



Understanding CDI Exam Questions

How to read, interpret, and answer
one-best-answer questions.



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Understanding CDI Exam Questions

A Guide to Reading and Answering One-Best-Answer Questions

Preparing for the Certified in Disease Intervention (CDI) exam involves more than knowing the content. It also helps to understand **how exam questions are structured and what they are asking you to do.**

CDI exam questions use a **one-best-answer multiple-choice format.** You will be presented with a question or scenario followed by response options and asked to select the **best answer.**

Sometimes the correct response will be immediately clear. Other times, more than one response may seem reasonable. In those situations, your task is not simply to identify an answer that *could* be correct. Your task is to identify the response that **best answers the specific question being asked.**

This guide will help you practice that skill.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

As you work through this guide, you'll learn how to:

- Identify exactly what a question is asking.
- Recognize words that can change the meaning of a question.
- Separate important information from details that do not affect your answer.
- Avoid adding assumptions or information that isn't provided.
- Compare reasonable response options and identify the best answer.
- Use a consistent approach when you encounter a challenging question.

The goal isn't to find tricks. It's to understand the question.

Read carefully, focus on the information provided, and answer the question that is actually being asked.

Anatomy of a CDI Exam Question

CDI exam questions use a **one-best-answer multiple-choice format**. Understanding the parts of a question can help you focus on the information provided and identify exactly what you are being asked to determine.

Example

Question:

While interviewing a person diagnosed with syphilis, the person informs the DIS that they just did HIV rapid testing and the results came back positive.

Answers:

A. Advise the person diagnosed with syphilis to get a confirmatory HIV test.

B. Link the person diagnosed with syphilis directly to HIV care.

C. Contact an Infectious Disease provider to prescribe HIV treatment via a telehealth appointment with the person diagnosed with syphilis.

THE SCENARIO

While interviewing a person diagnosed with syphilis, the person informs the DIS that they just did HIV rapid testing and the results came back positive.

THE ASK

What is the first thing the DIS should do?

THE RESPONSE OPTIONS

A. Advise the person diagnosed with syphilis to get a confirmatory HIV test.

B. Link the person diagnosed with syphilis directly to HIV care.

C. Contact an Infectious Disease provider to prescribe HIV treatment via a telehealth appointment with the person diagnosed with syphilis.

WHAT SHOULD YOU NOTICE?

The Scenario: What information have I been given?

The scenario provides the facts and context you need to answer the question. Focus on the information provided without adding details or assumptions of your own.

The Ask: What exactly am I being asked to determine?

Pay close attention to words that tell you what the question requires. In this example, **first** matters. The question isn't asking which actions might eventually be appropriate. It is asking what should happen first.

The Response Options: Which option best answers the question?

More than one response may describe an action that seems reasonable. Consider each option in relation to the specific question being asked.

REMEMBER: THERE IS ONE BEST ANSWER

More than one response may sound reasonable or include something that could be appropriate in the situation. Instead of asking: "**Could this be correct?**" Ask: "**Does this best answer the question being asked?**"

A Simple Approach to Every Question

When you encounter a question on the CDI exam, use the same four-step approach:

READ → IDENTIFY → DECIDE → CHECK

1. READ the entire question

Read the full scenario and question before looking for an answer. Pay attention to the information you have been given and resist the urge to fill in details that aren't there.

In our example:

A person diagnosed with syphilis reports receiving a positive result on an HIV rapid test.

2. IDENTIFY what the question is asking

Before considering the response options, make sure you know exactly what you are being asked to determine.

In our example:

The question asks what the DIS should do first.

That word matters. You aren't being asked to identify everything that may eventually need to happen. You're looking for the appropriate first step.

3. DECIDE what the answer should accomplish

Before choosing a response, think about what needs to happen based on the information provided.

In our example:

The person has received a positive result from a rapid HIV test. Before moving ahead with HIV care or treatment, the test result needs to be confirmed.

4. CHECK the response options

Now compare each option with what the question is asking.

A. Advise the person diagnosed with syphilis to get a confirmatory HIV test.

Best answer. This addresses the necessary first step following the positive rapid test.

B. Link the person diagnosed with syphilis directly to HIV care.

Linkage to care may become appropriate, but this option moves beyond the first step.

C. Contact an Infectious Disease provider to prescribe HIV treatment via a telehealth appointment with the person diagnosed with syphilis.

This also moves ahead of the first step and assumes that HIV infection has already been confirmed.

THE TAKEAWAY

Read for sequence. Words such as first and next can be just as important as the clinical or disease-intervention information in the question.

An answer may describe something that could be appropriate later and still not be the best answer to the question being asked.

Use the Information You Are Given

Your professional experience is valuable when answering CDI exam questions. But experience can also make it tempting to fill in missing details or make assumptions about what happened.

On the exam, base your answer on the information provided in the question.

Example Question

Question:

A person diagnosed with gonorrhea tells the DIS that he will notify his girlfriend of her exposure and take her to a clinic for testing. The next day, the DIS contacts the clinic and learns that no one by the girlfriend's name was seen. What should the DIS do next?

