

Item Writing Guidelines Refresher

Goal: *Accept and approve quality multiple choice items that effectively discriminate between candidates who should be awarded the credential and candidates who should not.*

Effective items are those that:

- ★ target only the knowledge as described in the content outline.
- ★ are fair for candidates just meeting the eligibility requirements.
- ★ adhere to the item writing guidelines to reduce the likelihood of unqualified candidates guessing the correct answer.

General Guidelines

- Why should a candidate know this? How will knowing this make job performance more effective?
- Is this item relevant to practice (current, best practice)?
- Is this topic appropriate for the candidate population? Is this based on generalized or specialized knowledge?
- Is this item free from bias and stereotyping?
 - Does the item contain content or language unfamiliar to some candidates?
 - Will members of one candidate group get the item correct or incorrect for the wrong reason?
 - Are there clues included in the item that would facilitate performance of one group over another?
 - Is the item free from using stereotypes? Would this item “turn-off” or offend a candidate resulting in lower performance? If item references age, gender, ethnicity, etc., is it absolutely imperative to the question?

Stem

- Presents the complete premise? Is clear and concise with a single focus?
 - Candidate can understand what the item is addressing without reading through options?
- Based on important learning objectives and not trivial information?
- Stated positively and in the third person?
- Supports goal of testing information and not teaching information?
- Correct answer not likely to change over time?
- Uses “should” instead of “would”?

Answer Choices

- Follows grammatically from stem?
- Uniform in structure, content, level of detail?
- Avoids absolute terms *always, never, all, none*?
- Does not include all/none of the above?
- Does not include answer choices with the same word/phrase that should appear in stem?
- Mutually exclusive of each other?

Key

- The one and only one correct or best answer?
- Unquestionably correct?
- Does not stand out from the page?
- Does not use a word that appears in the stem unless also appearing in distractors?
- Is documented in a current, acceptable resource?

Distractors

- Absolutely incorrect but plausible?
- Written at the same level of detail as the key?
- Not humorous?