

The ABC's of Writing Occupational Questionnaire Items

Screening applicants with an occupational questionnaire? Here are some helpful hints on writing quality questionnaire items.

IDENTIFY WHAT TO ASSESS

First, identify the competencies you plan to measure, based on your job analysis. The competencies you identify should relate to tasks and activities that can be seen and measured.

Generally, you will want to select about five (5) competencies as the focus of the occupational questionnaire.

WRITE BEHAVIORALLY-BASED ITEMS

The rule of thumb is to ask about 5 to 10 quality items for each competency.

- ☑ **Clearly distinguish competencies** (e.g., be sure an item doesn't measure both technical AND general content)
- ☑ **Consider level of experience required** (e.g., should the item cover very job-specific knowledge or general job-related behavior?)
- ☑ **Items should distinguish among candidates** (i.e., break items into different levels of proficiency)
- ☑ **Use observable (verifiable) terms** (e.g., "write a report" vs. "develop a report" as a measure for Written Communication)
- ☑ **Write clearly and succinctly** (e.g., "Audits employee time reports" vs. "Audits employee time reports of persons under own supervision by checking for errors in addition and hours claimed")

BUILD CONSISTENCY INTO YOUR PROCESS

- ☑ Establish clear standards of quality
- ☑ HR professionals should be trained in good item writing practices
- ☑ Consider designating certain individuals to develop occupational questionnaires
- ☑ Evaluate your results to determine the usefulness of your items



Did you know?

The general formula for writing items is:

Perform *What?* + to *Whom* or *What?* + to produce *What?* or *Why?* *How?*
(ex, Sort + incoming mail + into groups for distribution)