



## Form and Style Guidelines: PAEA Examinations

The following serves as an editorial guide for item writing. Adherence to these guidelines is required and important for the continuity of items across PAEA examinations. Each examination should have the appearance that the items were all written by the same author; following the established form and style guidelines will assist in this process. In addition to the specific rules outlined below, PAEA follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* for basic grammar rules with a few exceptions.

**Image/Picture Labeling:** If using an image (radiograph, electrocardiogram, or picture) the author must obtain permission to use. If a picture is provided with an item, the author should follow the “Using images in items in ExamDeveloper” instructions in the Announcements > Resources area of Exam Developer. The file name will not appear in the final question as seen by students. Please add the image source (link or citation) in the Resources section.

**Item Coding:** Every item must have only one correct answer and four or five options in total. Options should be listed in alphabetical order unless another order is more logical (e.g., numeric). All appropriate metadata coding must be complete for each item. This includes: organ system, content category, task area, and diagnosis key word.

**Answer Options and Diagnosis Key Word:** All answers and diagnosis key words should start with a capital letter. Initial capital letter only (unless proper name) and omit periods after answers that may be sentence fragments, and avoid full sentence answer options. Avoid excessive qualifiers, such as medication administration methods that are the same in each option or specific locations. Do not use “all of the above” or “none of the above.”

Answer Options Example:

- A. Blood transfusion
- B. Cold compress

Diagnosis Key Word Example:

Aortic insufficiency  
Mitral valve prolapse  
Tetralogy of Fallot

**Standard Conversion Rates:** Convert from Imperial to Metric, Fahrenheit to Celsius to ensure consistent rounding:

- ❖ Weight: kg (lb) - 2.2 lb to 1 kg; g (oz) - 1 g to 0.035 oz; g (lb) for newborns - 4,535.9 g to 10 lb

- ❖ Height: cm (in) - 2.54 cm to 1 in
- ❖ Temperature: is  $^{\circ}\text{C} (^{\circ}\text{F}) - (^{\circ}\text{C} \times 1.8) + 32 = ^{\circ}\text{F}$  (not preferred, but provided for simplicity:  $(^{\circ}\text{F} - 32) \times .556 = ^{\circ}\text{C}$ )

Pearson VUE recommends this tool: <https://www.calculator.net/conversion-calculator.html>

### Style List:

- ❖ **Abbreviations/Acronyms:** Avoid the use of abbreviations and acronyms. For example, write out the terms “physical examination” and “laboratory,” use “radiograph” instead of *x-ray*, use “intramuscular” instead of *IM*, use “nothing by mouth” instead of *NPO*, use “Emergency Department” instead of *ED* (capitalize both first letters), unless the full name is not widely known (pH instead of potential hydrogen), or when referring to a unit of measure (e.g., cm, mmHg).
- ❖ **Item Structure:** PAEA questions should follow a scenario - lead-in structure. The scenario should be written as an impersonal statement of facts, similar to how the case would be presented to a preceptor. Avoid a story-like, first- or third-person structure, except in cases where relevant to relaying the patient history.
- ❖ **Vignette:** At the beginning of the stem, use the following format if applicable: “...comes to the office” or “...comes to the Emergency Department.” Avoid the use of “...presents to the office.” It is acceptable to use “...brought to the office” or “...brought to the Emergency Department,” particularly for pediatric or geriatric patients, or others who would be unable to come on their own. In those cases, add a reference to who brought the patient (e.g. parents, mothers, guardian).
- ❖ **Vignette Order:**
  - Sentence 1:
    - Patient age
    - Gender
    - Site of care
    - Presenting symptom
    - Duration of symptom
  - Sentence 2: Personal medical/surgical history
  - Sentence 3: Family medical history
  - Sentence 4: Social history (e.g., employment, recent travel, current history of smoking, drinking, drug use, sexual history)
  - Sentence 5: Height/Weight/Body mass index
  - Sentence 6: Vital signs
  - Use your best discretion on the sentence breaks in relevant findings:
    - Physical examination findings
    - Laboratory findings, including normal values that may not be included in Adult Lab Values document

