Appendix C - Question writing guidelines for authors

Contents

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to give you advice on the best way to prepare your work to maintain consistency across our question banks and to help ensure that the production process is as quick and efficient as possible.

Getting to grips with these guidelines should give you a good grasp of the things you can and can't say; why you can and can't say them; and the tone of voice in which to say them. This document is not meant to be a rulebook from which you cannot stray; it is intended to guide you in the most effective way to communicate.

The CITB brand has been defined through extensive customer and staff research to ensure it is accurately positioned and reflects who we are, why we exist and what we do. Consistency of visual and verbal communications is really important in creating a strong, cohesive recognisable brand, which is an important part of our publications.

2.0 General Guidance

Cskills Awards Question and Answer bank comprises solely of multiple choice **items** (questions).

A multiple choice item is made up of three distinct parts:

STEM – the question or problem being set

KEY – the correct answer

DISTRACTORS – the incorrect alternatives

NB: When referred to collectively, the KEY and DISTRACTORS are called the OPTIONS.

2.0 Voice

The way that we write and the tone of voice used affects the impression made on our audience. We need to use a style of writing that has an approachable but professional tone of voice and one that allows our audience to understand what we want to say quickly and easily.

It is essential that new content is written in a style suitable for the audience and not aimed at subject matter experts.

The language you use should adopt a tone that is professional, measured, plain, personal and conversational. The aim is to provide the audience with the information they need in a clear, concise way, not to baffle or confuse them with jargon.

- Talk about doing things and using active verbs, rather than nouns, to get the point across.
- Always use plain English.
- Avoid using acronyms.
- Avoid negative questions, consider alternate question type such as sequencing or filling in the blanks.

3.0 Style

These simple house rules help to ensure that everyone writes in the same way, ensuring accuracy and consistency and thus providing clarity for our audience.

Sentence structure

Passive verbs and words such as improving, supporting and provision make for dull, heavy reading and often it sounds like nothing is happening in the sentence. Use active sentences, wherever possible, and use verbs instead of nouns. Some examples are shown below.

Right	Wrong
Complete	Completion
Introduce	Introducing
Deliver	Delivery
Support	Supporting
Provide	Providing

Avoid management speak

Here are some words that you should do your best to avoid using. You may not always agree, but try to remember that you are not writing for your own benefit, but for your readers'.

Unadvisable	Advisable
Accessible	Easy to get to, easy access
Activities	Work
Add value	Improve
Additional	Extra
Advise	Tell
Best practice	Good example
Commence	Start
Complete	Fill in
Comply with	Keep to
Consequently	So
Engage	Talk to, involve, employ
Ensure	Make sure
Forward	Send
In accordance with	Under, keeping to
In excess of	More than
In respect of	For
In the event of	If
Key	Most important, main
Going forward	From now
On receipt	When you get
Particulars	Details
Per annum	A year
Persons	People
Prior to	Before

4.0 Imagery

Photography is a great way to connect with and inspire our audience. The right image can have an immediate impact and create a lasting impression.

When choosing or commissioning photography the style must be confident, simple, understated, clean and modern. Photographs should be believable, realistic, aspirational and in context. They should appear natural and unposed, with a representative range of ethnicity, gender, age, people of all abilities and trades. Whenever possible you should use real people in real situations.

When choosing images there are several key points to consider, shown below.

- What is the image trying to communicate?
- Does it show diversity and convey our brand personality?
- Are workers wearing the appropriate work wear?
- Are current health and safety requirements being adhered to?
- Is the quality acceptable? (*Refer to 4.1 Resolutions.*)
- Do you have permission to use it? (*Refer to 4.2 Permissions.*)

Clearly identify where images are to go by using square brackets in the text that you submit. Also, ensure that it is obvious which image goes where, by giving using the question reference details and adding a brief description of what it is, for example:

- L1Core01.1.2.2, Illustration of high-visibility jacket, Stem or Option A

Every new image should be accompanied with a caption, which should be the brief description of the image (as shown above).

