

# Bias and Sensitivity Review: District Developed Assessments

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Office of Race to the Top Assessments



Florida Department of Education

Division of Accountability, Research and Measurement

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## Bias and Sensitivity

A bias and sensitivity review helps to ensure that items and stimuli are free of bias and do not exclude any group of children from demonstrating what they know and are able to do.

### BIAS

The Bias review ensures that items are clearly worded, are of appropriate difficulty and interest level, are unbiased, and will result in a full range of responses. These items are written so they do not provide an advantage or disadvantage (unrelated to an understanding of the content) to a student with certain personal characteristics, such as those related to gender, race, ethnicity, linguistics, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region. Nor do they provide an advantage or disadvantage due to experiences, interests, or opportunities common to the group that are unrelated to academic achievement. Reviews also include consideration of issues relevant to individuals with disabilities. A good question for a reviewer to ask: “Might this item offend or unfairly penalize examinees on the basis of personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, or geographic region?” Another question: “Will the subject matter and language of this item be acceptable?” A listing of areas where bias may be found follows:

#### Gender

The following should be considered when reviewing items:

- What **terms** are used to refer to humanity at large?
- In what **activities** are boys and girls involved?
- What **emotions** do characters display?
- What **situations** are characters placed in?
- How are pictures or **visuals** used?

#### Race, Ethnicity, or Culture

The following should be considered when reviewing items:

- Portrayal of any group or group member in a demeaning, offensive, condescending, or insensitive way
- Stereotyping any groups with respect to activities, emotions, language, or characteristics
- Use of pictures that do not represent the diversity of the student population
- Over-inclusion or under-inclusion of any group
- In the context of U.S. History, however, exploring some of the above in relation to Florida’s Standards may be appropriate

Some questions to ask during the review:

- How are different ethnic groups or members of ethnic groups **portrayed**?
- Is there any **stereotyping** with respect to activities, emotions, or characteristics?
- How varied are the **pictures** used to represent the diversity of the student population?
- Is any group **over-included** or **under-included**?

#### Economic or Social Class

The following should be considered when reviewing items:

- Contains an activity familiar to only one class or an activity that is not familiar to all classes
- Portrayal of leisure activities that aren't accessible to all children
- Preference or dominance of values from any one class

### SENSITIVITY

As part of the Sensitivity review, items are checked for a variety of cultural, regional, philosophical, political, and religious backgrounds throughout Florida. The review also helps to determine whether the subject matter will be acceptable to Florida students, their parents, and other members of Florida's communities.

#### NOTE:

- $\frac{3}{4}$  A Sensitivity review does not focus on issues that will affect student success on an item.
- $\frac{3}{4}$  Topics such as wildfires and hurricanes may be of a sensitive nature for Florida students, as well as other topics that may be considered offensive or distracting to students.
- $\frac{3}{4}$  When considering public domain works, it is important to be aware of any historical impact and other information in order to make a thorough assessment of the developed item. It is important to avoid including items that would be deemed inappropriate by parents and other citizens.

When developing an item, the following should be done:

- View an item through the eyes of one who is not a test-taker, as well as through the eyes of the test-taker
- Ensure that the context and content of the items would be acceptable to parents and other adults
- Consider the variety of cultural, regional, philosophical, political, and religious backgrounds throughout Florida

- Consider characteristics that would result in an unfair advantage or disadvantage for any group of students
- Be aware of other areas in which sensitivity may be found: moralistic messages connected to religion; sexuality; anger control; political positions; the supernatural; current events (war, disaster)
- Identify items with topics that are controversial among the adult population and might not be acceptable in a state-wide testing program
- Most topics are acceptable if the material is handled appropriately, well-written, and presents the topic from a wholesome, inoffensive, and interesting viewpoint
- Be aware of recurring patterns with respect to the ways people are depicted in the items

A question to ask: “Considering the variety of cultural, regional, philosophical, political, and religious backgrounds throughout Florida, will the subject matter and language of this item be acceptable to Florida students, their parents, and other members of Florida communities?”

SENSITIVITY TOPICS LIST – WORLD-CLASS INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT
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	Career and Technical Education (CTE)		Health Education (HE)	Physical Education (PE)	WORLD LANGUAGES	ARTS	
	Ag**	Cu**				PERFORMING	VISUAL
Violence			X		X <sup>1</sup>		
Criminal Activities			X				
Drugs (illegal, prescription, alcohol, tobacco) and individuals associated with drugs or controlled substances			X	X	X <sup>2</sup>		
Junk Food	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Height/Weight			X	X			
Dieting, other concerns about self image		X	X		X (healthy eating/ traditional cuisines of the country)		
Family Conflict			X				
Running Away			X				

\*Items checked (X) – okay when used as related to the course description and benchmarks; factual information is shared.

