

Test Item Guidance

Multiple Choice

In General

- The language and reading level is as simple as possible.
- The “all or none” rule is followed.
- Avoid KLANGS (an alliterative association which provides a clue to the correct answer).
- The item measures important content, not trivia.
- The content is up to date and accurate.
- Absolutes are avoided.
- Bias and stereotyping are avoided.
- The item measures the Qualification Standard to which it is documented.
- All items are independent.
- On item does not provide the answer to or clues to the answer for another item.
- There are no trick questions.
- If material is controversial, a theory or authority is cited.
- Items are not a series of true-false items.
- There is no clear-cut pattern of correct responses.
- Do not write items which measure the same information in several different ways.
- Avoid writing items which are mirror images of one another.

The stem

- Forms a complete thought or question.
- Provides as much information as possible, reducing redundant reading in the options.
- Avoids negatives, double negatives, and “excepts.”
- Avoids grammatical clues.
- Avoids teaching.
- Does not containing unnecessary information.
- Provides blanks near the end of the sentence.
- Does not ask for an opinion.
- Uses novel material when measuring higher level cognitive skills.

The options

- Do not contain “hang-ons.”
- Do not contain “a sore thumb.”
- Are grammatically parallel.
- Are parallel in concept.
- Are parallel in tense.
- Are parallel in technology or difficulty.
- Are parallel in length.
- Answer the question posed by the stem.
- Flow logically from the stem.
- Are arranged in a logical order.
- Do not contain one pair of opposites.
- Are in vertical format.
- Do not allow numerical overlap.

Test Item Guidance

The correct answer

- Is the one, and only one, correct answer.
- The distracters are attractive to unprepared students.

Matching Items

The directions

- Should state clearly how the matching should be done.
- Should state explicitly if items may be used more than once.

The lists

- Should be homogeneous.
- Should be short -- ten items or less per list.
- Should NOT be of the same length. The response list is usually longer.
- Should be arranged in a logical order, if one exists.
- Contain plausible distracters for each description.
- Should provide longer phrases in the description list, while the options should consist of short phrases, words, or symbols.
- Should provide numbers for each description in the description list and the list of options should be identified by a letter.

Short Answer Items

In general

- Word the item so that it is unambiguous and is as precise as possible.
- Do not use exact quotations from a textbook.

The directions

- Provide specific directions for the student.

If blanks are used, they

- Are standard in length to avoid giving clues as to the length of the correct answer.
- Should avoid "Swiss cheese items."
- Are placed near the end of the statement, if possible.

Scoring

- Prepare an answer key for each item.

Essay Items

In general

- Keep the objective you wish to measure clearly in mind before you begin to write the item.
- Ask a colleague to respond to the item, if possible. If the colleague cannot respond in a manner you think acceptable, the students will not be able to respond in that manner either.
- Don't make the item too comprehensive. It is preferable to develop several more specific items rather than one broad item. This makes the item easier for the student to respond to and also makes scoring easier.

Test Item Guidance

- Avoid “double barrel” items.

The stem

- States a specific question that measures the objective. The question should be clear and unambiguous. Questions may start with verbs such as describe, explain, compare, analyze, interpret, etc.
- Should elicit the type of response you want from the student.

Directions

- Provide clear and specific instructions to the student. This includes the length and specificity expected in the answer.

Scoring

- Include scoring criteria in the instruction to the student.
- Indicate to the student (and scorer) whether spelling, grammar, sentence structure, neatness, and organization count in the score.
- A model answer to the item is provided for scorers. This will help you decide if the item is clear enough, how many points each part of the essay will be worth, and the length expected. It also makes scoring easier and faster.