

**Minnesota Psychological Association**  
**Guidelines for Writing Continuing Education Posttests**  
**MPA Education and Training Committee**

**Purpose:**

The major purpose of a CE program posttest is to meet Standard E. Program Evaluation of the *APA Standards and Criteria for Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education of Psychologists*. This standard requires that all CE programs be evaluated, but for CE programs that are not offered in person, an additional process to evaluate program effectiveness is required, and CE program sponsors are required to evaluate achieved learning. MPA is an APA approved sponsor of continuing education.

**General Guidelines for Posttest Writers:**

1. Write 6-8 questions for each hour of CE credit—you may be asked to write additional posttest items if test retakes are allowed, in which case test questions will be randomly drawn from your test item pool for the original test and the retake test
  
2. Posttest questions should focus on ensuring **each** program learning objective as stated in your original program publicity (“Participants will be able to”) has been achieved. You should write at least 2-3 posttest questions related to each learning objective.
  
3. It is assumed that all programs offered by MPA are being taught at the postdoctoral level; therefore, the “level” of posttest questions is a major consideration. With this in mind:
  - a) Do not create test questions that program participants could have answered without attending your program.
  - b) Avoid writing posttest questions that focus on dates, statistics, or content not directly related to an original program learning objective or the major program content.

- c) Avoid writing questions that require only simple recognition or recall of facts or definitions.
- d) Focus on questions that require program participants to analyze program content or apply program content to new situations or cases. You could, for example, write a brief mini-case and write several questions about that case.

**Creating Objective Posttest Questions** *(adapted from Carnegie Mellon University, Eberly Center, Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation)*

Creating objective test questions – such as multiple-choice questions – can be difficult, but here are some general rules to remember:

1. Write objective test questions so that there is one and only one best answer.
2. Word questions clearly and simply, avoiding double negatives, idiomatic language, and absolutes such as “never” or “always.”
3. Test only a single idea in each item.
4. Make sure wrong answers (distractors) are plausible.
5. Incorporate what you think might be common program participant errors as distractors.
6. Make sure the position of the correct answer (e.g., A, B, C, D) varies randomly from item to item.
7. Include from three to five options for each posttest item.
8. Make sure the length of response items is roughly the same for each question.
9. Keep the length of response items short.
10. Make sure there are no grammatical clues to the correct answer (e.g., the use of “a” or “an” can tip the test-taker off to an answer beginning with a vowel or consonant).
11. In multiple choice questions, use positive phrasing in the stem, avoiding words like “not” and “except.” If this is unavoidable, highlight the negative words (e.g., “Which of the following is NOT an example of...?”).
12. Avoid overlapping alternatives.

13. Avoid using “All of the above” and “None of the above” in responses. (In the case of “All of the above,” program attendees only need to know that two of the options are correct to answer the question. Conversely, program participants only need to eliminate one response to eliminate “All of the above” as an answer. Similarly, when “None of the above” is used as the correct answer choice, it tests program participants’ ability to detect incorrect answers, but not whether they know the correct answer.)

**Suggestion from Carnegie Mellon-- Enlist a colleague to read through your draft posttest:**

Sometimes questions that seem perfectly clear to you are not as clear as you believe. Thus, it can be a good idea to ask a colleague to read through (or even take) your exam to make sure everything is clear and unambiguous.

**Review of Your Posttest:**

Generally, the committee coordinating your CE program and the MPA Education and Training Committee will review your posttest prior to posting.

**Test Administration Instructions and Passing Criterion:**

Instructions given to program participants about the administration of your posttest and the posttest passing criterion will be written by your MPA program coordinator and the MPA Education and Training Committee. In general, this information will be the same for most MPA CE posttest administrations.

**Questions?**

Contact Katie Benson in the MPA Office at [katie.benson@mnpsych.org](mailto:katie.benson@mnpsych.org).

Thank you for your interest in and contributions to MPA’s continuing education program!

STR/final/6/30/2020