\*\*Ag=Agriculture Cu=Culinary

\*\*\*Handel's Messiah; Bach's Christmas Oratorios are examples of works that would be discussed and studied in class

1- May be included in the context of civil wars or artistic depictions of armed conflicts.

2- May be included in the context of discovery of medicines in the rainforest or complimentary or alternative medicines.

						<b>ARTS</b>	
	<b>CTE</b>		<b>HE</b>	<b>PE</b>	<b>WORLD LANGUAGES</b>	<b>PERFORMING</b>	<b>VISUAL</b>
	Ag	Cu					
Religion, Religious Doctrine and Religious Holidays	X	X	X (respect)		X (as part of cultural expressions of perspectives)	X***	X
Socio-economic Advantages (private swimming pools, expensive vacations, etc.)	X (as related to food)		X				
Birthdays/Birthday Celebrations		X*	X		X (as cultural practice)	X	X
Controversial National Holidays							
Sports Knowledge				X	X (as cultural practice)		
Rap Music, Rock Concerts					X (as part of popular music in the target language)	X	
Extra-Sensory Perception, Witchcraft, the Supernatural and Occult					X (magical realism)		
Gambling, Card-Playing, Dice			X (risky behaviors)				
Anything Disrespectful, Demeaning, Moralistic, or Chauvinistic	X (Leadership)	X (Leadership)	X				

\*Items checked (X) – okay when used as related to the course description and benchmarks; factual information is shared.

						ARTS	
	CTE		HE	PE	WORLD LANGUAGES	PERFORMING	VISUAL
	Ag	Cu					
Children Questioning Authority or Functioning as Adults			X				
Unsafe Activities, Situations, or Risk-taking	X	X*	X				
Loss of Employment		X	X				
Detainment/Concentration Camps							
Racism and Sexism			X		X (maybe included in the contrast of cultural perspectives)		
Birth Control and Sexuality Transmitted Disease			X				
Sexual Orientation							
Pornography							
Incest and Rape			X (communicating no, avoidance, etc.)				
Abortion							
Child Abuse/Neglect			X				
Guns/Gun Control			X (responsible behavior/safety)		X (within historical contexts and associated artistic expression)		
Suicide			X (prevention)				
Animals, Animal Bones, Animal Rights (also animal "characteristics" should not have human-sounding names)	X	X			X (anthropomorphism and personification within target language literature)		
Creationism					X ( within context of oral tradition myths)		

\*Items checked (X) – okay when used as related to the course description and benchmarks; factual information is shared.



						ARTS	
	CTE		HE	PE	WORLD LANGUAGES	PERFORMING	VISUAL
	Ag	Cu					
Immigration	X		X		X		
War/Terrorism					X (historical)		
Poverty					X		
Slavery	X*				X	X (related to Spirituals)	
Religion	X	X	see previous		see previous		
Disease	X	X	X	X (e.g., obesity)	X (historical)		
Evolution	X (of animals)						
Prehistoric Times							
Age of the Solar System							
Dinosaurs							
Rats, Roaches, Lice, and Spiders	X	X					
Death, Dying (including from Natural Disasters), Near Death Experiences, Burial	X (slaughter of Animals)		X (e.g., stages of grief)		X (cultural practices related to expression of perspectives)		
Traumatic Experiences			X (e.g., post traumatic stress syndrome/disorder)				
Homelessness			X (e.g., respect, mental and emotional health)				

\*Items checked (X) – okay when used as related to the course description and benchmarks; factual information is shared.

Adapted from WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Consortium, Center for Applied Linguistics – used with permission

## SENSITIVITY AND BIAS REVIEW CRITERIA

The following criteria are used when conducting item reviews:

Content	Does any element of the item contain content that unfairly advantages or disadvantages a person because of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, or cultural, economic, or regional background?
Language	Does any element of the item contain language that unfairly advantages or disadvantages a person because of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, or cultural, economic, or regional background?
Offense	Is any element of the item presented in such a way as to offend a person because of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, or cultural, economic, or regional background?
Stereotypes	Does any element of the item reflect a stereotypical view of a group based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, or cultural, economic, or regional background?

