Examination Items: Rules of Good Form
for Item Structure and Content

General Item Guidelines

1. Assess only one skill or knowledge area in a single question.

2. Ensure that the content of the item closely matches the objective, task, or knowledge to be tested.

3. Avoid measuring knowledge extraneous to that which the item is written to measure (such as reading comprehension).

4. Avoid the use of "trick" items, or items measuring insignificant points.

5. Construct all test items with adherence to the standard rules of punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.

6. Ensure that the item requires content knowledge to arrive at the correct answer rather than simple logic or common sense alone.

7. In general, avoid the use of words that give verbal clues to the correct answer, such as: "always", "never", "all", "none", etc.

8. Avoid the use of vague terms such as: "frequently", "often", "sometimes", "typically", "generally", "may", "usually", etc.

9. In general, avoid the use of abbreviations unless they are common in the relevant practice.

10. Ensure that within any group of items, the correct answer follows a random pattern.

11. Ensure that within any group of items, the correct answer to an item is not found in the stem of another item.

12. Every item should be accompanied by a reference to an authoritative source that unambiguously validates the answer key.

Item Stem Guidelines

13. Ensure that the item stem clearly defines a single problem.

14. Ensure that the item stem is free of all irrelevant material.

15. Ensure that the item stem is free of grammatical and semantic clues to the correct answer.

16. Underline all negative words ("not", "except", "incorrect", etc.) but avoid the use of negative words, if possible.

17. Avoid the use of double negatives.

Response Option Guidelines *("Options" include all distractors and the keyed response)*

18. Include only one clearly correct answer in the options.

19. Ensure that all options are free of irrelevant material.

20. Remove all repetitive words from the options and include them in the stem.

21. Ensure that all options share the same grammatical form.

22. Ensure that all options are grammatically and semantically compatible with the item stem.

23. Ensure that all options are as homogeneous as possible.

24. Construct all options so that they are approximately the same length.

25. Construct all distractors so that they are incorrect, but plausible.

26. Avoid the use of distractors that mean the same thing or the opposite.

27. Avoid the use of "clang" associations of the correct answer with the stem.

28. Underline all negative words.

29. Avoid the use of negative words in the options if negative words are used in the stem.

30. Avoid the use of "none of the above" or "all of the above" as options.

31. List options using numeric data in ascending or descending order.

32. List options using lettered designations in alphabetical order, if possible.