
The process and guidelines for question vetting at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UNIMAS

Ong Puay Hoon¹

Abstract

The importance of vetting and re-vetting of examination questions cannot be overstated. In the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), there is a prescribed structure and protocol of question setting and vetting for examinations in both undergraduate medical and nursing programmes. The areas that are examined during question vetting are technical accuracy, content and language aspects.

The use of the prescribed structure and protocol of question vetting ensures a consistently high standard of question presentation during examinations.

Introduction

The importance of vetting and re-vetting of examination questions cannot be overstated. In the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), there is a prescribed structure and protocol of question setting and vetting for examinations in both undergraduate medical and nursing programmes. However, this prescribed protocol differs for End-of-Block/Posting and Professional examinations.

End-Of-Block/Posting Examinations

Often at the beginning of a Block/Posting or sometimes a few weeks before End-of-Block/Posting examinations, the Block or Posting Coordinators will call for questions from relevant lecturers, giving information regarding subject area/discipline, type of questions (whether MCQ-Multiple True/False, MCQ-Best Answer Type, MEQ, OSPE or OSCE) and number of questions for each subject area and type of questions. This information is sometimes distributed in the form of a matrix/table. A date is fixed for submission of questions to the coordinator and another date for vetting of the questions. All lecturers involved in the construction of questions are invited for the vetting session. The number of vetted questions in each subject area/discipline selected for the examination will be proportional to its lecture/contact hours.

Depending on whether the questions go towards the End-of-Block or Posting examinations, either in Phase 1 or Phase 2, the coordinator will be invited to attend the vetting session. The Block Coordinator usually chairs the vetting session and various aspects of the questions will be paid attention to. The vetted questions are then sent to the Examination Unit at the Academic Office for formatting into an examination paper draft. This draft will then be checked for technical and language compliancy by a representative from the Medical Education Unit. The Block/Posting Coordinator will check the final draft before the Examination Unit processes it into examination papers.

Professional Examinations

Separate question vetting committees for MCQ, MEQ and OSPE/OSCE will be appointed by the Dean of the Faculty for the Professional Examinations. The members of the committees include representatives from various disciplines. A few months before the First and Final Professional Examinations, the relevant Phase Coordinators will call for questions from all lecturers involved in the particular phase, giving information regarding subject area/discipline, type of questions (whether MCQ-Multiple True/False, MCQ-Best Answer Type, MEQ, OSPE or OSCE) and number of questions for each subject area and type of questions. A date is fixed for submission of questions to the coordinator. The Chairpersons of the vetting committees will schedule date(s) for vetting these

¹Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
Email: phong@fmhs.unimas.my

questions. All members of the committees and lecturers involved in the submission of questions are invited for the vetting session(s). The Chairperson of the vetting committee chairs the session and various aspects of the questions will be paid attention to. Questions that are to be revised are referred back to the original authors for endorsement of the revisions. The vetted questions are submitted back to the Phase Coordinators, who will select and arrange the questions in a specific order. These questions are sent to the Examination Unit, Academic Office for formatting into an examination paper draft. This draft will be checked for its technical and language compliancy by the Deputy Dean (Undergraduate and Student Development). The Phase Coordinator will check the final draft before the Examination Unit processes it into examination papers.

Many variables are given careful attention during the vetting process to ensure that the examination questions are correct, fair, valid and reliable. These variables can be divided into the following three aspects: technical, content and language. Compliance of the questions with these three aspects ensure both content and construct validity, besides ensuring that the examination measures understanding of prescribed content/process and not understanding of the question itself.

Aspects of questions taken note of during vetting

1. TECHNICAL

- There is technical accuracy, that is, the question complies with the recommended format and requirements of its type
- Task or demands of question is appropriate with the provision of time
- Marks awarded for each question or the total marks allotted for each question type is as required

MCQs

- There are five options, A, B, C, D and E

MEQs

- Space allotted for the answers to particular questions is appropriate to task
- Appropriate length of MEQ text

2. CONTENT

- Relevance of question to subject area/discipline

- Distribution of questions in relation to subject area/discipline and according to specified rubrics
 - Information in the question is valid, appropriate and current
 - Content being tested is within the syllabus
 - Content being tested is deemed important
 - Content being tested does not contravene any regulations or laws
 - Content being tested is not culturally or racially sensitive
 - The difficulty level of each question commensurate with the ability level of the group to be tested
 - There should be a range of difficulty, from easy to difficult
 - There should be a proper mix of skills tested, from factual to understanding, prediction, inference or implication
 - There should be no cues in the text or stem towards the right answer
 - There should be no overlap of exact content being tested in the questions within and between question types

MCQs

- Each MCQ should be integrated rather than single subject/discipline oriented
- The stem is clear, short and precise
- There is a definite, explicit and singular question/problem in the stem.
- Questions with negative stems, for example, NOT, EXCEPT, etc. are to be avoided or its number kept to a minimum. When used, the negative word is underlined/capitalized/bold
- All options are of similar length
- All options have a reasonable chance of being selected as answers
- All options are consistent in terms of aspect or perspective, that is, distracters are of the same class as the key
- All options are approximates rather than opposites
- Options which are mutually exclusive are avoided
- Options which are synonymous with, include or overlap others are avoided
- Options are presented in some logical order, for example, chronologically, most to least, least to most, etc.
- Distracters relate to some superficial logic or a popular misconception /belief and have a 'ring of truth'
- There is only one unequivocal key or correct/best answer

- The key should not be too obvious (test taker does not need to read the text/stem further or read the other options)
- Vary the location of the answer/key as random a basis as possible
- Vague qualitative modifiers such as “many”, “large”, “much”, “small”, “old” and “important”, etc. are avoided
- Cues to the key such as “always”, “never”, “all”, etc. are avoided
- There should be no double negatives in both stems and/or options

MEQs

- MEQ scenario must contain facts for thinking from multidisciplinary approach
- The sequence of scenarios on different pages depict development of different stages of problem or issue
- Each scenario provides relevant new information and requires clinical appraisal, problem solving or decision making

3. LANGUAGE

- Standardisation of spelling norms to British orthography
- Terminology used is the current version
- Punctuation marks are correct and proper
- Language used is simple, clear and direct
- Language used is not colloquial or oral-oriented
- Consistent use of tenses
- Appropriate action verbs are used, for example, indicate, show, illustrate, give, etc.
- No spelling errors
- No typography errors
- No grammar mistakes

Conclusion

The use of the prescribed structure and protocol of question setting and vetting in the Faculty ensures a consistently high standard of question presentation during examinations.