From Florida Department of Education's Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FCTE) Sensitivity and Bias Review Committee Meeting, November 2010

### BIAS/SENSITIVITY REVIEW GUIDELINES – MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- Ensure that language has the same basic semantic content for all students regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or physical or mental condition
- Consider the denotative and connotative meaning of words, expressions, images and symbols
- Avoid any items or materials that might evoke negative or potentially inflammatory associations on the part of students
- Consider the fairness of items and supporting materials:
  - Include females as well as males, and reflect nontraditional as well as traditional roles, relationships, and traits and occupations
  - Present women, very young and elderly individuals, individuals with disabilities, a range of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities in roles of diverse status and power, conventional and unconventional
- Ensure that there is no stereotyping
- Represent the multiculturalism and diversity of our schools, nation, and world
- Consider the possibility of sensitivity toward particular topics, which may interfere with students' ability to address item directives. Topics often regarded as sensitive include:

death/suicide  
religion  
bigotry/bias

extreme illness  
sex/birth control/pregnancy  
homelessness

violence/terrorism  
drugs/alcohol  
family dysfunction

- Avoid creating situations in which students are asked to, or feel compelled to, divulge personal information (e.g., religious, social, economic disclosures)

From Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Fine Arts Education

([http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias\\_Sensitivity\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias_Sensitivity_Guidelines.pdf))

BIAS/SENSITIVITY REVIEW GUIDELINES CHECKLIST – MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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The Maryland State Department of Education developed a checklist that supports the guidelines listed above. The checklist can be accessed at:

[http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias\\_Sensitivity\\_Checklist.pdf](http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias_Sensitivity_Checklist.pdf)

Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Fine Arts Education, Bias/Sensitivity Review Checklist

([http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias\\_Sensitivity\\_Checklist.pdf](http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias_Sensitivity_Checklist.pdf))

BIAS/SENSITIVITY REVIEW – FLORIDA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT
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Additional suggestions provided by the Florida Alternate Assessment Technical Report include:

- Avoid passages that show a bias toward a certain disability group, such as students with low hearing or low vision
- Avoid passages in which students were laughed at or bullied
- Simplify graphics
- Change distractors that might pose issues for students with hearing and/or visual impairments

Florida Alternative Assessment Technical Report 2009-2010, Prepared by Measured Progress for the Florida Department of Education

<https://www.fldoe.org/asp/rtf/FloridaAlternateAssessment0910.rtf>

## RESOURCES

Information in this document was taken directly from the following sources, located at the links listed:

Assessment and Accountability Briefing Book: FCAT, School Accountability, Teacher Certification Tests. Florida Department of Education, 2004  
<http://fcat.fldoe.org/pdf/fcataabb.pdf>

BIAS and SENSITIVITY Guidelines (DRAFT for SHOWCASE 3). Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium  
<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/DRAFT%20Bias%20and%20Sensitivity%20Guidelines.pdf>

FCAT Handbook – A Resource for Educators: FCAT 4.0 Test Development and Construction. Florida Department of Education, 2005  
<http://fcat.fldoe.org/handbk/developconstruct.pdf>

FCAT 2.0 Reading Test Item Specifications Grades 9-10. Florida Department of Education, Updated January 2012  
<http://fcat.fldoe.org/fcat2/pdf/FL10SplISG910RWTr3gfinal.pdf>

Florida Alternative Assessment Technical Report 2009 – 2010. Measured Progress for the Florida Department of Education

Item Writer Trainings: Bias and Sensitivity (PowerPoint). Florida Department of Education

Maryland Fine Arts Education, Bias/Sensitivity Review Guidelines. Maryland Department of Education.  
[http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias\\_Sensitivity\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias_Sensitivity_Guidelines.pdf)

Maryland Fine Arts Education, Bias/Sensitivity Review Guidelines Checklist. Maryland Department of Education.  
[http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias\\_Sensitivity\\_Checklist.pdf](http://www.mfaa.msde.state.md.us/source/PDF/Bias_Sensitivity_Checklist.pdf)

SBAC 04: Component 5: Guidelines for Accessibility for English Language Learners. Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.  
<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/DRAFT%20ELL%20Guidelines.pdf>

Sensitivity Topics List. World Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium, Center for Applied Linguistics.

