CLM^{SM}
Certified Legal Manager

Behind the Scenes---How Exam Items Are Written

In November 1997, the first Certified Legal Manager (CLM)^{SM} exam was administered. After almost 15 years, there are still many within ALA who do not fully understand how the items are written and pilot tested, and how the test is constructed. The Certification Committee would like to help demystify the process. This article describes the rigorous procedures that ALA uses to ensure the CLM exam follows nationally accepted assessment-related best practices at every step of the test development process. The following are the procedures for writing and reviewing the exam questions:

1. Each year, during the ALA Annual Conference, the Certification Committee meets for four hours on the Sunday morning before the conference for "item writing training." This training emphasizes best practices for writing high quality exam questions which includes proper phrasing of the stem (question), the correct answer, and the three plausible distractors (incorrect answers). *The training stresses the importance of testing knowledge — it is never the intent for questions to be tricky.*

2. During the summer, each member of the Certification Committee will write 12 or more potential exam questions. Questions are written to carefully follow the *Content Outline of the Body of Knowledge, based on a detailed job analysis of the duties and responsibilities of a principal administrator* that ALA completes every five to seven years. *An approved "reference source" is used to validate each question and supporting answer.* Currently, the knowledge areas are General Accounting, Financial Information and Analysis, Employee Selection and Promotion, Performance Management and Compensation, Organizational Development, Legal Industry, General Business Management, Technology Management and Operations.

3. After the questions are entered into a secure database, each newly written question is carefully reviewed by ALA's testing contractor (HumRRO) for consistency in style, grammar and word choice, in addition to ensuring that the question and answers follow the basic rules of effective test writing.

4. The Certification Committee meets again in the fall to review every recently written question. The questions and answers are scrutinized by each member of the committee. If a question is deemed to be ineffective, the Committee will make editing attempts to further align the question to the subject knowledge area; otherwise, the question will be removed from the database.

5. The questions are then submitted to a group of CLMs (usually members of the ALA Board of Directors) who review each question for content validity. *The reviewers rate the importance of the knowledge or skill required to answer the question. The reviewers further rate the consequences that would incur if the test taker lacked the knowledge or skills required to answer the question correctly.*

6. If the question passes the three levels of review and scrutiny described above, it will be put on an actual exam, but only as a *pilot question.* Pilot questions must perform well statistically as a pilot item before being included on an exam as a scored question. HumRRO gathers statistics for each pilot question. Pilot questions with poor statistics go back to the Certification Committee for review, and are either revised or dropped from the database. If a question is revised, it is piloted again, and new statistics are analyzed before the question goes on the exam as a scored item.

We hope you find this "behind the scenes" view of the CLM exam process helpful. Questions about certification should be directed to certification@alanet.org at ALA headquarters. In addition, the Certification Committee members are available in the ALA booth at each Annual Conference to promote the program and answer questions.