

Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Examinations  
Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA) E-Learning

Secrets of Competency Testing:  
Writing Items for Hospice and  
Palliative Certification  
Examinations

Presented by  
Lawrence J. Fabrey, PhD  
Senior Vice President, Psychometrics  
Applied Measurement Professionals, Inc.

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The planning committee members  
and the presenters have  
declared no conflict of interest  
involved in the content  
contained in this course.

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**AGENDA**

Part I

- I. Overview of Measurement
- II. Item Anatomy and Item Types
- III. Cognitive Levels

Part II

- IV. Subverting Test Wiseness
- V. General Rules for Item Writing

Part III

- VI. Item Writing and Feedback

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Overview of Measurement



Job Analysis  
Test Specifications  
Item Writing  
Examination Development  
Standard Setting  
Administration and Scoring

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Job Analysis

- Also called a Role Delineation Study
- Purpose: to identify practice
- Upholds standards of testing
- Conducted by Advisory Committee
- Survey distributed to national sample
- Results show importance of tasks

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Test Specifications

- Developed based on judgment:
  - From hundreds of respondents, as interpreted by Advisory Committee
- Ensures content validity
- Used to build all examinations
- Provides information to candidates
  - Why is that important?

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# Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Examinations Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA) E-Learning

## Item Writing

- Training provided through workshop
- All items linked to specifications
- Consistent style and format




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## Examination Development

- Unanimous agreement of experts
- Comparable examination forms
- Exactly match test specifications
- Extensive review process

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## Sample of LXR\*Test Item Banking System

The screenshot shows the LXR\*Test Item Banking System interface. It includes a header with 'LXR\*TEST V6.1 [SAMPLE NRSHPN BANK LXR\*BANK]' and a menu bar. The main area displays a test item with the following details:

- Projects:** NRSHPN
- Questions:** 1
- Tests:** NRSHPN
- Specs:** NRSHPN
- Grading:** 1
- Item Values:** 0
- Item:** A pain assessment scale is used to
- Options:**
  - A. measure pain intensity
  - B. evaluate the character of pain
  - C. graph compliance with medical regimen
  - D. measure cultural differences in perceiving pain
- Comments:** DNLMW 1C 201.25  
Checked 3/99 OK for scoring  
Ref: McCaffrey & Beebe, p. 312

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# Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Examinations Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA) E-Learning

## Standard Setting

- Criterion-referenced
- Definition of borderline candidate
- Use judgments of content experts
- Consistency through equating
- Passing depends on amount of knowledge displayed, not the ability of other candidates

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## Scoring

- Quality control procedures
- Review of item analysis
- Review of candidate comments
- Final scoring

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## Item Anatomy and Item Types

- Multiple Choice - WHY?
- Each measures one unit of content
- Response allows inference about candidate's ability in this content area
- All items linked to outline, which allows inference about job-related competencies

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# Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Examinations Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNA) E-Learning

Item Components

- Stem and four Options
- **Stem** - the statement or question to which candidates respond. The stem can also include a chart, table or graphic. The stem should clearly present the central problem or idea.

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Example Stems

- Direct Question:
- In a terminally ill patient, dysphagia would most likely indicate which of the following?
- Incomplete Statement:
- Dysphagia in a terminally ill patient would most likely indicate

**Novice writers tend to write clearer direct question item types. If you are new to item writing, it is best to concentrate on that type.**

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The four options will include:

- One key
  - The key is the best or most appropriate of the *available* options
- Three distractors
  - *Plausible*, yet incorrect responses or completions
- Why four options?

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Negatively worded item stems

- Should be avoided
- Try to rewrite as positively worded
- Can cause measurement error when able candidates become confused

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Cognitive Levels

- Recall
  - An effort of rote memorization
  - Never situationally dependent
- Application
  - Interpretation, classification, translation, recognition of elements and relationships
- Analysis
  - Synthesize information, solve problems, evaluate the best response

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Recall item

**The authority to make decisions regarding a patient's care ultimately rests with the**

- A. **patient/family.**
- B. attending physician.
- C. interdisciplinary team.
- D. hospice medical director.

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Application item

If a patient with a history of breast cancer experiences pain between the shoulder blades, it is most likely to indicate metastases to the

- A. liver.
- B. **bone.**
- C. brain.
- D. pancreas.

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Analysis item

A certification examination shows a reliability index of .45. One-half of the items have  $p$  values greater than .90, and 15% have negative point-biserial correlations. The psychometrician should recommend that the committee write

- A. longer, more difficult to read items that are more clearly job-related.
- B. easier items, focusing on basic facts.
- C. **more difficult items, with better distractors.**
- D. stems requiring complex computations.

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How to write items to test higher cognitive levels

- Develop an evaluative objective
- Think about job-related situations
- Expand on opportunities (problems) that have occurred



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Evaluative Objectives

- Recall:  
identify, define, recognize, restate
- Application:  
compute, differentiate, specify
- Analysis:  
judge, estimate, predict, conclude

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Please complete the  
Item Writing Aptitude Test



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