

# Where Questions Come From: How Questions are Developed for AHIMA Certification Exams

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*It's a long journey from draft question to scored item. The Council on Certification takes its job of developing credentialing exams seriously.*

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The AHIMA Council on Certification (COC) provides oversight and administration for all AHIMA certification exams. The council, which consists of 10 individuals (nine elected and a liaison from the Board of Directors), is responsible for ensuring that the exams maintain the highest standards of quality and excellence. These standards have stood the test of time since 1933.

A five-step process ensures that questions maintain standards of reliability and fairness. The process often takes 18 months, start to finish.

## Step 1: Item-Writing Workshops

Work begins in COC-sponsored item-writing workshops. These take place during the annual Assembly on Education Summer Symposium and during AHIMA's annual convention. The workshops are open to AHIMA credential holders. Workshops begin with instruction on writing challenging exam questions, followed by an interactive session in which attendees write questions that will be considered for eventual use on the exams.

The final outcome is a rewarding experience for both attendees and the COC alike. Attendees leave the workshop with a better understanding of developing good, reliable exam questions. The workshop is especially popular with instructors who want to increase their skills in writing quality questions. Participants also earn continuing education credits for attending. The COC gains new questions to consider for future examinations, as well as a pool of potential appointees to a COC construction committee in the future.

## Step 2: Item Review

Within three to six months following the workshops, the questions are reviewed by the appropriate exam construction committees (i.e., RHIA, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P, CCA, and CHP). Appointed by the COC, construction committee members are charged with assisting the council in its responsibilities to develop the examinations, ensure content validity, and monitor the administration of the exams.

Many committee members are former volunteer item writers from previous workshops. Each new question is reviewed by the appropriate construction committee during its annual face-to-face meeting and is accepted, revised, or deleted through consensus. On average, approximately half of new questions are retained.

## Step 3: Incorporation of New Questions as Pretest Items

New exams with different questions are introduced on a periodic basis; in most cases, once a year. Once new questions have been approved, they may be included in the exam as "pretest" items. Each exam contains two types of questions. "Scored" questions count toward a final score. Pretest items are new and do not count toward a final score. Including pretest items allows the COC to gauge how they perform in an actual testing situation.

Often three to six months might pass before the new questions appear on an exam that is seen by exam candidates.

#### Step 4: New Item Performance Review

Once a new exam is introduced, it usually takes three to six months to obtain a statistically valid sample of candidates—at least 100—for the COC to determine if the new questions are performing correctly. The data may show that certain questions are performing well while others may be performing poorly. Good questions are kept, and poorly performing questions are deleted or revised to be tested again as pretest items.

#### Step 5: Entry into the Exam as a Scored Item

Those new questions that make the cut are included in the next new exam as scored items. Again, this may take an additional three to six months, depending on the exam's release.

From item-writing workshop to scored item, an exam question's journey illustrates the dedication of the Council on Certification, the construction committees, and the volunteers in the item-writing workshops. Together they ensure that exams remain of the highest quality and continue to be considered the industry gold standard. To learn more about the exam process and AHIMA credentials, visit [www.ahima.org/certification](http://www.ahima.org/certification).

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