

Writing Bowl Questions

Questions used in a bowl program, regardless of subject matter, are based on the oral-response form commonly used in oral examinations. This time-honored form of measurement is still used at the university level for thesis and dissertation examinations, at the early childhood level for content examination, and at the postschool level for interviews and occupational placement.

The proper writing of the questions is possibly the most important factor in having a successful bowl competition. The better the questions are written, the fewer the problems with answers, the fewer protests will be made, and the more positive the experience will be for both youth and adults.

Here are some guidelines to follow when writing bowl questions:

1. Questions should be related to the subject matter being evaluated.
2. Questions must come from pre-agreed upon sources, and there should be a balance in the number of questions used from each source.
3. Questions should use vocabulary appropriate to the educational level of the 4-H participant.
4. Questions should avoid the use of stereotyped language.
5. Questions should have a realistic chance of being answered correctly.
6. One question should not be based upon the response to another, nor should it provide a clue to another answer.
7. There should be a variety in the level of difficulty of the questions with about 1/3 being easy, 1/3 medium, and 1/3 difficult.

In addition, good bowl questions will have these characteristics:

1. A good question has one central idea. It does not ask for multiple answers to unrelated things.
2. A good question is concise. If a question can't be asked in two short lines, it probably needs to be split up or reworded.
3. A good question is well-phrased, easy to understand, grammatically correct, and free from spelling errors.
4. A good question asks for no more than three parts to the answer. Questions that ask for more than three parts are best saved for bonus questions.
5. A good question is put into context (i.e. "In dressage"...or "For a trail course...").
6. A good question states the number of responses needed (Name 3 grooming tools.)
7. A good question does not allow for only two responses. Never use true-false, yes-no, right-left, etc. questions. With this type of question, if a team gets the answer wrong, the other team automatically gets it right.

8. A good question does not use blanks. Fill in the blank questions (even when the blank is at the end) are difficult for the moderator to read and hard for the contestants to understand.
9. A good question is not multiple choice.

While following most of the guidelines above, bonus questions may be slightly more complex. They may ask for more in-depth explanations or have more parts to the answer.

All questions must be accompanied by the source (including page number) of the question and answer.