Guidelines for Item Writing

Selected Response Items

► Items should assess targeted concepts/skills ("unwrapped" standard).

► Self-contained question stems should present a complete problem so that students know what to do before looking at the options; students should not need to read all the options before knowing what is expected.

► All options, including the correct response, should be similar in length and syntax. Students should not be able to rule out the wrong answer or identify a correct response solely because it looks or sounds different from the other options.

► Distractors are plausible.

► Distractors should reflect common student errors/misconceptions.

► Wording should be positive rather than negatively stated. There should be no humorous choices.

► There should be no cueing or clues to the correct response.

► Choices should appear in logical or numerical order.

► The use of "none of the above," "all of the above," etc., should be avoided.

► The answer choices should be equal in length.

► The position of the correct answer in the list should vary, with an equal distribution of answer positions.

Traditional Selected Response

► All options should be plausible, and there must be a correct or best answer.

Nontraditional Selected Response (SBAC)/ Evidence-Based Selected Response (PARCC)

► All distractors should be plausible, and there can be more than one correct or best answer. These items usually have more than four distractors.

► Evidence-based selected response items combine a traditional selected response item with a nontraditional selected response item with more than four distractors.

Constructed Response Items

► Items should have clearly stated directions with explicit expectations.

► Directions and rubrics should align to the cognitive rigor of the "unwrapped" standard/DOK ceiling.

► A rubric or scoring guide should be provided.

► Items should present the task as simply as possible, adequately and clearly prompting the student to do everything required by the rubric.

► The item should ask students to back up answers with evidence from the text or a mathematical justification (labeled diagram, equation, explanation, etc.).