind of the test taker. Therefore, it is important that the stem itself is not ambiguous, resulting in a test taker needlessly led astray by semantics. Consider the two stems in Figure 6.4. You'll see that the stem significantly influences students' understanding of the task at hand.

We were reminded of this while proctoring a middle school math exam. Luis, an English language learner classified as a "beginner," read the instructions that said, "Find *x*." He raised his hand to get our attention. He pointed to his paper where the letter *x* was circled and asked, "Like this?"

Stems may be written as either direct questions or incomplete statements. An example of a direct question format looks like this: