

Pennsylvania Style Guide



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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1.1 Multiple-Choice/Selected Response Format

1.1A Closed Stem

This is usually in the form of a question. The answer choices do not have ending punctuation unless each answer choice is a complete sentence. One-word and short phrases should not be capitalized (unless it is a proper noun).

1.1B Open Stem

The stem is completed in the answer choices. The first word of each answer option is lowercase, unless it is a proper noun, and there is appropriate end punctuation.

1.1C Grade 3 Mathematics stems are generally written as one sentence per paragraph.

1.2 Answer Options for Multiple-Choice/Selected Response

1.2A MC items have four options.

1.2B Parallel Answer Options

MC item answer options generally must be syntactically parallel with each other. Lists of items or topics generally must be parallel.

1.2C In MC items that use an open-stem format, articles with the stem are kept in the stem unless the answer options require different articles (e.g., “a” vs. “an”).

1.2D For math items, if all four answer option names appear in the stem in a particular order (e.g., a listing of how many marbles each of four students have), they will be listed in the same order in the distractor list as in the stem. In general, numeric answer choices are placed in ascending order.

1.2E All MC answer option letter designators are capitalized with no periods following.

1.3 General Open-Ended/Constructed-Response

1.3A When both Test Books and Answer Books are used, OE items appear in the Answer Book or consumable book.

1.4 Mathematics Open-Ended/Constructed-Response

- 1.4A** OE items for mathematics are designed to be two pages long. The pages should be placed in the Answer Book so that both pages are visible to the student at the same time (i.e., one left-hand page and one right-hand page).
- 1.4B** The OE item is always preceded by a set of item-specific directions.
- 1.4C** If the second page of the OE item contains part of the task (e.g., part B of the task), the “continue” instructions at the bottom of the first (left-hand) page will read, “GO TO THE NEXT PAGE TO FINISH QUESTION XX.” The lead-in text on the second (right-hand) page will read “**Continued.** Please refer to the previous page for task explanation.”
- 1.4D** If the second page of the OE item is provided as extra response space only, the “continue” instructions at the bottom of the first (left-hand) page will read, “IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, PLEASE USE PAGE XX.” The lead-in text on the second (right-hand) page will read “**Continued.** If you need more space, use this page. Please refer to the previous page for task explanation.”

1.5 Reading Open-Ended/Constructed-Response

- 1.5A** OE items in the reading sections are one page. The stem of the item is generally two or three lines in length. Questions and/or statements may be used in the OE item stem.

2 Language Issues Unique to Items and Directions

NOTE: For all issues regarding grammar, usage, and punctuation, *The Chicago Manual of Style—15th Edition* should be consulted. Also consult *Garner’s Modern American Usage* and *Words into Type, 3rd Edition*. Consult *American Heritage Dictionary* to verify correct spelling and meaning and/or *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*. Permissioned stimuli may require exceptions (on a case-by-case basis). For writing, consult traditional grammar and usage textbooks used in Pennsylvania classrooms, including *English Composition and Grammar*, by John E. Warriner, *MLA Handbook*, *Turabian’s Manual for Writers*, and *Tufte’s Artful Sentences*. *Exceptions are noted.*

2.1 Capitalization and Punctuation

- 2.1A** Capitalize the initial letter of all words in the title or subheads of a chart or a graph except articles and **all** prepositions. Subsequent information in charts should be lowercase unless it is a proper noun. If, however, the text/chart/graph is found in the passage, the style in the item should reflect the style in the passage. (Distractors should match stem. Do not capitalize the distractors that are sentence fragments.)
- 2.1B** Use the serial comma in directions and test items. In a series of three or more, use a comma

before the conjunction. *Example: Which figure has a similar height, width, and length?*

2.1C In mathematics, use commas when the numbers represent a pattern (unless it is a replication problem). Do NOT use commas when the item deals with a measure of central tendency, comparing, or ordering numbers.

2.1D Apostrophes should be curved, not straight font style.

2.1E In mathematics, use a colon at the end of a single-word prompt (followed by a specific expression or equation). When a colon is used in this way, do not use end punctuation.

Example:

Solve:

$$x - 3(2x + 7) = -26$$

2.1F Directions that include a series of item sequence numbers should use an en dash (without spaces) between numbers. For example: *Use the chart below to answer questions 13–15.* If the stimulus is being used to answer only two questions, use *and* instead of the en dash. For example: *Use the chart below to answer questions 13 and 14.*

2.2 Phrasing and Word Choice

2.2A “of the following”

Do not use in stem. Also avoid “the figure above” and “of these.”

NOTE: “of the following” is acceptable for use in the writing assessment.

2.2B “all of the above,” “and/or,” or “none of the above”:

Do not use these constructions in MC items.

3 Numbers, Operators, Variables, and Constants

3.1 Numbers and Operators

3.1A In mathematics, when numbers with multiple number places are spelled out within an item, insert commas. *Example: two thousand, five hundred seventy-two. [Exception from Chicago.]*

3.1B When a number in a mathematics item is a decimal with no whole number part, include a zero to the left of the decimal point. *Examples: 0.35, \$0.50.*

3.1C Fractions should be stacked, with the numerator and denominator each spaced 2 points from

the fraction line. A fraction line is not a hyphen; it is a hairline that extends roughly one point to the left and right of the longest term in the numerator or denominator. Fraction numerators should be centered over denominators. Set numerators and denominators should be 12 point. (Exceptions will occur with reading passages.)

