



Anatomy of a Test Question

Stem or Lead Line - introductory statement or question that elicits the correct answer.

Responses or Options - 1 correct “answer” plus 3 incorrect “distractors”. Always list the correct answer first.

Rationale - Brief statement explaining the testing point.

References - Author, Title, Publisher, year, page

Follow a specific question writing plan

- Survey the general content domain of your writing assignment.
- List or select specific content areas within the domain.
- Highlight the most important areas, such as those in which practice has changed.
- Identify and write out the exact testing point.
- Select the cognitive ability to be tested - knowledge, synthesis, judgment.
- Select the cognitive task to be tested.

Avoid common pitfalls

- Presenting a real case
- Writing the stem before determining the testing point
- Lack of one clearly best answer
- Adding unnecessary or misleading information
- Testing more than one point
- Including unintentional clues to the correct answer
- Using “What would you do?” or “What do you believe?” as these statements cannot be tested
- Avoid the use of gender pronouns
- Using flawed question formats - negative question, true/false, none of the above, all of the above

Try to:

- The stem should be clear enough to provide the examinee with sufficient information to anticipate the type of answer before looking at the responses.
- Include in the stem all words that would otherwise have to be repeated in each of the responses.
- All responses should be grammatically consistent with the item stem, and all responses should be parallel.
- Distractors should represent unsafe practices or commonly held misconceptions and should be plausible.
- If the item calls for an evaluation or judgment, be sure to provide the authority or



source of the judgment.

- Items should be written to assess knowledge of meaningful facts and concepts, not trivial information.
- Stems should be as succinct as possible.

Review, reflect and rewrite.

Let go of ego and ownership and trust the committee process.