- Urinalysis findings
  - Imaging study results
- ❖ **Lead-in questions:** End each item stem with a question. For example, instead of “The most appropriate management is...,” the item should read “Which of the following is the most appropriate management?” Do not end with a colon so that the answer options finish the sentence. Avoid negative questions, such as “Which of the following is the least likely?” Asking for contraindications is okay as long as you use that word, as it is less likely to trick the student.
- ❖ **Age and Gender:**
- Females should be referred to as “woman” for patients aged 18 and older, and “girl” for patients aged 1 through 17.
  - Males should be referred to as “man” for patients aged 18 and older, and “boy” for patients aged 1 through 17.
  - Children under the age of 12 months should be referred to as “infant,” and sex should be identified through the use of pronouns in subsequent sentences.
  - Transgender patients should be identified as “trans man” or “trans woman,” or “trans boy” or “trans girl.” Add transition status only if it is relevant to the case. Pronouns should match the patient’s current identity, not their sex assigned at birth.
- ❖ **Patient Race/Ethnicity:** A patient’s race/ethnicity is only used if directly relevant to the scenario and necessary to answer the question correctly.
- ❖ **OB/GYN Patients:** use “gestation” rather than “pregnant”: A 35-year-old woman at 35 weeks gestation; describe OB history in upper case letters and numbers: A 35-year-old G1P5 woman

### Punctuation and Capitalization:

- ❖ **Hyphens:** Use a hyphen for two or more words serving as a single adjective modifying a noun, such as “three-day history,” “hand-foot-and-mouth disease,” “thyroid-stimulating hormone,” “attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder,” or “obsessive-compulsive disorder” (unless ending in “ly,” e.g., badly drawn picture, or appearing after the noun they modify, e.g., history of three days). For example:
- Ages (10-year-old boy; 45-year-old woman)
  - Words beginning with non-, anti-, and post- should **not** be hyphenated
  - Measurements should not be hyphenated, such as in “2.5 cm mass.”
- ❖ **Numerals:** Use the numerals for values 10 and more. Write out numbers under 10, unless they are lab values or ages. Very large numbers (one million and above) can use the words instead of a long series of zeroes.
- ❖ **Setting:** Capitalize departments (Emergency Department, Cardiac Intensive Care Unit) but not structures (clinic, urgent care)

- ❖ **Time:** When referring to a specific time, it should be styled like “4:00 p.m.” Durations can follow standard numeral rules, with a preference for the word “ago” rather than “prior” and “long” rather than “in duration.”
- ❖ Periods are not needed after units of measure.
- ❖ Use the serial comma: red, white, and blue
- ❖ Italicize bacteria, such as *Chlamydia trachomatis* or *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, but not the infections they cause, such as chlamydia or pneumonia
- ❖ Do not use subscripts (e.g., A1C, not A<sub>1C</sub>, and O<sub>2</sub> instead of O<sub>2</sub>). Superscripts are okay.

### Patient History:

- ❖ **Medications:**
  - Include both generic and brand names for medications: generic (Brand).
  - Do not use ™ or ® with brand-name medications.
  - Since many brand names may exist, item authors are asked to provide only one common, specific, and relevant brand name.
  - Rarely there will be some medications that do not have a brand name; in that case use only the generic. Please check all medications to make sure they have not been discontinued, e.g., amitriptyline, without (Elavil)
  - When adding medications to the stem, include full dosing instructions (e.g., The patient is compliant with sertraline (Zoloft) 200 mg once a day for six months.)
- ❖ **Disease Names:** Do not use apostrophe “s” in disease names: Parkinson disease (not Parkinson’s); Crohn disease (not Crohn’s disease). Psychiatric diagnoses should be compliant with DSM-5 in criteria and nomenclature. See DSM-5 Trigger Words document for common examples.
- ❖ **Smoking History:** Use hyphen between number, pack, and year: 35-pack-year. Pack year is calculated by multiplying the number of packs of cigarettes per day by the number of years the person has smoked.
- ❖ **Substance Use:** Do not use the word “abuse” when referring to any substance use. Rather, use the term “frequent use,” “regular use,” or a specific volume and frequency.

