

QUESTION WRITING INSTRUCTIONS



*People Helping People
Build a Safer World™*

The following guidelines should be used to construct test questions for ICC-sponsored examinations.

GOOD TEST QUESTIONS:

Questions must be accurate and checked for the following:

- (a) Questions should be simple and direct and never deliberately misleading.
- (b) Questions should address subjects which are directly related to the job or a job task.
- (c) Questions should require practical application of knowledge rather than rote memory, whenever possible.
- (d) Questions should avoid the use of absolute terms; e.g., “always”, “never”, “all of the above.”
- (e) Colloquialisms, slang, gender terms and brandnames (e.g. “Zerox” rather than “photocopy”) should never be used.

THE STEM:

The stem is the opening statement of a question. It must be clear and precise, and must completely state the question. It should be in the form of an incomplete statement (followed by a colon or completion line) or a direct question. True/False questions, matching, and free-response questions should not be used.

RESPONSES:

Responses should consist of only one correct answer and up to three distractors (incorrect responses), written to the following guidelines.

- (a) Response distractors should be attractive to those who lack the necessary knowledge, emphasizing common errors in the application of this knowledge. Item analysis statistics should be periodically reviewed to identify distractors which are not selected by candidates.
- (b) One or two distractors may be used if three well-written distractors are not possible.
- (c) Responses should be ordered in a low-to-high numerical sequence, or short-to-long alpha order.
- (d) Responses should not include or overlap each other.
- (e) The use of “none of the above,” “all of the above,” and multiple-correct options such as “both a and b above” should be avoided.

DOCUMENTATION:

Documentation for each question should include the:

- (a) Reference source (year of edition, name, and section or page number);
- (b) Major content area and job task;
- (c) Math required for solution (if any);
- (d) Written evidence of committee approval; and
- (e) Item cut-score determined by the modified Angoff/Nedelsky method.

Example of Poor Stem and Test Question	Sample of Better Stem and Test Question
When an indigent and bellicose employee completes his probationary period with an unsatisfactory rating, he:	Employees who unsatisfactorily complete their probationary period:
a. needs to no longer complete his training.	a. must take additional training.
b. needs to seek counseling with his supervisor.	b. will be terminated without cause.
c. needs a reprimand.	c. can seek career counseling with supervisor.
d. gets and immediate raise.	d. receive a demotion and must be counseled and provided additional training.
Problems: “Indigent” and “bellicose” are needlessly difficult words. The reference to h/is is unnecessary and gender biased. There may be more than one correct answer and distractor “d” is an easily identified incorrect response.	The stem of this question is more direct and simpler without any unnecessarily difficult words.