## Addendum

Information taken from  
**Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium**  
**BIAS and SENSITIVITY Guidelines (DRAFT**  
**for SHOWCASE 3)**

The *Smarter Balanced Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines* (Guidelines) are supportive of the information included in this document. Additional information has been gleaned from the Guidelines to further develop some of the items included in the main body. There are many lists and several sub-topics located within the guidelines; however, some of this supporting information has been combined in one or two lists below.

The *Smarter Balanced Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines* (Guidelines) identify the ultimate goal as producing test materials that are fair and free of barriers. Barriers can be reduced by considering the following:

- Do not measure irrelevant knowledge or skill
- Do not anger, offend, upset, or otherwise distract test-takers
- Treat all groups of people with respect in test materials (page 3)

Additionally, the Guidelines suggest reviewers should avoid creating contrived situations in which the topic may be upsetting. This would be something that had the potential to cause upset amongst a group of students versus something focused on a student. An example would be neighborhoods destroyed by a wildfire versus a student's house burning down. The Guidelines discuss the use of difficult language as being distracting and should be avoided unless this language is the focus of the item. Students also have different experiences and different levels of exposure to activities, etc. Unless the concept has been taught, it is necessary to be thoughtful prior to including topics in an item. For example, some students have not been exposed to snow. If they have not received instruction on snow, in some form, it would not be appropriate to include snow in an item. However, if students received instruction on the body's response to the elements (exposure to snow over a set period of time), then it is appropriate to include snow as part of the item.

It is fair to include unfamiliar information when working with students having disabilities if the information is necessary. The example used in the Guidelines focuses on a deaf student having to know what a bell is versus how it sounds. The use of Universal Design will reduce barriers for students who have a physical difficulty related to answering items. However, accommodations or modifications to the test may still be needed.

The “presence of offensive, inflammatory, controversial, upsetting or disrespectful material in tests will lower the confidence of students, parents, educators, and community members in the test” and may cause emotional reactions amongst test-takers (page 9). Some current events may also cause emotional reactions. The following are topics that generally should be avoided:

- Abortion (the term aborted may be used in Florida Animal Science courses to refer to an animal naturally aborting/miscarrying the fetus)
- Abuse of people or animals (animal abuse and welfare is a topic covered in Florida Veterinary Assisting and Animal Science; may be included in Agriculture courses)
- Contraception (except as identified in Florida’s health education courses. Breeding is discussed in identified Florida Career and Technical Education courses related to animals)
- Experimentation on people or animals that is dangerous or painful (may be included in Florida Agriculture courses)
- Killing animals for sport (may be included in Florida Agriculture courses)
- The occult, witches, ghosts
- Pregnancy of human beings (except as identified in Florida’s health education courses)
- Rape (except as identified in Florida’s health education courses, e.g., communicating no; avoiding situations; alcohol and drug use; statutes, etc.)
- Sexual behavior or sexual innuendo (except as identified in Florida’s health education courses, e.g., risky/unsafe behavior; alcohol and drug use; communication; harassment; statutes, etc. Signs of breeding, animals in heat, and artificial insemination are covered in Florida Animal Science and Veterinarian Assisting courses)
- Suicide (except as identified in Florida’s health education courses, e.g., signs; stress management/coping skills, etc.)
- Torture (page 11)

It is recommended that the following topics not be included:

- Euthanasia (covered as it refers to animals in Florida Veterinarian Assisting and Animal Science courses)
- Gun control
- Prayer in school
- Current or recent partisan political issues, ethnic conflicts, and religious disputes (page 11)

The topics below may be sensitive and should be treated with care. Base the decision to include them on the content standards, course description, and the necessity to include them:

Accidents, natural disasters, serious illnesses. Mention of these topics or general, objective discussions may be acceptable, but avoid a focus on suffering, destruction, or graphic, gruesome details that may upset students. Serious illnesses include mental as well as physical illnesses. Illnesses that primarily affect certain groups, such as some genetic diseases, may be particularly problematic.

Advocacy. Assessment items should not “take sides” on a controversial issue unless necessary to do so for validity. Avoid advocacy when possible because test-takers with opposite views may be disadvantaged.

Alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. The goal is to avoid giving any impression of approval of these substances. Avoid modeling bad behavior pertaining to these substances for students. It is best to avoid depictions of people using these substances. Warnings against the use of these substances may be acceptable for students in middle or high school.