4.1 Resolution

To ensure the images you supply are appropriate for use, you need to ensure that the:

- image resolution is a minimum of 300 dpi
- file is saved as a jpeg (to enable upload to our digital asset management system).

As a guide, the file size should be over 1 MB and when you open the image (viewed at 100%) it should be crisp and good quality (not pixelated).

4.2 Permissions

Unless it has been agreed otherwise in your contract, it is your responsibility to clear all copyright permissions for any text or images that you include, if similar text or an illustration, table, or data used has been published elsewhere.

Ensure that you have obtained **written** permission from the copyright holder and acknowledge the original source, in square brackets, at the end of the caption. We will need copies of permissions for our files. It is important that you begin clearing permissions as early as possible, as it can often be a slow process.

Material found on the internet is **not** in the public domain. The content is owned by an infinite variety of sources and is subject to copyright law. The expense and effort involved in tracking down contributors and clearing copyright with them is usually not worthwhile. Equally, do not plagiarise text or images from a website – not only is it illegal but it will result in a change in style from the existing publication. Clip art should also not be used.

If you want to use a newspaper or magazine article please make sure you note down the publication date and original headline so that you can trace it easily. However, bear in mind that the publications concerned often do not own the copyright of the individual articles they have published. In most cases, the writers of the articles and the photographers of any images have to grant permission and be paid a fee, making it complicated to include the article in question. Usually, an original article is not necessary, and a paraphrase or mock-up of the news story is sufficient. Therefore, include one only where there is a special reason for doing so (for example, only if it is an integral and necessary part of the text).

Things that do not need clearing are:

- extracts that have fallen out of copyright – 70 years after the death of an author
- short extracts that do not form a substantial part of the original work.

5.0 Principles of question authoring

5.1 Multiple Choice Question Types

- Conventional multiple choice - minimum of four options (with one correct answer), where more than one correct answer is required, increase the number of options accordingly.
- Sequencing questions
- Fill the gap questions

5.2 Structuring and wording

All questions should be structured or worded as follows:

- Conventional multiple choice questions should be a complete question, finishing with a question mark.
- The options (a list of answers) will all start with a capital letter and will have a final fullstop.
- Do not ask 'What would you do?' as any answer from the candidate would be defensible (avoid 'you' where possible).
- When using acronyms, ensure the full meaning follows in brackets.
- Emphasise any important words (limited to one word per question). Target words (such as first, least, except, most, etc.) should be emboldened.
- Negative questions should be avoided, wherever possible. If used, always embolden the word 'not'.
- The number of correct answers should be included in the question stem and emboldened.
- Ensure none of the distractors are viable answers.
- Avoid 'giving away' they correct answer in the stem.
- Responses should each be of a similar length.
- Numerical responses should be in ascending order.
- Avoid 'none of the above' or 'all of the above' as responses.
- Avoid words such as 'frequently', 'sometimes', 'always, 'only' and 'never'
- Avoid repetitive wording in the responses – include within the stem, if possible.
- Avoid using '/' as this causes difficulty in translation. Use wording 'and', 'or' or 'and/or' as appropriate.

Some examples

Place **most of the phrasing** in the stem.

- Poor stem:

  Type II diabetes is
    a. also called juvenile-onset
    b. characterised by insulin dependency
    c. primarily seen in adults over 40
    d. often managed by drug therapy

- Better stem:

  What is the most frequent age of onset for Type II diabetes?

Avoid **teaching** in the stem.

- Poor stem:

  HR professionals are required to undertake continuing professional development. What is the minimum number of hours required in a two-year period?
    a. 10
    b. 15
    c. 20
    d. 25

- Better stem:

  How many hours of continuing professional development must an HR professional take in a two-year period?

Use active voice, not passive voice.

- Active voice: Subject matter experts write the test items
- Passive voice: The test items are written by subject matter experts

Items should be written in the present tense.

- Present tense: A patient presents to the emergency room
- NOT past tense: A patient presented to the emergency room