

A guide to writing ABO test items

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Credentialing examinations are frequently the primary method for determining a candidate's competency before entering a profession or achieving certification. "Credentialed" implies that the certificate holder is sufficiently competent to ensure that the health, welfare, and safety of the public are protected. The testing process is an outcome assessment tool that measures areas of mandatory and essential knowledge.¹ Because credentialing examinations are only as good as the quality of their testing items, these items must accurately reflect the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) essential for entry-level competency. The primary purpose of this article is to assist in writing relevant and reliable test items.

A testing organization should precisely define both the educational objective of the examination and the information that the candidate should know. With regard to the American Board of Orthodontics (ABO) and American Dental Association, these details can be found at www.Americanboardortho.com and www.adad.org. Tests should give the examining body enough information to assess all applicable areas of knowledge² and have a sufficiently broad scope of questions to ensure reliability. No test should be designed until the examiners know how the results are to be used. The ABO uses the Phase II examination results to assess didactic and clinical knowledge as a part of the certification process.

When the purpose of the test has been established, an appropriate format should be chosen. The multiple-choice format is objective, versatile, and useful for testing the knowledge of a large group of people in various subjects. Therefore, the ABO chose it for the Phase II examination.

Objective, multiple-choice tests have the following advantages.

- They sample knowledge with maximum efficiency and reliability.
- They ask questions and elicit answers (multiple choice, true or false, fill in, matching).
- They require the candidate to read, evaluate, and respond.
- They are easy to score.
- They are efficient because they allow many items to be administered in a short time.
- They can assess important and relevant areas of knowledge.
- They can identify areas of deficiency in the candidate's knowledge.
- They can be used to identify weaknesses in program curricula.³

Objective tests have the following disadvantages.

- They can be poorly written, impeding a knowledgeable candidate.
- They can be biased against poor test takers.
- They can overemphasize recall and memorization.⁴

For an examination to be reliable and valid for measuring knowledge and competency, much time and effort must be devoted to developing the test. Before an item appears in an examination, hours might have been spent on its development, review, trial, and analysis. Regardless of this effort, it is still possible for the items to be flawed. By becoming familiar with the terminology and concepts of good test writing, the process will proceed more smoothly.

CONSTRUCTING ITEMS

Writing a good test item is not a science in the strictest sense, but certain conventions should be followed. A multiple-choice item consists of an introductory question or statement—the stem—followed by 3 to 5 alternative responses—the options. The stem states the central problem, suggests an idea, or asks a question. It can include graphics or describe a particular situation (a story problem) to assist the candidate in defining the problem. Following are 2 examples of simple stems.

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Am J Orthod Dentofacial Orthop 2005;128:397-401
 0896-6643/\$30.00
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 doi:10.1016/j.ajodo.2005.07.010

A Guide To Writing Abo Test Items

Thomas Griffiths

A Guide To Writing Abo Test Items:

Reviewing **A Guide To Writing Abo Test Items**: Unlocking the Spellbinding Force of Linguistics

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