

MULTIPLE CHOICE ITEM WRITING GUIDELINES

General item-writing (procedure)

1. Use either the best answer or the correct answer format.
2. Avoid the complex multiple-choice format.
3. Format the item vertically, not horizontally.
4. Allow time for editing and revising items.
5. Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
6. Minimize examinee reading time in phrasing each item.
7. Avoid trick items that mislead or deceive examinees into answering incorrectly.

Stem development

1. State the stem in either question form or completion form.
2. When using the completion format, don't leave a blank for completion in the beginning or middle of the stem.
3. Ensure that the directions in the stem are clear, and that wording lets the examinee know exactly what is being asked.
4. Include only the material needed to make the problem clear. Don't add extraneous information.
5. Word the stem positively; avoid negative phrasing. If an item must be stated negatively, underline or capitalize the negative word.
6. Include the central idea and most of the phrasing in the stem.

General item-writing (content)

1. Base each item on a clearly stated objective or valid skill standard.
2. Focus on a single problem.
3. Keep the vocabulary as simple as possible.
4. Avoid cuing one item with another; keep items independent of one another.
5. Avoid over specific knowledge when developing the item.
6. Avoid textbook, verbatim phrasing when developing the item.
7. Avoid items based on opinions.
8. Develop items that measure higher level thinking.
9. Base items on important aspects of the content area; avoid trivial material.
10. Avoid potentially insensitive content or language.

General option development

1. Include four options.
2. Place options in a logical order, if one exists (e.g., numerical, alphabetical).
3. Keep options independent; options should not be overlapping.
4. Keep all options in an item homogeneous in content.
5. Keep the length of options fairly consistent.
6. Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase "all of the above."
7. Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase "none of the above."
8. Avoid the use of the phrase "I don't know."
9. Phrase options positively, not negatively.
10. Avoid distractors that can clue test-wise examinees; for example, avoid clang associations, absurd options, formal prompts, or semantic (overly specific or overly general) clues.
11. Avoid giving clues through the use of faulty grammatical construction. (Grammatical inconsistencies involving "a," or "an," for example, give clues to the correct answer.)
12. Avoid specific determiners, such as "never" and "always."

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Correct option development

1. Position the correct option so that it appears about the same number of times in each possible position for a set of items.
2. Make sure there is one and only one correct, or clearly best, answer on which experts would agree.

Distractor development

1. Use plausible distractors; avoid illogical distractors.
2. Incorporate common errors of students in distractors.
3. Use familiar yet incorrect phrases as distractors.
4. Use true statements that do not correctly answer the item.
5. Avoid the use of humor when developing options.



MULTIPLE CHOICE – SCENARIO ITEM WRITING GUIDELINES

Situation

1. Provide directions to the student.
2. Provide sufficient information to adequately describe the situation.
3. Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
4. Base situations on realistic job-related activities.
5. Link each situation to one or more skills/tasks/competencies.

Associated Multiple-Choice Items

1. Include 3 - 8 multiple choice items with each scenario.
2. Follow the “Multiple Choice Item Writing Guidelines”.
3. Make sure that each item is linked to the situation.
4. Organize the items in a logical sequence.