Animals that are frightening to children. Younger students are more likely to be upset by certain dangerous animals than are older students. Depictions of spiders and poisonous snakes have been cited as causing problems and are best avoided. Objective depictions of a food chain or nonthreatening descriptions of animals are acceptable, but avoid depicting predators engaged in violent, threatening behavior. For example, a discussion of how members of a wolf pack interact with each other may be acceptable. A depiction of a wolf ripping the entrails from a fawn should be avoided.

Antisocial, criminal, or inappropriate behaviors (e.g., bullying, criminal activity, cheating, cutting school, gangs, fighting, lying, stealing). One goal is to avoid modeling inappropriate or bad behavior for students. It is particularly important to avoid making such behavior appear to be attractive, fun, glamorous, sophisticated, or something to be emulated. Another goal is to avoid upsetting students who may have been the victims of such behavior by others.

Biographical materials. Take care in selecting biographical materials. Some biographical materials may be controversial because individuals may be viewed very differently by different groups of people. For example, one group’s heroic freedom fighter is another group’s cowardly terrorist. A possible concern with the use of biographical material about living people is that a person who is widely admired at the time he or she is included in test materials may become involved in a highly publicized scandal before the test is administered.

Dangerous activities. The goal is to avoid modeling behaviors that are inherently dangerous and making dangerous behaviors appear to be attractive, fun, glamorous, or something to be emulated. Particularly for younger children, avoid showing potentially dangerous behavior such as running away from home, going with strangers, or using dangerous tools without supervision, even if all turns out well. Common actions that are dangerous if done improperly (such as crossing the street,

riding a bicycle, hiking, swimming) are acceptable if depicted as being done properly. Describing dangerous substances or devices such as weapons, poisons, or explosives in ways that make them appear attractive or safe is not acceptable.

Death and dying. These topics are potentially upsetting for students, especially detailed depictions of the death of parents, siblings, contemporaries, and family pets. It is acceptable to mention death (e.g., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died in 1968), but it is not acceptable to depict gruesome details.

Family problems. The goal is to avoid upsetting test-takers with detailed descriptions of serious family problems such as the loss of a job, divorce, serious illness of a parent or sibling, and the like. Depicting a single-parent family is acceptable.

Gambling. Playing cards and dice may be used as required in math problems, but do not assume that all students will be familiar with them and will know such things as the number of cards in a deck or the maximum number obtainable when a pair of dice is tossed. Depictions of people gambling for fun or profit should be avoided.

Holidays and birthdays. Not all test-takers will be familiar with every religious or quasi-religious holiday (e.g., Halloween). Not all test-takers celebrate birthdays. Mention of holidays and birthdays is acceptable as long as all necessary information is included in the stimulus material. The general need to avoid religious materials would argue against extended discussion of religious holidays.

Homelessness, evictions, deportation. These topics may be upsetting to students, particularly those who have direct experience with them or fear having a future experience with them. The topic must be treated factually rather than emotionally and must not focus on anguish and distress.

Junk food. The goal is to avoid modeling unhealthy behavior by showing excessive consumption of junk food or the selection of junk food in preference to more healthful food. However, it is acceptable to mention eating a cookie or to use the sharing of a pie to illustrate a fraction.

Luxuries. The goal is to avoid elitism and the impression that ordinary people are excluded from the test materials. However, test materials do not have to be limited to what is affordable by the least affluent of families. Luxuries such as servants, mansions, and yachts should be avoided. Avoid more common luxuries such as ski trips and private tennis lessons as well. Avoid depicting expenditures that most people would consider excessive. For example, in a math item, do not have a man purchase 6 sweaters at \$75 per sweater for himself.

Medicines, including diet supplements. Treatments for serious illnesses may be upsetting to some students and should be avoided. Do not model the use of drugs, even prescription drugs, as a way to solve problems. Some groups are opposed to medical treatment.

Obesity and body-image problems. The goal is to avoid upsetting children who depart from the norm in height, weight, or other physical attributes with negative depictions of people who depart



from the physical norm. A wide range of body types should be represented in any pictorial material, but stereotypes and negative depictions of people with atypical body shapes should be avoided.

Personal questions. Items must not invade the privacy of students by asking them to divulge personal or family issues such as religion, political preference, or antisocial or criminal behavior. For example, do not use an item that asks a test-taker to describe a time when he or she was caught doing something wrong. It is best to avoid constructed response items that require students to reveal how they would act in situations contrary to their beliefs about appropriate behavior.

