

## GUIDELINES FOR MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

### 1. The question should be meaningful in and of itself and present a definite problem.

A poor question is: South America:

- a) Is a flat, arid country
- b) Imports coffee from the United States
- c) Has a larger population than the United States
- d) Was settled mainly by colonists from Spain

A better question is: Most of South America was settled by colonists from:

- a) England
- b) France
- c) Holland
- d) Spain

**2. An item should have only one correct or one clearly best answer.** Authorities in the field must agree that the keyed response is correct.

**3. Do not use "All of the above" and "None of the above" as distractors.**

**4. Use terms like "always" and "never" judiciously.** Very few things in professional settings are always true or never true. Candidates may use these terms in eliminating distractors.

**5. Write only multiple-choice questions. Do not write "true/false," matching, or other kinds of questions**

**6. The question should include as much of the item as possible and be free of irrelevant material. A poor question is:**

Most of South America was settled by colonists from Spain. How do you account for the large number settling there?

A better question is:

Why did Spanish colonists settle in South America?

The best question for this example is:

Spanish colonists settled most of South America in search of:

**7. Use a negatively-stated question only when there is significant justification for it.**

A poor question would be:

Which state is not located north of the Mason-Dixon line?

A better question is:

Which state is located south of the Mason-Dixon line?

Another acceptable question is:

All of the following states are located north of the Mason-Dixon line except:

**8. All response options should be grammatically consistent with the question. Candidates assume that the correct response will most likely be grammatically consistent, and if there are options that are inconsistent, test-wise candidates may eliminate them quickly.**

An item in which options do not all follow grammatically from the question is:

An electric transformer can be used:

- a) For storing electricity
- b) To increase the voltage of alternating current
- c) It converts electrical energy into mechanical energy
- d) Alternating current is changed into direct current

electric transformer can be used to:

- a) Store electricity
- b) Increase the voltage of alternating current
- c) Convert electrical energy into mechanical energy
- d) Change alternating current to direct current

A better example for this question is: An

**9. Items measuring application and analysis should contain some novelty, but not so much that the item becomes irrelevant to the work that professionals do.** The key strategy for item writers is to select situations carefully and to use skillful phrasing.

**10. All distractors must be plausible.** In writing distractors, item writers may use common errors, important sounding words (significant, accurate, etc.) and language resembling textbooks, and words with verbal associations in the question (politician ... political). Item writers may think of common misunderstandings and careless errors. Distractors must be drawn from the same pool, which means that they are all members of the same group as the correct response. Distractors must be similar in length and complexity, vocabulary, grammatical construction, etc. An item with distractors that are not drawn from the same pool as the correct response is:

The state bird of North Carolina is the:  
a) Robin  
b) Penguin  
c) Cardinal  
d) Purple Martin

A better question is: The state bird of North Carolina is the:  
a) Robin  
b) Wild turkey  
c) Cardinal.  
d) Purple Martin

