



GUIDE TO ITEM WRITING

CRITERIA FOR EXAM QUALITY

Validity

- Exam content is aligned with professional practice requirements

Reliability

- Exam provides consistent measurement

Fairness

- Exam provides all candidates with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their competence

PRINCIPLES OF ITEM WRITING

Validity

1. Align with the exam blueprint

Reliability

2. Clear and focused
3. Provide sufficient information
4. Have only one correct response
5. Consistent and plausible distractors

Fairness

6. Accessible language
7. Relevant content



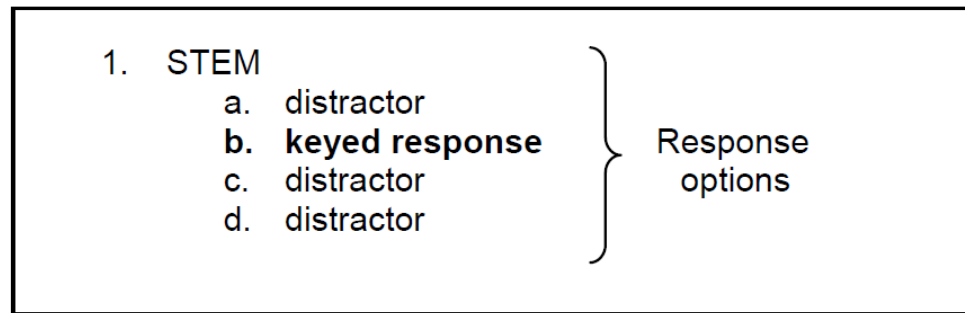
ITEM COGNITIVE LEVELS

Items can be written at various levels of complexity to assess different types of thinking.

- **Knowledge/Recall**
 - Is the recall of basic facts or definitions
 - Are **highly discouraged** and are **not effective** at assessing the knowledge, skill, and ability required to function competently in practice.
- **Comprehension/Understanding**
 - Assess the candidate's understanding of clinical principles or processes
- **Application/Analysis**
 - Depict hypothetical physicians/patient scenarios and require the candidate to make diagnoses, prescribe meds, offer suggestions about lifestyle changes, etc.

ANATOMY OF AN ITEM

- ABPS uses multiple choice questions or items to assess a candidate's competency. All items are constructed of a stem and 4 options.
- An item skeleton:



- Terminology:
 - Stem:** Presents the candidate with the situation or problem they must resolve
 - Response options:** the potential responses to the stem
 - Keyed Response (Key):** the correct option
 - Distractors:** the incorrect options

ITEM FORMATS



- Direct Question
 - A patient presents to the office complaining of fatigue, morning stiffness, and multiple joint swelling and tenderness that has lasted for eight weeks. On physical examination, the patient has a reduced range of motion. What is the most likely diagnosis?
 - A. gout
 - B. cellulitis
 - C. rheumatoid arthritis**
 - D. vitamin B deficiency
- Sentence Completion
 - A patient presents to the office complaining of fatigue, morning stiffness, and multiple joint swelling and tenderness that has lasted for eight weeks. On physical examination, the patient has a reduced range of motion. The most likely diagnosis is
 - A. gout.
 - B. cellulitis.
 - C. rheumatoid arthritis.**
 - D. vitamin B deficiency.



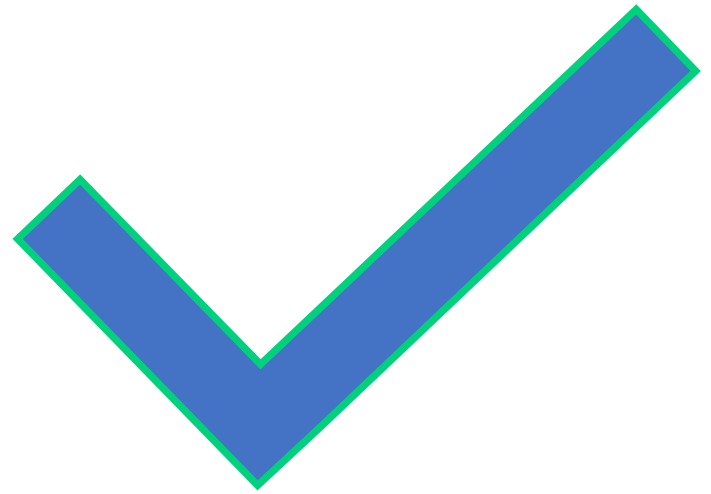
STEP 1: CREATE THE STEM

The stem presents the situation or problem to which the candidate must respond

- Should be a direct question or beginning of a sentence
- Should provide enough stimulus for the candidate to respond and enough information to select a response option (put the main idea in the stem)
- Use simple and concise language
- Should be phrased positively
- Uses third person (i.e., the physician, the patient)
- Avoid textbook phrasing
- Avoid extraneous/irrelevant information (focus on a single concept)
- Use “should” not “would”

