The Critical Thinking Report

By Claire Corter

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Alternate Test Items On Your HESI Exit Exam  
- Focus on the “Hot Spot” format -

Claire Corter – YourBestGrade.com

One of the key strategies for success – in any format - is being prepared. For you, as you need to take the HESI, being prepared means studying the content that will be covered by the exam. Most students “get” that part.

But there is more. Being prepared also means knowing what to expect of the exam. The kind of questions that will be asked, the format of these questions, the percentage of questions that is dedicated to certain subjects or formats, the amount of time that is allotted for each question, the digital test environment. A lot of students forget about this second part of “being prepared.”

It is oh so tempting to use those last few weeks/days/hours on the night before your exam cramming, trying to fit more content in your head. And in that process…. to forget about the time that you had allotted for familiarizing yourself with the exam itself. And that is a shame, because “knowing what to expect” takes relatively little effort, while the potential benefit is HUGE.

With this report, I want to help you prepare yourself for the HESI, the “complete” way. By knowing what to expect. I’ll focus on one of the elements most students struggle with on their exams: alternate test items, and in particular, the “hotspot” test question.

In case you’re not yet familiar with them, “alternate test items” are test questions that differ from the usual multiple-choice setup and can be categorized in five specific formats:

- “Hot spot” items that ask to identify one or more areas on a picture or graphic;
- “Multiple response” items that require more than 1 correct answer;
- “Fill-in-the-blank” items that require a written calculation as the answer;
- “Chart/exhibit” format that asks that the chart be read prior to answering the question; and
- “Audio/video” item formats that present an audio or video clip (and headphones) and asks that the correct option be selected

Over the years, the NCLEX and HESI tests (both RN and PN) have changed in that over 8% of the HESI test items are now formatted in these “alternate formats”.

In this report, I want to “open the curtain” for you and show how such “tricky test questions” are developed. I want to show you a peek from the other side, to allow you to gain a better understanding of these test items.

Specifically, I will focus on the “hot spot” alternate items and review how the National Council for State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) structures these questions for your HESI examination.

To start, the authors of the book *Critical Thinking and Test Item Writing* list the four criteria for writing critical thinking test items that are generally applied to both NCLEX and HESI test items. These include:

- A rationale that is written
- Material that is at or above the application level;
- The question requires multiple levels of logical thinking; and
- The question requires a high ability to discriminate and to choose from several possible alternatives.

These criteria will be used to edit and create *all HESI test items.*

Now, let’s look at a sample “hot spot” alternative format question that requires a location on a graph to be identified. How does this question evolve to reach HESI Exit status?

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The test item format may begin as a traditional single response multiple-choice format as seen below. At this point, this question doesn’t require critical thinking:

Which area of the eye should the nurse examine to assess the client for increased intracranial pressure?

A. Pupil.
B. Optic nerve.
C. Retina.
D. Fovea centralis.

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Now, the question is converted to a “hot spot” format, meaning you will have an unlimited amount of spots to choose from. You can move your mouse over the picture, and when you press your mouse button, you better be pressing somewhere within the “hot spot” zone. The below question, however, still doesn’t require critical thinking.
Which area of the eyes does the nurse assess to examine for increased intracranial pressure? (Place the cursor on the correct location on the diagram of the eye)

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This question now undergoes an edit to create a **critical thinking** test item:

The nurse is concerned about possible increased intracranial pressure following a client’s fall and hard blow to the head. It is most important for the nurse to first assess the client’s eyes at what location? (Place the cursor on the correct location on the diagram of the eye)

*Rationale*: The nurse should compare the pupils to each other for size, shape, movement and reactivity. If the oculomotor nerve (CN III) is compressed, the pupil on the affected side will become larger until it fully dilates. If ICP continues to increase, both pupils will dilate. Test the client’s pupil reaction with a penlight. The normal reaction is a quick constriction when the light is shone directly into the eye.

This “hot spot” question requires the student to use critical thinking and meets the four criteria listed before.
Notice how this question is already fundamentally different from the first and second questions.

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Finally, the question is polished to create a better critical thinking question for the test.

The nurse is concerned about possible increase intracranial pressure (ICP) following a client’s fall and hard blow to the head. The nurse first checks the client’s circulation and respiration to be sure each is adequate. Which area of the eye should the nurse view first to assess for ICP? (Place the cursor on the correct location on the diagram of the eye)

![Eye Diagram](image)

_Rationale:_ The nurse should compare the pupils to each other for size, shape, movement and reactivity. If the oculomotor nerve (CN III) is compressed, the pupil on the affected side will become larger until it fully dilates. If ICP continues to increase, both pupils will dilate. Test the client’s pupil reaction with a penlight. The normal reaction is a quick constriction when the light is shone directly into the eye. A sluggish reaction often is a sign of early pressure on CN III. A fixed pupil that does not respond to a light stimulus usually indicates increased ICP.

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I hope you enjoyed my report! I’ll be sending more emails out this week on your HESI Exit Exam just because you signed up for my free HESI Study tips mailing list.

I’ll be sending a HESI practice test to test your current knowledge and, based on your answers, I’ll be writing a special report on the 5 or 6 most difficult questions from that exam.

For now, to help you learn the new alternate format questions and practice answering them before the NCLEX, the book *Strategies for Alternate Item Formats on the NCLEX-RN® Exam* is recommended.
If, however, you want to learn and practice answering these types of questions in a true HESI Exit Exam format, so you’ll be prepared the right way, check out www.YourBestGrade.com/hesi/letter.

I want you to know that if you like this report, I got a lot more really good stuff for you that’s going to help you out even more with my newly updated product called HESI Study Insider. It’s all about how to pass your HESI Exit Exam and I want you to know that this product is backed by a 100% guarantee. That’s right, I am so confident that it will help you succeed on your exam (based on our track record of helping students succeed for over 7 years!), I insist that you try it out at my own risk.

You can find out more about it at www.YourBestGrade.com/hesi/letter.

To passing the HESI Exam,
Claire Corter