

Assessments Style Guide

These rules aim to prevent a learner from picking an incorrect answer simply because of confusion over style, not lack of knowledge. For example, we don't want a learner to misunderstand a question because he or she does not know an acronym that is non-essential to the knowledge the question is testing for.

We adhere to the Google Developer Documentation Style Guide (GDD Style Guide), which in turn is based on Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and The Chicago Manual of Style. The GDD Style Guide is an industry standard that goes beyond grammar, spelling, and punctuation to include rules for consistent style created specifically for developers. It is easily searchable online and contains a useful word list, a text-formatting summary, and seven main sections:

- General principles, including style and tone
- Language and grammar
- Punctuation
- Formatting and organization
- Computer interfaces
- HTML and CSS
- Names and naming

Exceptions/Additions to the Google Developers Style Guide

Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronyms occasionally alienate learners and it is helpful to provide the phrase or term in the event that a learner does not know the abbreviation. Acronyms without the phrase in the first occurrence (except when used as a Remember-level question, for example, What does PS represent?)

YES: Pluralsight (PS) is a technology learning platform.

NO: PS is a technology learning platform.

Avoid the use of "i.e." or "e.g." Instead, use "for example."

Avoid the use of "etc." Instead use "and more."

Do not spell out an acronym if it is part of a product, service, or feature name and that product, service, or feature is only referred to with the acronym (Amazon DynamoDB vs. Amazon S3, also referred to as Amazon Simple Storage Service).

In addition, if the acronym contains other acronyms, it is best to not spell out every acronym because it can quickly overwhelm a learner.

YES: advanced RISC machine (ARM)

NO: advanced reduced instruction set computer (RISC) machine (ARM)

If the learner should already know a specific acronym to be proficient in the topic of the assessment, you do not need to spell it out. For example, in an assessment for RxJS, there is no need to spell out “Reactive Extensions for JavaScript” every time it appears in a question because it is safe to assume the learner knows what RxJS is.

On the flip side, if you judge that a term designated above should be spelled out because the average learner taking that specific assessment would not understand it, then spell it out. This would be the case if a technology is tangential to the topic of the assessment.

Second Person and Pronouns

Always use second person in assessments. Below is more guidance on how to use pronouns.

When using second person, you must establish who the “You” is in your questions.

Use second person pronouns or use “they” for the third person. Please avoid the use of “he,” “she,” and “he/she.”

YES: You are a security analyst and you discover a breach. What would you do next?

YES: A security analyst finds a breach. What should they do next?

NO: A security analyst finds a breach. What should he or she do next?

NO: A security analyst finds a breach. What should he / she do next?

Learners will only see one question at a time, so it is important to establish who pronouns refer to in each question.

YES: Your manager asks you, the developer who built the sales teams' line-of-business application, to fix the software across the company's devices. What should you do?

There is no ambiguity about your role in this example.

NO: Your manager tells you to fix the line-of-business application across the sales teams' devices. What should you do?

Depending on your role, the answer here could be different. For example, an end-user might submit a help desk ticket, a help-desk worker might reach out to a developer, and a developer might go into the app's code to fix the problem.

Words/Terms to Avoid

- “Leverage;” you can almost always say “use”
- Best of breed

- “In order to,” you can almost always say “to”
- “Since” and “as” when you mean “because”
- “Like” when you mean “such as”
- Environment: this is vague and can generally be replaced with a more specific word
- “Space” when you mean “market”
- “Impact” when you mean “effect/affect”

Style Guidance

All questions should be evergreen or future proof so they can stand the test of time. Someone may take the assessment when the iPhone X is no longer the latest smartphone from Apple, but the date the product was released will not change.

YES: The iPhone XS Max, which Apple released in September 2018, was the first smartphone to include which feature?

NO: Apple’s latest smartphone, the iPhone XS Max, is the first smartphone to include which feature?

Use “ensure” when you mean “to make sure of.”

The security team trained its users to ensure that they understood the risks.

Use “insure” when referring to making arrangements for insurance.

The security team implored the CEO to insure the company’s computers.

Use “assure” when trying to convince someone.

The security team assured the CEO that it had taken care of the breach.

An organization/company is not a they/their.

YES: An organization monitors its users.

NO: An organization monitors their users.

Assessments Requirements

Dos and Don’ts

All questions MUST:

Be multiple-choice questions with ONE correct answer and THREE distractors.

Have answer choices that are parallel in format and length.

YES: What is an objective of IT service management (ITSM)?

- Increasing efficiency inside an organization
- Delivering more projects in a shorter time
- Making sure tasks are allocated to employees
- Ensuring projects fit in the allocated budget

NO: What is an objective of IT service management (ITSM)?

- Increasing efficiency inside an organization
- Delivering more projects in a shorter time
- Ensuring tasks are allocated to employees
- Budget allocation

Adhere to the [Bloom's Taxonomy framework](#).

Reasoning: This framework enables us to have the appropriate difficulty level within our assessments.

Be technically and unambiguously accurate.

Use [active voice](#) and present tense when the subject of the sentence is performing the action.