STEP 2: WRITE THE CORRECT (KEYED) RESPONSE

- Can be *only one* correct or best response
- Experts should agree that the key is the best answer
- Must be supported by a valid reference





STEP 3: FORMULATE DISTRACTORS

- The options/distractors must be:
 - real
 - plausible
 - positively phrased
 - unique - no options should have the same meaning
 - grammatically correct
 - similar in terms of:
 - Length
 - Structure
 - Content
- Source of distractors:
 - Use common errors and misconceptions

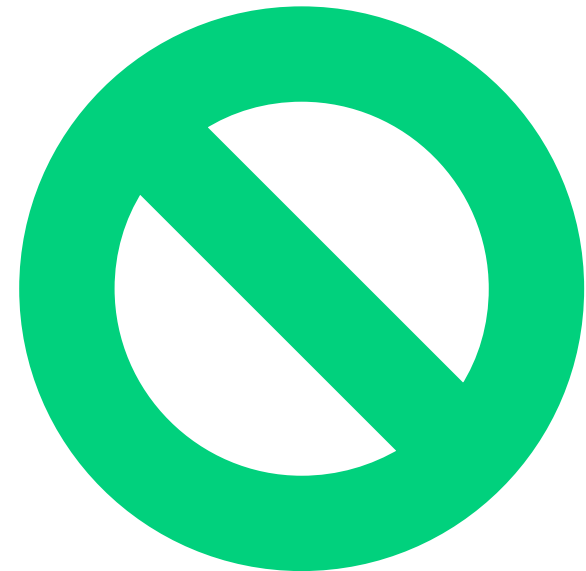


ITEM WRITING REQUIREMENTS

- All items **MUST**:
 - be job-relevant
 - reflect day-to-day clinical practice
 - have a valid textbook reference from the approved specialty reference list
 - be linked to one area of the exam blueprint/content outline
 - have one clear correct answer
 - be positively phrased
 - be free of ambiguous or confusing language

THINGS TO AVOID

- Unnecessary demographic descriptors or text that indicate bias (Most items should only refer to age and gender of a patient.)
- Brand names
- Clueing
 - Verbiage from the stem repeated in the key
 - Obviously incorrect options
 - Directly opposing options (hypothermia/hyperthermia)
- first person – use job titles instead of using “you”
- teaching statements or additional information not needed to provide a response





UNACCEPTABLE ITEMS

- True/False stems (such as TRUE, CORRECT, FALSE, INCORRECT, etc.)
- Options that are a series of True/False statements.
- Negative phrasing (such as NOT, EXCEPT, LEAST, INCORRECT, CONTRAINDICATED, AVOID, OPPOSITE, etc.) in either the stem or options
- Absolutes (such as ALWAYS, NEVER, etc.)
- “all of the above” or “none of the above” options
- a combination of options (A&B, B&C, ...)

ITEM WRITING TIPS

Utilize

Utilize real-life clinical examples

Write

Write items that require the same kind of decision-making the physician would encounter in practice situations

