International Foundation for Retirement Education

Item Writing Workshop
for the
Certified Retirement Counselors Examination

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September 9, 2008

Why Are You Here?

- As subject-matter experts
- To review, revise and approve items for inclusion in the InFRE tem bank used to construct the Certified Retirement Counselors Examination
Agenda

- Overview of:
  - Examination Development Process
  - Item Development and Review Process

- Review of:
  - Item Writing Principles
  - Cognitive Levels
  - Validation Scales

- Review:
  - Remote Item Writing (RIW) software

Exam Development Process

1. Conduct Practice Analysis
2. Validate Practice Analysis
3. Develop Test Specs.
4. Construct Test Items
5. Assemble Item Bank
7. Approve Final Exam Form
8. Select Items to Be Retired for Next Test
9. Disseminate Score Reports
10. Administer Examination
11. Establish Passing Point and Score Report Conventions
12. Construct Camera Ready Copy
13. Administer Examination
14. Disseminate Score Reports
15. Approve Final Exam Form

Select Items to Be Retired for Next Test
Item Review Process

1. Select Item for Review
2. Review Item For Content and Structure - Revise
3. Validate Item
4. Verify Rubric Classification
5. Mark Item OK
6. Refer Back To Author

Inadequate Ratings
Unable to Revise

Item Writing Guidelines

- The item (also referred to as a premise or stem) can be in the form of a direct question (followed by a question mark) or an incomplete statement (followed by a colon)
- Each item should contain a premise (stem) and 4 choices:
  - one choice is the KEY (correct response)
  - three choices are the DISTRACTORS (incorrect responses)
Item Writing Guidelines (cont’d)

● Make sure that you DO NOT:
  – repeat the same word in each choice; include the word in the premise instead
  – use negatively stated premises, requiring candidates to select an incorrect response
  – use “All of the above” or “None of the above” as choices
  – provide candidates with clues that make it easy to select the correct answer

Item Writing Guidelines (cont’d)

● DO NOT:
  – make the keyed correct answer much shorter, longer, or more technical than the distractors
  – put the same descriptive word in both the premise and the correct answer
  – make the keyed correct answer clear and concise and the distractors vague and ambiguous
Item Writing Guidelines (cont’d)

- Test items should be written:
  - clearly and concisely
  - without unnecessary jargon
  - without unnecessary information in the premise
  - to assess meaningful and not trivial information

- Distractors are as important as the keyed correct answer in discriminating between candidates who have mastered the knowledge and those who have not. Distractors should be written so that they:
  - incorporate common errors made by candidates
  - contain familiar yet incorrect phrases
  - avoid the use of humor

Item Writing Guidelines (cont’d)

- To minimize the effects of guessing, it is important that the distractors are as plausible as the correct answer. If the distractors are not plausible, here’s what will happen:
  - one bad distractor will give a candidate a 33% chance of guessing correctly
  - two bad distractors will give a candidate a 50% chance of guessing correctly
  - three bad distractors will give away the correct answer
Item Components

Investors buy income stocks for their:
1. high dividend payments.
2. high interest payments.
3. guaranteed, fixed payments.
4. ability to generate tax-free quarterly payments.

General Considerations

- Does the item test information that is important and relevant to practice in the field?
- Does the item reflect current and best practice in the field, and not judgments?
- Is the item written clearly so that candidates with knowledge can select the correct answer without hesitation (i.e., without reading the choices)?
General Considerations (cont’d)

- Are the context, setting, and content of the item equally appropriate and familiar to all segments of the candidate population?
- Is the terminology used equally appropriate and familiar to all segments of the candidate population?

Premise Considerations

- Is the premise clear?
- Is the sentence structure simple and direct?
- Have ambiguous words and terms been avoided?
- Is the premise positively stated? If not, can it be rewritten?
Choice Considerations

- Does each choice follow logically and grammatically from the stem?
- Are the keyed correct answer and distractors parallel in:
  - length?
  - grammatical structure?
  - terminology?
  - content?

Choice Considerations (cont’d)

- Have professionally acceptable or technical terms been used in the distractors as well as the correct answer?
- Is there one and only one correct (or best) answer?
- Have the choices been placed in numerical order (ascending or descending)?
- Avoid the use of absolutes (all, always, no, never) since they are rarely the correct answer.
The Three Levels of Cognition (cont’d)

Level 1: KNOWLEDGE

Questions that assess knowledge ask the candidate to list, identify, name, state, recall, recognize, and define.

Example:

On the average, girls start puberty how much sooner than boys?

A. 1 year
B. 2 years
C. 3 years
D. 4 years
Three Levels of Cognition (cont’d)

Level 2: INTERPRETATION
Questions that assess this level of cognition ask the candidate to analyze, inspect, differentiate, compare, and contrast.
Example:
A chaperone at a seventh-grade dance would generally observe which of the following conditions?
A. Girls are taller than boys.
B. Boys are taller than girls.
C. Girls and boys are of approximately the same height.
D. Most of the boys have completed puberty.

Three Levels of Cognition (cont’d)

Level 3: PROBLEM SOLVING & EVALUATION
Questions that assess this level of cognition ask the candidate to propose, plan, design, evaluate, assess, and judge.
Example:
A high school principal wants to make arrangements for a dance where the boys and girls will be of approximately equal height. This could best be achieved by inviting:
A. seventh-grade girls and eighth-grade boys.
B. seventh-grade boys and ninth-grade girls.
C. ninth-grade boys and ninth-grade girls.
D. eighth-grade girls and seventh-grade boys.
The Item Construction Form

In addition to the premise and four choices, all items must contain the following information:

1. A **Reference** source that supports the accuracy of the keyed correct answer. The reference should include the author’s name, the title of the reference, the publisher, the year of publication, and the page number(s).

2. A **Content Area** classification. This is a six-digit numeric designation that refers to the specific content being tested. Each item must be directly linked to one of the areas in the role delineation document.

The Item Construction Form (cont’d)

The content area classification is formed as follows:
- the first two digits represent the Domain
- the third and fourth digits represent the Task
- the fifth and sixth digits represent the Knowledge

For example, if you are writing a question dealing with retirement education and using a web site to present retirement plans, the content area classification would be 010119.
The Item Construction Form (cont’d)

3. Completed **Validation Scales**. All items are rated on three scales:
- Relevance (Scale A)
- Importance (Scale B)
- Harm (Scale C)

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The IGNU Test

(Developed by Dr. Jerry Durovic)

The following is a hypothetical examination on which you could get every item correct by knowing the pitfalls in item construction.

1. The purpose of the cluss in furmpaling is to remove:
   a. clussprags
   b. tremalis
   c. cloughs
   d. plumots
The IGNU Test (cont’d)

2. Trassig is true when:
   a. lusp trasses the vom.
   b. the viskal flans, if the viskal is donwill or zortil.
   c. the belgo frulls.
   d. dissles lisk easily.

The IGNU Test (cont’d)

3. The sigla frequently overfesks the trelsum because:
   a. all siglas are mellious.
   b. siglas are always votial.
   c. the trelsum is usually tarious.
   d. no trelsa are feskable.
The IGNU Test (cont’d)

4. The fribbled breg will minter best with an:
   a. derst
   b. morst
   c. sortar
   d. ignu