

# How to...

## Write effective questions



Whether they're for an assessment or part of the training course itself, writing questions can be a tricky business. Read on for Saffron's top ten tips for creating effective questions that test learners in the right way, on the right thing.

### 1 **Draft the assessment before the content**

If step one is defining the objectives and learning outcomes, step two is drafting the assessment. Make sure each question maps back to the outcomes and then focus the training content on the assessment.

### 2 **Randomise the assessment**

Ideally an end of course assessment will have a pool of questions, with a random selection drawn on each attempt. This means, if learners fail once, they can't simply memorise where they went wrong but are actually tested again.

### 3 **Remember: quality not quantity**

When it comes to assessments, it's better to have 10 excellent questions than 40 substandard ones. Likewise, multiple choice questions generally work best with four options – don't go below three or above five without a very good reason.

### 4 **Use questions to drive the learning**

We're big believers in the value of the test and tell approach. Don't just give learners information and then test them on it. Instead, ask them to think for themselves with a question before correcting or confirming their answers.

### 5 **Focus on behaviours**

We're in the business of changing behaviours. This means we need to enable learners to do the right thing, not just to remember facts and figures. Make sure every question relates to a choice or decision learners will face in real life.

### 6 **Make it challenging...**

If the right answer is three times as long as the rest, or the wrong answers are likely to make learners laugh than think, there's no point even asking the question. Yes, coming up with plausible wrong answers is hard, but it's worth the effort.

### 7 **...but keep it fair**

Don't try to trick learners or give them an impossible choice. Negative questions, options that are identical except for one word, and questions on topics that weren't actually covered in the course are neither fair nor effective.

### 8 **Avoid yes/no questions**

Giving learners a 50% chance of guessing correctly is not the most effective test. If you must use them, include a couple more options and make sure that 'yes', 'no' and 'maybe' are qualified, so learners have to justify their choice.

### 9 **Help people learn from their mistakes**

Don't just use ticks and crosses to show how learners have done. Provide constructive feedback to reinforce the message if they answer correctly, and explain where they went wrong if they answer incorrectly.

### 10 **Keep the learners' experience in mind**

Focusing on behaviours is one way to answer the 'what's in it for me?' question. But there are other ways – for instance, pre-tests assess existing knowledge and point towards the most relevant training units. Time efficient and effective!