

From Lesson to Item: Crafting EOCEP-Ready Questions

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Designing high-quality assessments begins with high-quality instruction. Once students have engaged in meaningful historical thinking through evidence-centered learning, assessments should measure the same thinking, evidence use, and content understanding practiced during instruction.

This article explores how to design EOCEP-aligned assessment items that mirror classroom instruction. You'll examine how EOCEP item types, the Test Blueprint, Historical Thinking Skills (HTS), Depth of Knowledge (DOK), and Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) work together to create rigorous, evidence-centered assessments.

Why Item Types Matter

The EOCEP offers five primary item formats. Each taps different cognitive skills and offers unique opportunities to assess both content knowledge and historical thinking.

- **Selected-Response (SR)**
Single-best-answer items can assess content knowledge and historical reasoning depending on the cognitive demand of the question.
- **Multi-Select (MS)**
With two correct choices from a larger set, multi-select items require students to evaluate multiple options and identify more than one accurate response.
- **Evidence-Based Selected-Response (EBSR)**
Two-part items ask students to respond to a question in Part A and select supporting evidence or reasoning in Part B, allowing students to connect a response to relevant historical evidence.
- **Technology-Enhanced (TE)**
Drag-and-drop, hotspot, or dropdown tasks allow students to interact with visual or textual stimuli to organize, classify, sequence, or analyze historical information.
- **Technology-Enhanced Constructed-Response (TECR)**
Constructed-response tasks use technology-enhanced features or stimuli and require students to generate a response rather than select from provided options.

Key takeaway: Choose the assessment format that best mirrors the historical thinking, evidence use, and DOK level students practiced during instruction.

Decoding the Blueprint

The EOCEP Test Blueprint provides important information about assessment priorities for U.S. History and the Constitution, including:

- **Assessment length:** 55 items

- **Standard 2 weight:** 10–12 items
- **DOK distribution:** DOK 1 (0–15%), DOK 2 (55–75%), DOK 3 (20–45%)

When designing classroom assessments, this Blueprint information suggests several instructional considerations:

1. Design most assessment opportunities to require DOK 2-3 historical reasoning.
2. Consider the relative emphasis placed on standards when planning assessment opportunities.
3. Use the Blueprint alongside other EOCEP resources when designing classroom assessments.

The Blueprint should inform assessment design, but it should not drive instruction. Begin by identifying the historical thinking students need to develop, then use the Blueprint to consider the distribution of items across standards and DOK levels represented on the EOCEP.

Aligning to HTS & DOK

Each EOCEP item must align to both a Historical Thinking Skill (HTS) and an appropriate DOK level.

Example: USHC.2.CE (Causation)

- **SR (DOK 2):** *“Which of the following best identifies a long-term effect of the Missouri Compromise?”*
- **EBSR (DOK 3):**
 - Part A: *“What was a primary purpose of the Compromise?”*
 - Part B: *“Which excerpt best supports your answer?”*
- **TECR (DOK 3):** Drag key provisions into a timeline and write a short justification of how they led to the Compromise.

Mapping:

Item Type	HTS	DOK	Sample Focus
SR	CE	2	Identify cause or effect
EBSR	CE	3	Select cause; support with evidence
TECR	CE	3	Sequence events; explain linkage

Remember: The assessment should require students to demonstrate the same historical thinking that was intentionally developed during instruction.

Choosing vs. Crafting

Before you select an item from a test bank or draft your own, revisit the intended historical thinking, content, and evidence expectations to ensure the item assesses what students practiced during instruction.

1. **Adapt an existing item when**

- An existing item perfectly matches the historical thinking required by your instructional anchor.
- You need quick formative checks.

2. **Craft when**

- You want precise alignment to your specific content or local examples.
- No bank item captures the nuance of your instructional anchor or PLD level.

Tip: Always vet bank items for alignment.

Ask: “Does this item assess the same historical thinking and reasoning we practiced in class?”

Using PLDs to Inform Feedback

Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) can help teachers anticipate differences in the depth of student reasoning, evidence use, and independence demonstrated on a common rigorous task. Rather than assigning different levels of cognitive demand to different students, use PLDs to inform scoring criteria, feedback, instructional supports, and next steps.

For a common evidence-centered task, PLD-informed feedback might distinguish among responses that:

Minimally Meets: Demonstrate partial historical reasoning using limited relevant evidence.

Meets: Demonstrate the targeted historical thinking with relevant evidence and a clear explanation.

Exceeds: Demonstrate sustained historical reasoning by connecting or corroborating evidence and supporting a nuanced conclusion.

Using PLDs in this way maintains a common rigorous expectation while helping teachers identify where students are in their historical reasoning and what support or challenge may help them progress.

Putting It All Together

By strategically selecting item types, decoding the Blueprint, aligning to historical thinking skills and DOK levels, and using PLDs to inform feedback, you can build assessments that do more than measure learning; they reinforce and extend historical thinking.

Each EOCEP item format offers a distinct opportunity to challenge students to think critically, use evidence, and connect content to larger themes. Whether you're designing a selected-response question or a technology-enhanced task, the goal remains the same: reinforce evidence-centered historical thinking and prepare students for success on the EOCEP.

Effective assessment is not a separate step in planning. It is the natural extension of coherent instruction in which students demonstrate the same historical thinking they practiced throughout the learning experience.

In future planning, begin with the historical thinking required by the indicator, use an appropriate instructional anchor to organize learning, ensure assessments measure the reasoning students practiced during instruction, and use the PLDs to inform feedback and support. The power of classroom assessment lies not just in what we ask, but in how we ask it.