

Exam Content Checklist for Beginners

New to building certification exams? Start here. A step-by-step walk-through for writing test questions that hold up.

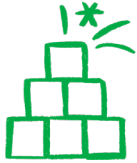
Quick definitions

SME: Subject Matter Expert — knows the job well but isn't trained to write test questions

Item: Test-world word for a single question

Distractor: The wrong answer choices in a multiple-choice question

Pilot testing: Trying new questions on real people before they officially count



1) Build a strong foundation

- ☐ Say exactly what skill you're testing — "Configure multi-factor authentication" works, "security" doesn't
- ☐ Decide how hard the thinking should be: recall, applying a rule, or solving a problem
- ☐ Write the question so it stands on its own, without needing the answers to make sense
- ☐ Set it up with a short, realistic scenario instead of a dry, abstract prompt
- ☐ Write the correct answer first — then build wrong answers around real mistakes people make
- ☐ Add a short note explaining why each wrong answer is wrong



2) Using AI to Help Write Questions

- ☐ Treat AI like a fast, eager helper — not the final decision-maker
- ☐ Have a real expert review every AI-written question before it's used
- ☐ Watch for outdated facts or answers that sound right but aren't
- ☐ Track which questions came from AI vs. a person



3) Double-Check Each Question

- ☐ Is it clearly worded, with no bias or trick wording?
- ☐ Is there only one correct answer?
- ☐ Do the answer choices look similar in length and style?
- ☐ Did you skip "which of the following is NOT..." unless truly needed?



4) Test Before It Counts

- ☐ Run a "beta" exam — same as the real thing, scores aren't official yet
- ☐ Sneak a few unscored practice questions into the real exam
- ☐ Don't tell test-takers which questions count
- ☐ Swap out test questions regularly to keep improving the bank



5) The Big Picture, In Order

- ☐ Decide clearly what skills your exam should cover
- ☐ Use a simple checklist for every question you write
- ☐ Have someone else review each question before it's used
- ☐ Test new questions with real people before trusting them
- ☐ Once the basics are solid, let AI help write more questions faster

Bottom line

Good exams are built one good question at a time.
Get the questions right, and everything else gets a lot easier.

