MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEM-WRITING RULES

Procedural Rules:

- Use either the best answer or the correct answer format.
- Avoid complex multiple-choice & Type K format.
- Format the item vertically, not horizontally.
- Allow time for editing and other types of item revisions.
- Use good grammar, punctuation, and spelling consistently.
- Minimize examinee reading time in phrasing each item.
- Avoid trick items, those which mislead or deceive examinees into answering incorrectly.

Content-related Rules:

- Base each item on an educational or instructional objective.
- Focus on a single problem.
- Keep the vocabulary consistent with the examinees' level of understanding.
- Avoid cuing one item with another; keep items indepedent of one another.
- Use the author's examples as a basis for developing your items.
- Avoid overspecific knowledge when developing the item.
- Avoid textbook, verbatim phrasing when developing the item.
- Avoid items based on opinions.
- Use multiple-choice to measure higher level thinking.
- Test for important or significant materials; avoid trivial material.

Stem Construction Rules:

- State the stem in either question form or completion form.
- When using the completion form, don't leave a blank for completion in the beginning or middle of the stem.
- Ensure that the directions in the stem are clear, and that wording lets the examinee know exactly what is being asked.
- Avoid window dressing (excessive verbiage) in the stem.
- Word the stem positively; avoid negative phrasing.
- Include the central idea and most of the phrasing in the stem.

General Option Development Rules:

- Use as many options as are feasible; more options are desirable.
- Place options in logical or numerical order.
- Keep options independent; options should not be overlapping.

- Keep all options in an item homogeneous in content.
- Keep the length of options fairly consistent.
- Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase *all of the above.*
- Avoid, or use sparingly, the phrase *none of the above.*
- Avoid the use of the phrase *I don't know.*
- Phrase options positively, not negatively.
- Avoid distracters that can clue test-wise examinees; for example, avoid clang associations, absurd options, formal prompts, or semantic (overly specific or overly general) clues.
- Avoid giving clues through the use of faulty grammatical construction.
- Avoid specific determiners, such as *never* and *always.*

Key Option Development Rules:

- Position the correct option so that it appears about the same number of times in each possible position for a set of items.
- Make sure there is one and only one correct option.

Distracter Development Rules:

- Use plausible distracters; avoid illogical distracters.
- Incorporate common errors of students in distracters.
- Avoid technically phrased distracters.
- Use familiar yet incorrect phrases as distracters.
- Use true statement that do not correctly answer the item.
- Avoid the use of humor when developing options.