

Quick Reference Guide for Writing & Editing ABPath CertLink® Items

Stem:

- Provide a brief clinical history.
- The inclusion of age and gender is at the Item Writer's discretion.
 - If used, format age using hyphens (eg, "XX-year-old male/female").
 - Use "male" and "female." Do not use "man," "woman," "boy," or "girl."
- Use past tense.
- If there is a list of laboratory results, put the list into a table. For Item Writers without the capability to build a table in the database, please create one in Word, take a screenshot, and submit it as an image.
- If there is a table, make certain that it follows the Stem.

Lead-in:

- Make certain that the Lead-in asks a question. For example, a Lead-in should read, "What is the most likely diagnosis?" rather than, "The most likely diagnosis is:". The Lead-in must clearly define the task so that the question can be answered before viewing the Answer Choices.
- Multiple true/false items are NOT acceptable (eg, "Which statement is correct about 'X'?").
- Do not ask, "Which of the following..." or "All of the following is true except..."

Answer Choices:

- The Key is the correct Answer Choice.
- Distractors are the incorrect Answer Choices.
- Alphabetize unless they are listed in order of benign to malignant (NILM, LSIL, HSIL, SCC) or some other logical progression. In such cases, please indicate "DO NOT ALPHA" in the Comments box. If changes were made, make certain the correct answer is marked.
- Answer Choices should be homogeneous, testing a single dimension (eg, all IHC stains, all diagnoses, all clinical associations, all genes).
- A lowercase letter begins each Answer Choice unless it is a proper noun or a complete sentence.
- No period should be at the end of an Answer Choice unless it is a complete sentence.
- Answer Choices should be of similar length; avoid the common pitfall of the Key being the longest Answer Choice.

Critique:

- The Critique should provide clear and comprehensive explanations for why the Key (correct answer) is correct **and** why each Distractor (incorrect answer) is incorrect, just like working through a differential diagnosis.
- The goal of the Critique (answer explanation) is to help each participant expand their knowledge and diagnostic ability.

Key Learning Objective (KLO):

- The KLO should briefly summarize (one phrase or sentence) the "take-away knowledge" a diplomate should possess after reading the Critique.
 - Examples include "Diagnosis of glioblastoma," "Diagnosing melanoma," "Prognostic indicators in breast carcinoma," and "Laboratory accreditation standards."
- Place a period at the end of **all** KLOs (phrases and sentences).

References:

- URLs/hyperlinks to sources are preferred, but the Document Object Identifier (DOI), ISBN (for textbooks), NLM call number, and the PubMed ID (PMID) are also acceptable.
- Attribute the source of an image if it's not created by you.

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Item Type:

- If the item asks for a recall of facts, it is a RECALL item.
- If the item has data to interpret (eg, lab results), it is a PRACTICAL item.
- If the item is associated with an image(s), it is a PRACTICAL W/ IMAGE item.

Practice Area:

- The Practice Area denotes the area in pathology to which the question is applicable.
- The Practice Area determines which pathologists will receive the question based on the Elective area(s) they choose when designing their ABPCL assessment.
- The Practice Area requested of an author must be the Primary one assigned to the item.
- Up to four different Practice Areas can be assigned to one item if it's applicable to more than one area of pathology.

Category Code:

- The Category Code is dependent upon the Practice Area chosen and is a more granular subtopic area.

Images:

- Label which stain is depicted in any image that is not an H&E.
- Attribute the source of an image if it's not created by you.
- Refer to the [Acquisition and Use of Web Images for ABPath Exams](#) for more information about images.

General Notes:

- Check for misspelled words, punctuation and grammatical errors, and other typos.
- Immunoreactive “to” not “for”
- This lesion *from* the ___ *of* a 53-year-old male/female
- What is the most likely diagnosis *for* this ___ lesion *from* a 36-year-old male/female?
- What is the most likely diagnosis for this leg lesion (not “lesion from the leg”)?
- A patient with AIDS, not an AIDS patient
- Pregnant patient (not pregnant female)
- 2 cm, not 2cm; **BUT:** a 2-cm lesion (noun “lesion” follows “2-cm”)
- No need to say male/female when the Stem refers to the prostate/testicle/ovary/uterus. Instead, say “patient.”
- Capitalize any reference to race or ethnicity.
- AMA does not use the trademark symbol because of the capitalization of a trademark name. Trademarks or product names should only be used if a generic name is not possible or applicable.
- Do not use a/an or a(n) in the Stem; instead, put “a” or “an” in the Answer Choices.
- Items test the application of knowledge based on cases/scenarios encountered in practice.
- Items should have longer Stems and shorter Answer Choices.
- There are no technical flaws or clues benefitting test-wise diplomates.
- Items that require interpretation and application of knowledge are preferred.
- If an item mentions a “gene fusion” or “gene translocation,” make certain to use a double colon between the two (eg, *EML4::ALK* fusion; *BCR::ABL1* fusion).
- Use Greek symbols rather than spelling out the words (eg, β -catenin, β -hCG).
- Italicize gene and bacteria names.