

Item Writing Rules (Selected Response)

1. The stem should be a complete statement about the problem to be solved. It must be in a question format.
2. The stem should contain no unnecessary or irrelevant information.
3. The stem should be stated in clear and precise language.
4. The stem should contain as much of the item as possible such that information will not have to be repeated in each alternative.
5. The stem should be stated positively. Negative stems are discouraged, but if used, the word NOT should be in bold and placed near the end of the stem.
6. The grammar in both the stem and the alternatives (keyed response and distractors) must be consistent.
7. Alternatives should be approximately equal in length. If this is not possible, then two short alternatives and two long alternatives should be used.
8. If an opposite is used in one distractor, the other two distractors should be opposites as well.
9. All distractors should be plausible answers.
10. Verbal clues, such as repetition of key words in the stem and keyed response, should be avoided.
11. One alternative should be clearly right and the distractors clearly wrong except in the case of the best answer type.
12. Avoid using distractors none of the above, all of the above, etc.
13. Modifiers such as sometimes and usually should be avoided.
14. If the correct answer has “important-sounding” words, distractors should contain such words as well.
15. Choices should be listed vertically, alphabetical or numerical, and on separate lines.
16. Statements should not be lifted directly from the text.
17. Items should contain no tricks.
18. Items that test higher-order mental processes must have an element of novelty, but situations presented in the item should be similar to those used in class.
19. Use the best answer-type only when there is no correct answer.