- 3.1D** In general, ordinal numbers should be written out (not superscript).
- 3.1E** Use a single space between numerals and symbols denoting operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division). *Example:* $5 + 3 = 8$. Use no space between numerals or letters/variables and associated properties. *Examples:* 12^2 , x^3 , $m \angle ABC$
- 3.1F** When a ratio only uses numerical values, a maximum of one-half space should be used around the colon. *Example:* 2:3. When a ratio includes units, a single space should be used around the colon. *Example:* 2 inches : 3 miles
- 3.1G** Use minus signs—not hyphens—in subtraction problems. Use a raised minus sign to represent negative numbers. Use a raised negative sign for negative powers. *Example:* 3^{-2}

3.2 Variables

- 3.2A** Use italics for all variables in formulas or equations (regardless of capitalization). *Example:* $Ax + By = C$
- 3.2B** Lowercase letters must be italicized if they are used to label math figures. *Example:* Line g
- 3.2C** Do not use italics for uppercase letters used as labels (e.g., vertices) within graphics. *Example:* $\angle ABC$
- 3.2D** Use italics for the horizontal and vertical axis labels on graphs.

3.3 Constants

- 3.3A** The symbols i [the imaginary unit], e [Euler's number], π [pi] will be in a serif font.
- 3.3B** The symbols i [the imaginary unit] and e [Euler's number] shall be italicized.
- 3.3C** The symbol π [pi] shall not be italicized.

4 Abbreviations

- 4.1 It is acceptable to abbreviate units of measure (centimeters, inches, feet, kilograms, etc.) in figures, but these terms should be spelled out in the stems and answer choices unless otherwise indicated. Whatever approach is used (i.e., abbreviating vs. spelling out) should be consistently used within the same item.
- 4.2 It is preferable to spell out *feet*, *inches*, etc. consistently when used in any test. In math, however, it is also acceptable to use abbreviations. Be consistent about using abbreviations in parentheses after spelling out the word(s) for less common abbreviations. It is preferable to use abbreviations at the upper grade levels. The only abbreviation for which a period at the end should appear is for inches, (i.e., “in.”) and ounces (i.e., “oz.”) [Exception to Chicago.]
- 4.3 The abbreviations “A.M.” and “P.M.” appear as small cap with periods. [Exception to Chicago.]

5 Emphasis

5.1 Underlining

- 5.1A Vocabulary stimulus words and phrases (including antonyms and synonyms) are underlined in both the passage and in the item stem. Examples:

Read the following sentence(s) from the passage.

“..... (underlined vocabulary word).....”

What does the word (underlined vocabulary word) mean?

OR

The meaning of the word (underlined vocabulary word) is _____.

OR

What word means the same as (underlined vocabulary word)?

OR

Some similar phrasing.

Preference is to have vocabulary sentence(s) in the item, but allowances can be made if the vocabulary word needs the full paragraph or more to get the meaning from the context clues.

- 5.1B Underscoring should be placed 2 points below the descenders of underlined text or 2 points below where the descenders would be if there were any.

5.2 Boldface

- 5.2A The following words are presented in boldface when the word is used for emphasis: **best**, **greatest**, **least**, **most**, and **not**. See below for additional content-specific guidelines.

- 5.2B** In mathematics, when the words listed in the chart below are used in the stem as mathematics terms, the word should be boldfaced.

Always		Optional
• about	• mean absolute deviation	• and
• closest estimate	• median	• closest approximation
• experimental	• minimum	• even
• fewest	• mode	• odd
• interquartile range	• most likely	• or
• least likely	• only	• part A
• maximum	• theoretical	• part B
• mean		• range

- 5.2C** In reading, when the word **except** is used in the stem for emphasis, the word should be boldfaced. Do not bold the word “most” in the phrase “most likely.” “**Both**” should be shown in boldface if it is used in pairings of passages; however, if “both” is the first word in the stem, it is not set in bold face.
- 5.2D** In science, when the words **except**, **most appropriate**, and **most likely** are used in the stem for emphasis, the word should be boldfaced.
- 5.2E** In charts and graphs, titles and headers are set bold. Parenthetical information that follows the header should also be bold.
- 5.2F** Punctuation marks that follow bolded text should also be set bold.
- 5.2G** The primary accented syllable in a dictionary entry should be set bold.

6 Typesetting/Layout/Alignment

- 6.1 Questions should appear on the same page and/or the page facing a passage whenever possible.
- 6.2 Questions should span two columns (flows across the page).
- 6.3 Center graphics, expressions, equations, etc. within item text.
- 6.4 In tables, text is left justified and numbers are centered, unless noted.
- 6.5 Expressions, equations, and figures that appear above or below the stem are centered in relation to the page.
- 6.6 Numbers in answer options are left-aligned.
- 6.7 Footnotes should be formatted with the superscript number followed by the word from the passage that is being defined. The word being defined is followed by an em dash and the definition. Footnotes (superscript number and all text that follows) should be typeset 1 point smaller than the text of the passage. A line should appear above the text of the footnote. The line is not bold. In reading passages, the line should extend to the end of the footnote copy (and somewhat beyond for very short footnotes.) Note that the em dash in this document (Word) looks different than the em dash in test forms.

Examples of footnote format:

¹ cupreous—of, resembling, or containing copper; coppery

² aspen—a kind of tree

A footnote for a poem should work with the column format of the poem. Left align the footnote, but extend the line above the footnote to the approximate width of the column.

- 6.8 When using a footnote for definition in a chart, use an asterisk at the first occurrence, but not thereafter (for example, to define a word or to specify that *kWh* means “kilowatts per hour”).

7 Text Aesthetics

- 7.1** Avoid widows and orphans in text when appropriate. If a small word is alone on the last line of text, bring the previous word down a line or track the widow up to the previous line.
- 7.2** In general, pay attention to line breaks. If there is a word that extends far past other lines, move it to the next line.
- 7.3** Keep natural pairs together. Specifically, make sure that numbers and units, word pairs, and hyphenated words stay on one line (if possible):
- 2 centimeters* *10:00 A.M.* *Mr. Reed*