Religion. Religion is a source of information that is not common to all students. Religion is cited here as a topic best treated with great care. Even an objective description of a religion will be seen as proselytizing by some people. However, it is acceptable to mention religion. For example, mentioning that Buddhism is one of the main religions in Singapore is acceptable. Going into detail about the practices of adherents of Buddhism is not acceptable. In particular, avoid praising or criticizing the practices of a religion. Also avoid references to God, or euphemisms for God, except in historical or literary documents.

Slavery. This topic may be included in historical or literary documents. A focus on graphic, upsetting aspects of slavery should be avoided.

Wars, violence, suffering. These topics may be included in historical or literary documents if important to measurement of a standard. A focus on graphic, upsetting aspects of the topics should be avoided. (pages 12-14)

It is also important to avoid stereotypes:

Stereotyped language. Representations of dialect are not acceptable unless it is important to measure a standard. Phrases such as “man-sized job,” or “Dutch uncle” should be avoided. Language that uses different terms for the same characteristic in men and women is not acceptable. For example, it is not appropriate to label a man as “forceful” or “assertive” and a woman as “pushy” or “controlling” for exhibiting the same behavior. Language that assumes all members of a profession are one gender is unacceptable (e.g., use “sales representative” instead of “salesman,” “firefighter” instead of “fireman,” “mail carrier” instead of “mailman”). Some stereotyped language may be acceptable in literary or historical material important for measurement of a standard.

Stereotyped social/occupational roles. There should be a mix of genders and races shown in any social or occupational role. For example, do not depict all male doctors with all female nurses. Do not show all Black workers with all White bosses. If it is impossible to show diversity in a single item, diversity should be shown across items.

Stereotyped behaviors and characteristics. Do not treat all members of a group as though they all shared the same characteristic, unless the group was assembled on the basis of that characteristic. For example, do not imply that all Native American people are close to nature or that all Asian American students are smart.

Offensive stereotypes. It is particularly important to avoid offensive stereotypes of any gender, racial, ethnic, national, or other such group. For example, do not portray any such group as lazier, less moral, more primitive, less intelligent, more prone to crime, more gullible, more violent, more miserly, more arrogant, or less clean than other such groups. (page 15)

Further, care must be taken to avoid derogatory labels:

African American people. Use “Black” or “African American.” Do not use “Negro” or “Colored,” except in the names of institutions.

Asian American people. When possible, use specific terms such as “Japanese American” or “Chinese American.” Terms such as “Pacific Island American” “Native Hawaiian” and “Asian/Pacific Island American” should be used as appropriate. Do not use “Oriental” except in the names of institutions.

People with disabilities. Put the person before the disability. For example, use “a person who is blind” rather than “a blind person.” In general, avoid using adjectives as nouns for people with disabilities; e.g., “the blind” or “the deaf” except in the names of organizations or in literary or historical material important for measurement of a standard. Avoid euphemisms such as “challenged.” Use objective language rather than emotionally loaded terms; e.g., “uses a wheelchair” rather than “confined to a wheelchair.” Do not depict people with disabilities, including people with learning disabilities and people with developmental disabilities, as helpless victims.

Latino/Latina American people. The terms “Latino American” (for men) and “Latina American” (for women) are acceptable. The term “Hispanic American” is widely used, but some people object to it. “Latino/a” and “Hispanic” may be used without the addition of “American.” When possible, use specific group names such as “Cuban American,” “Dominican American,” or “Mexican American.”

Native American people. “Native American” and “American Indian” are both acceptable. When possible, use specific names for peoples such as “Pequot” or “Mohegan.” Some Native Americans prefer the words “nation” or “people” to the word “tribe.”

Older people. It is best to refer to older people by specific ages or age ranges. Minimize the use of euphemisms such as “seniors.”

