

Job Aid

Developing Short-Answer Test Items¹

As with all test item formats, more consistent results are attainable if certain guidelines and rules are followed when the test items are developed. Keep the following in mind when constructing short-answer test items that require a response ranging from one word to a few sentences:

- Provide clear, explicit directions.
- Avoid excessive wording or information.
- Ensure the answer key matches the test item.
- Avoid giving away the answer.
- Avoid trick test items.
- Use the question form if possible.
- Word each test item in specific terms with clear meanings so the intended answer is the only one possible, and so the answer is a single word, brief phrase, or number.
- Avoid copying statements word for word from texts or classroom materials.
- State the precision, numerical units, or degree of accuracy expected of the answer.
- Word the test item to avoid irrelevant clues or specific determiners.
- Use some fill-the-blank test items.
- Because the passing score is 80%, try to have 10 items (or 5 test items with two-part/item-answers) to aid in tallying the test score.

The test item directions should provide clear, explicit directions for answering the test item so that the trainee understands what constitutes a fully correct response. Choose words carefully to ensure that the conditions and requirements of the test item are appropriately conveyed. Words such as "evaluate," "outline," and "explain," can invite lots of detail that is not necessarily relevant.

The test item developer should avoid excessive wording or information in the test item. In an attempt to make a test item operationally oriented and/or meaningful, there is a tendency to add more information than required for a correct response.

Prepare an answer key.

Check each test item and answer by asking a colleague to take the test. Revise the test item and answer as needed.

¹ From DOE-HDBK-1204-97, *DOE Handbook – Guide to Good Practices for the Development of Test Items*