- *YES: The learner took the test. (Active)*
- *NO: The test was taken by the learner. (Passive)*
- *OK: The firewall was disabled.*
- *YES: You write the following code. (Present tense)*
- *NO: You wrote the following code. (Past tense)*

Be able to stand alone, because learners will not know which objectives the questions belong to.

YES: In Microsoft Word, how do you insert a hyperlink in a block of text?

NO: How do you insert a hyperlink in a block of text?

Be as specific and concise as possible.

YES: What is the definition of "highly available?"

NO: Which of the following definitions best describes what "highly available" means?

Contain plausible distractors. Implausible distractors are easy to eliminate, making them easier to guess.

YES: Which type of tree grows acorns? A) Pine B) Oak C) Elm D) Birch

NO: Which type of tree grows acorns? A) Pine B) Oak C) Elm D) Telephone pole

Contain no unintended errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Please proofread your work before submission and make use of the spell check feature

Use American-English spelling, unless the technology dictates otherwise.

YES: customize, summarize, behavior, color

NO: customise, summarise, behaviour, colour

Include correct capitalization of proper nouns and/or tech specific capitalization.

YES: iOS, JavaScript, Docker, Azure

NO: ios, javascript, docker, azure

Make proper use of [code formatting](#). If using our internal tooling, use the text editor to include code blocks and inline code. If using spreadsheets, use markdown to denote code formatting. Use ****bold**** for UI elements.

Be correctly formatted. Most questions with short answers should end with a question mark, and the correct answer and distractors should be capitalized and end without punctuation. When citing recommendations, advice, or suggestions be specific as to who or what is making the recommendation or suggestion or giving the advice

YES: Microsoft recommends using the latest version of Windows 10.

NO: It is recommended that you use the latest version of Windows 10.

All questions must AVOID:

True or False questions. These make it too easy to guess the answer.

All of the above/none of the above questions. These make it too easy to guess the correct answer, and the test engine randomizes all answers.

Negatively phrased questions (Which of these is NOT...)

Obscure or archaic words when not pertinent to the subject of the test.

Complex sentences. Our learners are global customers and it is important to remember that we are measuring learners' skill in technology, not their reading comprehension, so we need to use clear, plain English.

Subjective language that leaves room for argument that a distractor *could* be the correct answer. This could lead to technically inaccurate questions.

YES: Agile software development is a project management framework used in software development.

NO: The Agile software development is the most efficient approach to software development.

Keyboard shortcut questions and breadcrumb navigation answers and distractors. These don't test a person's knowledge and are usually configurable.

Keyboard Shortcut: What is the keyboard shortcut to save a file?

Breadcrumb Navigation: How do you save a file? File -> Save

Language intended to trick the learner into guessing the wrong answer.

Extraneous words, like "Which of the following."

YES: What does Splunk do when an active correlation search matches the search criteria?

NO: Which of the following does Splunk do when an active correlation search matches the search criteria?

Adverbs of degree or frequency, for example, “Really,” “Very,” “Extremely,” “Just.” These modifiers are superfluous, and questions require more specificity regarding frequency and intensity.

YES: You scanned your hard drive for errors two hours ago.

NO: You just scanned your hard drive.

“Always” and “Never” statements. These types of declarations assume permanence, which is rare.

YES: The update runs at 10 p.m.

NO: The update always runs at 10 p.m.

Vague language

YES: You have been tasked with setting up a wide area network (WAN) for three offices across two countries in North America.

NO: You have been tasked with setting up a wide area network (WAN) for several offices in different locations.

Colloquialisms, idioms, country-specific products, and phrases. We have a global audience, and this could alienate some learners.

Tricky questions. These can include unclear wording of questions, use of common words but with an unusual meaning, use of unusual words when usual words are commonly used, or use of double negatives.

Use of Inclusive Language to Avoid Bias

In addition to the guidance below, please review the [inclusive language](#) section of the Author Kit for guidance as you write assessments.

Inclusive language is communication that does not stereotype or demean people based on personal characteristics including gender, gender expression, race, ethnicity, economic background, national origin, ability/disability status, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

- Use balanced or neutral representation of age, gender, culture, and ethnicity.
 - Due to the adaptive nature of our tests, a balanced representation to age, gender, culture, and ethnicity is not always achievable, so in scenario-based questions it is best to put the learner as the subject of the question.
 - YES: “*You* are a security analyst who has been asked to implement security measures...”
 - NO: “*Taylor* is a security analyst who has been asked to implement security measures...”
 - Avoid presenting age, gender, culture, or ethnic groups in a stereotyped fashion, even in wrong answers.

- Differences in gender, gender expression, race, ethnicity, economic background, ability/disability status, religion, and sexual orientation should only be mentioned when relevant.
- Use “people-first” language.
 - YES: “You are a helpdesk technician and you’ve been asked to install software for *a teammate who uses a screen reader...*”
 - NO: “You are a helpdesk technician and you’ve been asked to install software for *a blind teammate...*”
- Avoid questions that have the potential to unnecessarily evoke emotional responses
 - Avoid sensitive topics in test questions, because this may cause anxiety or other emotional responses from learners, which may cause unequal testing conditions.
 - Example: Politics, religion, etc.
 - Some words or phrases have more than one meaning, and one of those meanings might have emotional impact for certain groups.
 - Example: Courier (letter vs. drug)