Use

Use common errors and misconceptions to create distractors

Cover

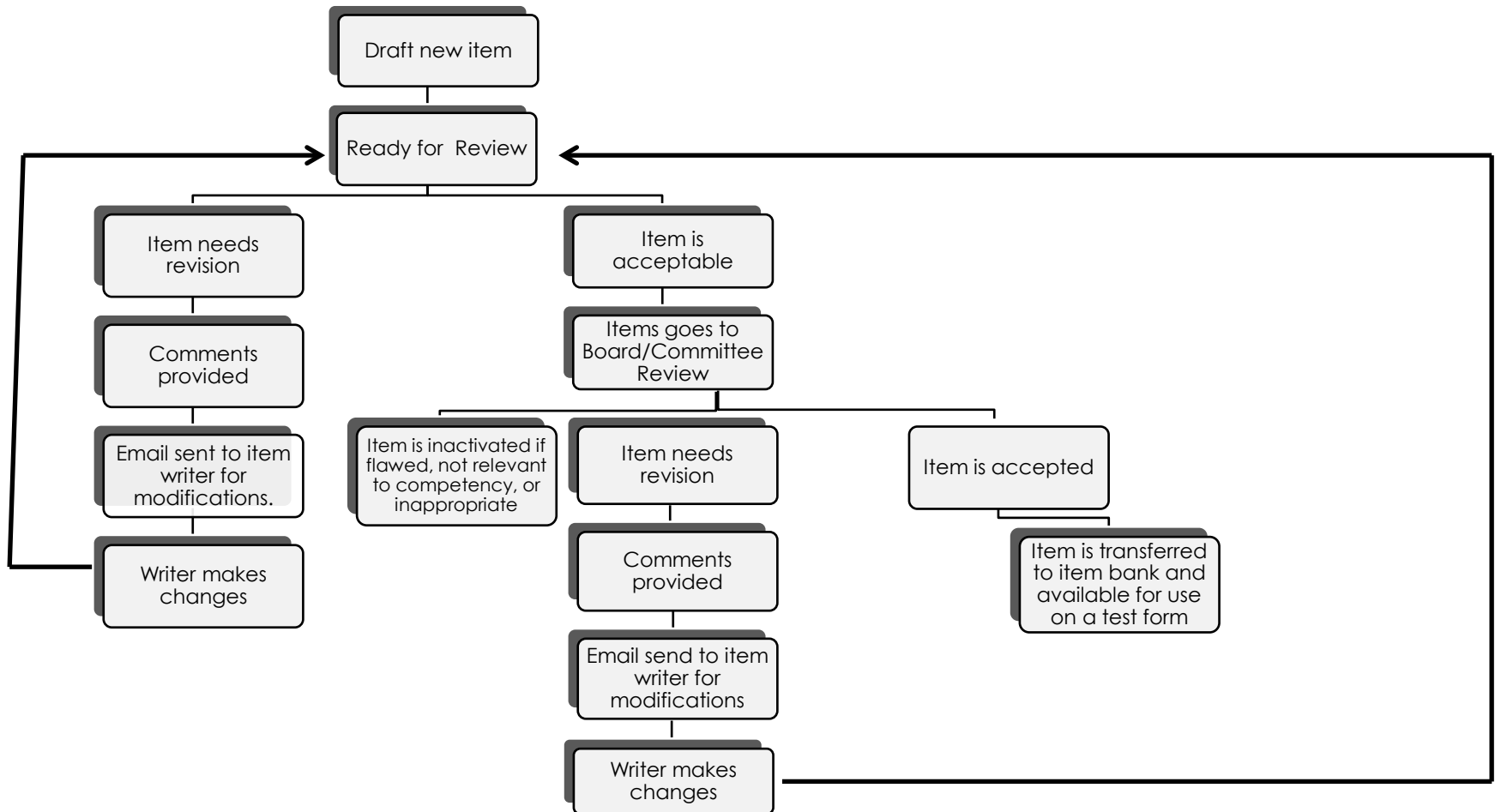
Once an item is complete, cover the options and reread the stem



REFERENCES

- Each specialty has a list of approved references for item writing.
 - All items must be linked to a reference from the approved list and a page number or chapter is required.
 - While references are used to support the content of the items, items should be practice-based rather than definitional or verbatim from the text.

ONLINE ITEM WRITING PROCESS



CONCLUSION



WE HOPE THIS PRESENTATION HAS PROVIDED INSIGHT ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF ITEM WRITING.



PLEASE REMEMBER THAT ITEM WRITING, LIKE ANY SKILL, IS IMPROVED WITH TIME AND PRACTICE.



ABPS STAFF IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE FOR QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK.



WE LOOK FORWARD TO HELPING YOU TRANSFORM YOUR EXPERTISE INTO HIGH-QUALITY ITEMS WHICH WILL STRENGTHEN THE VALIDITY OF THE ABPS EXAMINATIONS.

Any Questions?

Contact Certification Staff @ 813-433-2277 or certification@abpsus.org