

## **Test Construction and Assembly**

**Question:** *We have completed a job/practice analysis and used the results to develop test specifications for our examination program. How do we use this information to develop valid examinations?*

**Answer:** A series of steps are required after the test specifications have been developed. It is important to understand that an examination does not possess validity. Validity of a licensing examination is inferred from the accumulated evidence in support of the specific interpretation of the test scores. For most licensing tests, the evidence is typically based on the examination testing the job-related competencies shown to be relevant from the results of the job/practice analysis. To have strong evidence in support of the examination during the construction and assembly process, the following items should be considered:

- The first step is to ensure that the test questions are linked to the test specifications, and that the test specifications, in turn, are linked to the results of the job/practice analysis.
- Before the test questions are written, care must be given in selecting the item writers to ensure that they are truly subject matter experts – that they represent the practice, e.g., in terms of ethnicity, gender, length of licensure, and specialty areas of practice.
- The SMEs must be trained on the procedures for writing well-constructed items. (The FAQ on *Item Development/Review* provides additional information on this topic.)
- SMEs should be formed into an Exam Committee (EC) that has the responsibility to ensure that all items selected for the test meet the review criteria established by the Board. These may include that each item is properly linked to the test specifications, is written clearly and succinctly, has only one correct or best answer, and has plausible distractors. (The FAQ on *Item Development/Review* provides additional information on this topic.)
- The EC should review the entire test to ensure the group of items selected not only exactly match the specifications, but can be used with each other. Many items in large item pools are classified as “enemies” and should not be used on the same test form.
- Once the final group of items is selected, it is a good idea to have the entire EC review the test one more time, and answer all the items. This identifies any problematic wording or items with disagreements on the single best answer.

In summary, validity evidence must be collected not only in the course of examination development, but also in the administration, scoring, and in the determination of the passing score. (See additional FAQs on these topics for more information). If proper procedures are not applied consistently in any of these areas, then the validity of the examination program may be questioned. It is necessary to be vigilant at every step in an examination program in order to ensure the validity of the licensing decision. Validity is a function of doing many things correctly.