### Measurements:

- ❖ **Adult cases:** Height should appear as cm (in); weight should appear as kg (lb); and body mass index as kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
  - Height is 80 cm (31.5 in), weight is 13.6 kg (30 lb), and body mass index is 21.2 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
  - For BMI in pregnancy, include the appropriate pre- and mid-pregnancy measurements when clinically relevant.

❖ **Pediatric cases:**

- For patients under age 2, use “length” rather than “height.”
- Newborn weight should appear as g (lb oz); e.g., 3,175 g (7 lb).
- Include head circumference up to age 2.
- Include BMI after age 2, and only before if clinically relevant, and always with the percentile by age.
  - Height is XX cm (XX in), weight is XX kg (XX lb), and body mass index is XX kg/m<sup>2</sup> (XXth percentile for age).
- If height/length, weight, and/or head circumference percentiles are relevant, add as a second sentence.
  - Length is XX cm (XX in), weight is XX kg (XX lb), and head circumference is XX cm (XX in). This corresponds to a height in the XX percentile for age, weight in the XX percentile for age, and head circumference in the XX percentile for age.
- Consult [CDC growth charts](#) for percentile reference.

❖ **Vital Signs:**

- Vital signs should be in this order: temperature, pulse rate, respirations, and blood pressure (i.e., Temperature is 36.7°C (98.0°F), pulse rate is 205/min, respirations are 12/min, and blood pressure is 96/60 mmHg). You do not need the lead-in “Vital signs are...”
- The temperature should appear as °C (°F) with no space after the degree symbol.
- Indicate if the heart rhythm is regular or irregular and if the respirations are labored or unlabored.
- Pediatric blood pressure should be included after age 3, and only before if clinically relevant.
- If pulse oximetry is relevant, add it as a new sentence right after the vital signs sentence (i.e., Oxygen saturation is 94%).

❖ **Laboratory Values and Units:**

- Use the Adult Laboratory Values list as a reference. Students will have access to these values on the examination.
- Provide normal laboratory values/reference ranges in parentheses after the result for any laboratory result not listed on the Adult Laboratory Values list.
- Units should be identified for each value noted.
- Always add a space between the value and the units (“28 mEq/L” not “28mEq/L”).
- Use hpf for high-power field.
- If more than three lab values are in a sentence, create a table within the stem.

❖ **Arterial Blood Gas Order:** pH, pCO<sub>2</sub>, pO<sub>2</sub>

- ❖ **Image Introduction:** The appropriate reference to the picture should be present and correct (i.e., if there are two radiographs shown, the stem should say, “radiographic studies are shown” not “x-ray study is shown.” If the picture is a photograph, the picture language should say, “A photograph is shown.”

### Word Choices:

- ❖ Use of “well child visit” is preferred
- ❖ Use funduscopic instead of fundoscopic
- ❖ Use lowercase “d” and “t” for diabetes type: diabetes mellitus type 1, diabetes mellitus type 2 unless at the start of a sentence, answer option, or diagnosis code
- ❖ Use “prostatic hyperplasia” instead of “prostatic hypertrophy”
- ❖ Avoid use of “complains” or “complaints”
- ❖ Avoid use of “should” and “might” as this may mean the answer is up for debate
- ❖ Avoid use of the word “normal” for physical examination findings or radiographs/lab values. Instead state “shows no abnormalities” for physical examination or radiograph findings or “within normal limits” for lab values. The preference would be to list normal values so the student can make that determination.
- ❖ Avoid use of quotation marks when referring to patient reporting unless a direct quote is critical
- ❖ Do not use “you” or “your” when referring to the PA.