

0245-1

SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS

A. The Item as a Whole:

1. Select a concept or an idea that is important for the examinee to know or to understand.
2. Structure the item around one central idea or problem that is clearly presented in the stem and to which all the options relate in the same way.
3. Make sure that the item has one and only one correct answer.
4. Use language that is simple, direct, and free of ambiguity. Do not make an item a test of reading ability unless this is the purpose of the question.
5. When several items are based on a single setting or on stimulus material such as a passage, graphs, or charts, make sure that each item is independent of the other items in the set. The examinee is expected to arrive at the answer from the information provided in the stimulus material, not from having answered correctly a previous question in the set. Do not use distracters in one question that may provide clues for answering another question in the set.
6. Keep the purpose of the item clearly in mind. That is, if you intend to test factual knowledge, do not "dress up" the item to appear otherwise; if you intend to test critical thinking, be sure that the item cannot be answered on the basis of factual information alone.
7. If you intend for an item to be difficult, make certain that it is difficult because it requires sophisticated reasoning or understanding of a high-level concept, not because it tests obscure or esoteric subject matter.
8. Do not use double negatives in an item. If you ask the examinee to answer by identifying an option that is not true, or that is false or incorrect, state the options in positive terms. As an extreme example, an examinee would be confused by having to recognize that it is not true that John Milton did not write Paradise Lost.
9. Items using single negatives, **NOT**, **LEAST**, **EXCEPT**, should be limited to no more than 25% of the total number of items you write.

B. The Stem of the Item:

1. You may state the stem as a question, as an incomplete statement that is completed by the options, or as a complete statement of a problem to be solved.

2. Clearly define in the stem the task you are setting for the examinee and include all information necessary to understand the intent of the item. (Certain item types that appear grouped together in a test require special directions, and these directions precede the group and are not repeated in each item.)

C. The Options For the Item (answer and incorrect responses or distractors):

1. The options are as important as your statement of the problem in the stem. Select and formulate the distracters with care--incorrectness should not be the sole criterion. Sources of good distracters include the following:
 - a. common misconceptions and common errors in technique;
 - b. a statement which itself is true, but which does not satisfy the requirements of the problem;
 - c. a statement that is either too broad or too narrow for the requirements of the problem;
 - d. a carefully worded incorrect statement that may sound plausible to the uninformed.
2. The difficulty of an item depends largely on the options. The finer the distinctions that must be made to select the correct answer from the distracters, the more difficult the item.
3. Phrase all the options so that they maintain a similar relationship to the thought in the stem and state the options clearly and concisely.
4. Guard against giving clues in the correct answer. If there is a similarity between the stem and the correct answer in wording, phraseology, or grammatical construction and if this similarity is not maintained between the stem and other options, the examinee can respond on the basis of the clue alone. Also avoid the tendency to use textbookish wording in the correct answer if you do not also use such wording in the other options.
5. Avoid any tendency to make the correct answer consistently longer than the distracters. This tendency usually results from one's qualifying the correct answer so that it is complete and exactly right and setting down the distracters as flat or simple statements without qualification. Write the distracters with as much care and precision as the correct answer so that all alternatives are equally attractive to an examinee who guesses.

0245-3

6. Avoid "give-aways" in the distracters, for example, "always," "only," "every," "all," "never," etc. Items should test something more sophisticated than an examinee's ability to recognize that statements are seldom universally true.
7. Do not give away the answer to an item by using in all the distracters words having unfavorable connotations that would contrast sharply with words having favorable connotations in the key, and vice versa.
8. Do not repeat in each option information that can be placed in the stem.
9. If you ask for an evaluation in the stem of an item (e.g., "best," or "most"), be sure that you are indeed requiring the examinee to identify the "best" or the "most" of several options, rather than to distinguish between the correct and incorrect.

D. Miscellaneous

1. For a typical test, it is desirable to have items that range in difficulty from easy to hard for the group for which the test is intended. (An easy item is one that at least 70% of the examinees can answer correctly; a hard one can be answered correctly by less than 30%.) However, the greatest concentration of items in a test is usually in the 30% to 70% correct range. It is important to keep in mind that items usually turn out to be more difficult for the examinees than you intend them to be.
2. To provide flexibility in assembling a test to meet test specifications, it is desirable to have available items on the same topic at different levels of difficulty and testing different abilities.
3. When submitting items, indicate the key (answer) either on the back of the item or on a separate sheet of paper. This is to ensure that reviewers can key the item independently without being influenced by having your answer marked on the face of the item.

ACTFL PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOPS

0245-9

Teaching for Proficiency: Reading

Length: One day

Participants will...

- discuss the principles of proficiency in terms of the development of reading skills
- implement authentic texts to develop real-world reading skills
- develop reading activities with attention to the selection of texts, and pre- and post-reading activities and strategies
- integrate other skills in various reading activities
- develop materials for testing reading comprehension and discuss factors in test preparation
- analyze and adapt the presentation and practice of reading skills found in current textbooks

Teaching for Proficiency: Writing

Length: One day

Participants will...

- analyze the writing skill as a purposeful and communicative activity
- become acquainted with a developmental sequence of writing tasks ranging from listing to written discourse
- focus on the skills involved in various writing tasks and examine the compatibility of classroom materials and teaching strategies with learning and the goals of language use
- develop writing activities with respect to the topics, purposes, intended readers, and functions of a written message
- examine the skill of writing as an element which complements listening and reading tasks
- critique and adapt the presentation and practice of writing skills found in current textbooks

Teaching for Proficiency: Listening

Length: One day

Participants will...

- focus on listening as a real-world skill and investigate those factors influencing listening comprehension
- examine the listening skill in light of its purposes and contexts
- develop listening activities with linguistic and cognitive aspects of specific tasks as a focus for the selection of materials
- discuss the role of pre-listening tasks
- illustrate the difference between general and detailed understanding of an aural text
- develop post-listening activities and assessment tools
- analyze and begin to adapt the presentation and practice of listening skills in current textbooks, with provision made for the evaluation of classroom listening activities

Teaching for Proficiency: Speaking

Length: One day

Participants will...

- become acquainted with the principles of proficiency in terms of the development of speaking skills
- discuss features of real-world language use in terms of communication needs and strategies
- focus attention on the strategies and learner characteristics involved in the process of speaking
- identify the functions and topics, elements of context, and aspects of culture involved in a particular speaking task
- develop activities to promote communicative strategies
- examine the compatibility of classroom materials and teaching strategies with learning and the goals of language use
- implement alternative grouping strategies for maximum student involvement

The above workshops can also be designed as a two- or three-day workshop on Receptive Skills.

The above workshops can also be designed as a two- or three-day workshop on Productive Skills.