



## ARELLO<sup>®</sup> EXAMINATION ACCREDITATION PROGRAM BASIC ITEM WRITING PRINCIPLES

Adopted 1991 for Internal Use Only. Revised and Adopted for Public Distribution 04-14-04.  
Updated ("certification" to "accreditation") 10-02-04. Revised September 14, 2007; April 4, 2011

The ARELLO<sup>®</sup> *Guidelines for Examination Accreditation* require that each test question (item) writer and reviewer be given detailed written guidelines specific to licensure examinations. These guidelines shall be thorough and include principles for preparing items that are consistent with the following ARELLO<sup>®</sup> *Examination Accreditation Program Basic Item Writing Principles*:

1. The item must have only one **clearly correct** or clearly best answer (called the "key"). The stem and answer must contain or result in an accurate statement(s).
2. The subject matter being tested by an item must be **relevant and appropriate**. Content must be linked to job-related activities (as identified through a job, task, or skills analysis) that define the knowledge and skills necessary to be competent to practice in a manner that protects the public interest.
3. Any scenarios used must be **realistic and appropriate**.
4. Each item must be based on an **important** point, idea, or skill that reflects an appropriate level of competency in knowledge or skill related to tasks shown to be needed for entry level.
5. The task must be presented as simply and **straightforwardly** as possible, but include all information that a candidate will need to determine the correct answer without having to make assumptions about critical information.
6. The language must be **clear and concise** and appropriate for the conceptual difficulty level of the examination and item. Terminology and phrasing must be technically accurate except in the distractors (wrong response choices) of multiple-choice items. However, although distractors are inaccurate or inadequate as an answer to the item, they must not contain fictitious terms.
7. Items must be free of extraneous, ambiguous, non sequitur, illogical or **confusing material** and free of tricky expressions, slang, and other tricky requirements.
8. There must be no **clues** or suggestions that would help the candidate who does not have the knowledge or skill that should be necessary to answer correctly.
9. Each item must be **independent** of other items so the answer to one item is not dependent upon the answer to another, except where testing multi-step processes encountered in practice using the situational set approach.
10. The level of reading required must be only as difficult as that required for **entry-level practice**.
11. Standard rules of **punctuation and grammar** must be followed.
12. Any item that is based on an **opinion** or authority must state whose opinion or what authority.
13. **Unnecessarily** convoluted, intricate, circuitous or detailed **operations** must be avoided.
14. The use of specific determiners like **"always," "never," "none," and "all"** should not be used in a manner that provides a clue to the correct answer.
15. Specific directions referring to any scenario or graphic used should be provided so that they can be easily related to the item.

16. Any pictorial materials used (drawing, charts, graphs, etc.) need to be clearly presented and labeled.
17. Information that is **stereotypic** or debasing or offensive to a test taker's culture, race, or religion, or to an age group, sex, or person under the provisions of ADA must not be used. This includes portraying or implying any inequality in ability, attributes or natural endowments of any group.
18. Items must not provide any clues or information that could be seen to work to the benefit or detriment of any particular group. This includes the use of group-specific language or vocabulary such as regional or culturally related expressions or slang.

### Additional Basic Principles for Multiple-Choice Items

1. The stem (main body of the question or problem scenario) must clearly define the task and, to the extent possible, enable the candidate to know what is required as a response without seeing the options (independent of the choice of responses).
2. The stem should not be limited to the information needed to derive the correct answer; it should provide sufficient information to support the plausibility of all distractors. The stem of a mathematics item must reflect realistic job-related activities and present an array of facts and figures from which the candidate must choose the appropriate information with which to derive the correct answer.
3. For stems that are presented in incomplete statement form, the options should complete the sentence as an ending to the statement rather than the beginning or middle.
4. Reduce the "reading load" as much as possible by not **repeating words in the options** that can be placed in the stem.
5. The item must not contain any verbal **clues** that might enable candidates to determine the correct option or eliminate incorrect options, such as a disagreement between singular and plural or similar clues.
6. The use of **negative words** including "except", "not" and "none" should be confined to use in the stem and should be highlighted (UPPER CASE, bold or underlined) to draw the attention of the candidate.
7. Response options must:
  - a. fit or match the stem **logically** and grammatically.
  - b. be approximately **equal in length**, logically parallel, and about equal in complexity.
  - c. be **grammatically and syntactically** parallel.
  - d. have a **unique meaning**, so that distractors with the same or similar meaning cannot be eliminated readily by candidates.
  - e. contain distractors that are **plausible** to the candidate who does not have the requisite knowledge and, in the case of mathematics items, be derivable by working the problem incorrectly (e.g., based on common errors of reasoning, misconception, misinterpretation, miscalculation, selection of information, relevance of fact, selection of partly correct options).
  - f. avoid using "all of the above," and use "none of the above" only sparingly if necessary.