

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

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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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Please complete the  
Item Writing Aptitude Test



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Are you testwise?

Can you select the key based  
on clues given in the item  
without knowing the content?

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Trassign normally occurs under which of the following  
conditions?

- A. when the viskal flans, if the viskal is zortil
- B. when lusp trasses the vom
- C. when the belgo lisks tarious
- D. when dissles frull

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- Testwise candidates will pick **A** as the key; it is the only option to specify a condition and the stem directs candidates to look for a condition.

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The fribbled breg will ninter best with an

- A. mors.
- B. ignu.
- C. derst.
- D. sortar.

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- Testwise candidates would select **B**; it is the only option that grammatically flows from the stem.

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Why does the sigla frequently overfesek the trelsum?

- A. All siglas are mellious.
- B. Siglas are always votial.
- C. The trelsum is usually tarious.
- D. No trelsa are directly feskable.

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- Testwise candidates can identify **C** as the key because all the other options contain words (i.e., all, always, no) associated with false statements.

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What probable causes are indicated when doss occurs in a compots?

- A. The polats were thenced in the sluth
- B. The kredges roted with the rots
- C. The rakogs were not accepted in the sluth
- D. The sabs foped and the doths tinzed

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- This one is relatively tricky, yet some testwise candidates may be able to deduce that **D** is the only option with multiple *causes* (sabs and doths).

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What is the primary purpose of the class in frumpaling?

- A. To remove class-prangs.
- B. To patch tremails.
- C. To loosen cloughs.
- D. To repair plumots.

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- Someone who knows nothing about the content can still pick **A** as the key because it's the only option to include a word (class) from the stem.

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The nintering function of the ignu is most effectively performed in connection with the

- A. arazma tol.
- B. fribbled breg.
- C. groshing statol.
- D. frallied stantels.

**If you are testwise,  
you can find the key.**

- Testwise candidates will remember that *ignus* and *fribbled bregs* were linked in the second item and thus select **B** here. This is an example of cueing.

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**Part 2 Answers**

7.	C	Abraham Lincoln
8.	A	5/8
9.	B	Sue and Margie
10.	C	did not
11.	D	\$25,000
12.	D	water
13.	A	260
14.	B	Tom made the play
15.	B	17

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Part 2 Answers Explained

- Convergence Theory of Testwiseness
- Abe Lincoln: President during Civil War
- 5/8: 5 in numerator, 8 in denominator
- Sue (3 times) and Margie (twice)
- did (twice) and not (three times) . . .
  
- What about the different options?

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Things to do

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Steps in writing items

- **Generate an idea (use TCO or situation)**
- **Write an evaluative objective**
- **Jot notes (+ and - examples & attributes)**
- **Draft the stem**
- **Write the key**
- **Use your +/- list to help write distractors**
- **Get feedback (yours and others)**

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Follow grammatical (AMP) rules

- Options that are complete sentences begin in upper case, end with a period
- Incomplete thoughts for direct questions begin with lower case (no period)
- Options that complete incomplete statements begin in lower case and end with periods

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Put as many words as possible into the stem.

The psychometrician should recommend

A. that the committee write longer, more difficult to read stems.

B. that the committee write distractors of length similar to the key.

The psychometrician should recommend that the committee write

A. longer, more difficult to read stems.

B. distractors of length similar to the key.

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Write distractors with care

- Item difficulty largely depends on the quality of the distractors.
- The finer distinctions candidates must make, the more difficult the item.
- When writing item **stems**, you should help candidates clearly understand.
- **Distractors** should be written with a ruthless attitude.

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Write distractors you know some candidates will select.

- Use common misconceptions
- Use the candidates' language
- Use impressive-sounding and technical words in the distractors
- Use scientific and stereotyped phrases, and verbal associations

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Summary example: options

A. longer, more difficult to read stems.  
B. distractors of length similar to the key.  
C. clearly wrong, yet attractive distractors.  
D. stems involving complex computations.

- Options are similar in length and detail
- Two options address *stems*, two address *distractors*
- Two options with commas, two without
- Two options begin with nouns, two begin with adjectives

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Evaluating your own items

1. Content relevant for intended examination?
2. Item linked to the content outline?
3. Cognitive level correct?
4. Stem clear and complete?
5. Key the best answer?
6. Distractors plausible, but wrong?
7. Free from bias?
8. Reading level appropriate?
9. Reference? Conform to standards?

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## Things to avoid



A cartoon illustration showing a judge on the left wearing a black robe and a white wig, holding a gavel. On the right is a man with a very long, pointed nose, wearing a suit and tie, holding a small object near his nose.

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### Avoid "All of the above" and "None of the above"

- "All of the above" allows candidates to correctly respond based on partial information.
- "None of the above" is a poor option because candidates could almost always argue that it was correct.

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### Avoid irrelevant sources of difficulty

- Use short sentences rather than long complex sentences.
- Use smaller words rather than polysyllabic words to reduce reading level.
- Now is not the time to show off your verbosity.

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Avoid Irrelevant Clues

- Options having the same meaning. Therefore, both must be incorrect.
- Options that are mutually exclusive.
- Similar phrases in the stem and key.
- Writing keys "better" than distractors.

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Avoid bias in your items

- Avoid stereotypes
- Keep in mind the following potential areas of bias: gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, disability
- If not relevant to the clinical picture, do not include it

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A few last things to avoid

- "you"
- would
- humor

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**The next step:**

- Submit IWW Application online at [www.goHPCC.org](http://www.goHPCC.org)
- Submit one item to HPCC
- Submitting items:
- Category: Major, Minor, Task
- ...Cardiac would be 1B3
- Cognitive Level
- Key
- Reference

**AMP**  
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FOR HPCC USE ONLY  
 Item # \_\_\_\_\_

**ITEM SUBMISSION FORM**  
Hospice and Palliative Credentialing Center (HPCC)

Event \_\_\_\_\_ Item Order \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<small>Content Outline Classification</small>	<small>Complexity Level</small>
<small>Major Category</small> _____	<small>(1=Found, 2=Application, 3=Analysis)</small>
<small>HP G. 1.D</small> _____	<small>Content Area</small> _____
<small>Major Category</small> _____	<small>Reference Material</small> _____
<small>HP G. A.B</small> _____	
<small>Item Statement</small> _____	
<small>HP G. 1.D</small> _____	<small>Please print or type item in the space below.</small>

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**Final Session**

- Purpose: to get a glimpse of Examination Development Committee approval process
- Similar to “Evaluating your own items”
- Sign up online—attend one of 3 interactive teleconferences. Details at [www.goHPCC.org](http://www.goHPCC.org) under Item Writer Workshops.

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