Women and men. The primary rule is to use parallel terms for men and women. For example, do not use titles for men and first names for women, as in “Dr. Sanchez and his wife, Juanita.” Do not refer to women as “wives” unless men are referred to as “husbands” in the same context. Do not refer to women by physical attributes and to men by accomplishments as in “the brilliant lawyer and his beautiful wife.” Do not refer to males as “men” and women of similar ages as “girls.” Do not use the generic “he” or “man” to refer to all human beings. Even if it uses outmoded terms and

nonparallel language for women and men, historical or literary material important for the measurement of a standard is acceptable. (pages 15-16)

Assessment items should show diversity of individuals and groups:

- Males and females should be approximately equally represented
- People traditionally considered members of minority groups must be represented
- People of different ages, physical abilities, and social classes should be depicted
- A wide variety of life situations, living conditions, types of housing, types of families, regions, and the like should be depicted (page 17)

If after following all of the guidelines listed in this document, there is still uncertainty, ask the following questions:

- Do the items measure any irrelevant knowledge or skill? If so, is the irrelevant knowledge or skill about equally distributed among groups of test-takers, or will some group(s) be more greatly affected than others?
- Will any aspect of the test materials anger, offend, upset, or otherwise distract test-takers? If so, will the reaction be about equally distributed, or will some group(s) be more greatly affected than others?
- Do the test materials treat all groups of people with respect? If not, will the reaction be about equally distributed, or will some group(s) be more greatly affected than others? (page 17)

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/DRAFT%20Bias%20and%20Sensitivity%20Guidelines.pdf>

Information taken from

**SBAC 04: Component 5**

***Guidelines for Accessibility for English Language Learners***

The Smarter Balanced Consortium, in its *Guidelines for Accessibility for English Language Learners*, suggests item writers be cognizant of how language is used when developing items that will eventually be used with students who are English Language Learners (ELL). When developing items, it is important to consider whether the language being used is driven by the content (content-related) or not. If it is not content-related, is it necessary? Will it cause confusion for an ELL student? Will it impact the validity of the item or the assessment as it relates to the ELL student? For these students, English is a second language. It is fair to include language that is content-related because instruction has been provided that includes or is focused on this language. The language is necessary and a part of the course. An example of content-related language is the use of the word slope as used in algebra or population as used in biology.

It is also preferable for items to include objects that are commonly found in schools, when writing items, such as books and pencils. ELL students may have some degree of familiarity with concepts or objects used outside of schools. However, because of their differing cultural and social experiences, one cannot be certain and it is better to err on the side of caution. If these objects are a part of instruction and are necessary, then inclusion is appropriate.

The list below provides additional guidance on things to consider:

- Use vocabulary in test items that is widely accessible to all students and avoid unfamiliar vocabulary that is not directly related to the construct (August, Carlo, & Snow, 2005; Bailey, Huang, Shin, Farnsworth, & Butler, 2007). NOTE: The use of an English to heritage language dictionary may be of assistance. Some of the most popular languages may have such a dictionary, as an accommodation. However, these dictionaries may not be all inclusive. For example, not all animals may be listed in an English to heritage language dictionary.
- Avoid the use of syntax or vocabulary that is above the test's target grade level (Borgioli, 2008). The test item should be written at a vocabulary level no higher than the target grade level, and preferably at a slightly lower grade level, to ensure that all students understand the task presented (Young, 2008).
- Keep sentence structures as simple as is possible while expressing the intended meaning. In general, ELLs will find a series of simpler, shorter sentences to be more accessible than longer, more complex sentences (Pitoniak, Young, Martiniello, King, Buteux, & Ginsburgh, 2009).
- Consider the impact of cognates (words with a common etymological origin) when developing test items. More importantly, be particularly aware of false cognates (or more precisely, false friends), which are word pairs or phrases that appear to have the same meaning in two or more languages, but in fact, do not. Spanish and English share literally thousands of cognates, and because the large majority of ELLs speak Spanish as their first language (nationally, more than 75%), the presence of cognates can inadvertently confuse students and alter the skills being assessed by a test item. Examples of false cognates include: billion (the correct Spanish word is mil millones; not billón, which means *trillion*); deception (engaño; not decepción, which means disappointment); large (grande; not largo, which means long); library (biblioteca; not librería, which means bookstore ).

- Do not use cultural references or idiomatic expressions (such as “being on the ball”) that are not equally familiar to all students (Bernhardt, 2005).
- Avoid sentence structures that may be confusing or difficult to follow, such as the use of passive voice or sentences with multiple clauses (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Forster & Olbrei, 1973; Schachter, 1983).
- Do not use syntax that may be confusing or ambiguous, such as using negation or double negatives in constructing test items (Abedi, 2006; Cummins, Kintsch, Reusser, & Weimer, 1988).
- Minimize the use of low-frequency, long, or morphologically complex words and long sentences (Abedi, 2006; Abedi, Lord & Plummer, 1995). (pages 4 and 5)

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/DRAFT%20ELL%20Guidelines.pdf>