Answers:

- A. Contact the girlfriend directly to notify her of the exposure.
- B. Contact the person diagnosed with gonorrhea to determine whether he notified his girlfriend and whether she was tested.
- C. Inform the clinic that the girlfriend was exposed to gonorrhea and ask the clinic to contact her.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The person said he planned to notify his girlfriend and take her to a clinic.
We also know that the clinic the DIS contacted did not see someone by the girlfriend's name.

WHAT DON'T WE KNOW?

We don't know that the girlfriend was never notified.
We don't know that she wasn't tested.
She may have visited another clinic or healthcare provider.

DON'T TURN AN UNKNOWN INTO A FACT

It might be tempting to choose A because the girlfriend wasn't seen at the clinic. But doing so requires an assumption: that the original patient did not notify her.

The information provided doesn't establish that.

B is the best answer. Contacting the original patient allows the DIS to determine what actually happened before deciding what action should come next.

THE TAKEAWAY

When reading a scenario, separate: **What the question tells you** from **What you think may have happened**

Use your professional knowledge to interpret the facts provided, but don't add facts to the scenario.
If the question doesn't tell you something happened, don't assume that it did.

Look for the Best Answer

Some CDI exam questions may include more than one response that sounds reasonable. When that happens, don't stop when you find an option that could work.

Compare the choices and ask which response most completely and appropriately addresses the situation described.

Question:

A person exposed to gonorrhea tells the DIS that they have had gonorrhea before and do not have any symptoms, so they do not believe they need to be tested. **Which response by the DIS is most appropriate?**

Answers:

- A. Explain that testing is recommended because they were exposed to someone diagnosed with gonorrhea.
- B. Tell the person that they should be tested even if they do not have symptoms.
- C. Explain that gonorrhea can occur without symptoms and that testing is necessary to determine whether they have been infected.

COMPARE THE RESPONSES

At first glance, all three responses seem reasonable. Each encourages the person to be tested. So simply asking "Is this a reasonable thing for a DIS to say?" doesn't get us to the best answer.

Look instead at how completely each response addresses the situation.

- A addresses the person's exposure but does not address their belief that having no symptoms means they do not need testing.
 - B recommends testing despite the absence of symptoms, but it does not explain why the absence of symptoms doesn't rule out infection.
 - C directly addresses the person's misunderstanding by explaining that gonorrhea can occur without symptoms and connects that information to the need for testing.
- C is the best answer.**

THE TAKEAWAY

When two or more options seem reasonable, return to the scenario and the question.

Ask yourself:

- Which response addresses the most important information in the scenario?
- Which response most completely answers what I was asked?

A reasonable answer isn't always the best answer.

Put It All Together

You've seen how careful reading can help you identify what a question is asking, avoid making assumptions, and distinguish a reasonable response from the best response.

Now it's your turn.

READ → IDENTIFY → DECIDE → CHECK

READ

Read the entire question. What information have you been given? Don't add details that aren't there.

IDENTIFY

What exactly are you being asked? Pay attention to words such as first, next, best, and most appropriate.

DECIDE

Before choosing a response, think about what the best answer should accomplish based on the information provided.

CHECK

Compare the response options. Eliminate those that don't answer the question, then choose the option that best fits.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Practice Question 1

What is the best course of action for a DIS if a roommate of a sought person asks what the visit is about?

- A. Provide the DIS's title, work location, and reason for the visit.
- B. Politely avoid answering questions, acknowledge concerns, and restate the request.
- C. Provide detailed information to the roommate.

My answer: _____

Before moving on, ask yourself:

What is this question asking me to determine?

What principle should guide the DIS's response?

Does my answer protect information that should not be shared with a third party?

Practice Question 2

What is a best practice when utilizing interpretation services with a person diagnosed with or exposed to an infectious disease?

- A. Pause frequently for interpretation.
- B. Use medical terminology when possible.
- C. Direct clarifying questions directly to the interpreter.

My answer: _____

This time, work through the question on your own: **READ → IDENTIFY → DECIDE → CHECK**

Choose your answer before turning the page.

Check Your Approach

How did you do? The goal of these questions isn't only to get the correct answer. It's to practice a process you can use when you encounter an unfamiliar or challenging question on the CDI exam.

Practice Question 1

What is the best course of action for a DIS if a roommate of a sought person asks what the visit is about?

Best Answer: B. Politely avoid answering questions, acknowledge concerns, and restate the request.

READ... The DIS is trying to reach one person, but a roommate is asking why the DIS is there. The roommate is a third party.

IDENTIFY... The question asks for the best course of action. The DIS needs to respond to the roommate without disclosing information about the person being sought.

DECIDE... The best response should protect confidentiality while still allowing the DIS to continue trying to reach the person.

CHECK...

A would reveal the reason for the visit to the roommate.

B protects confidentiality while allowing the DIS to acknowledge the roommate and restate the request.

C would disclose information to someone who should not receive it.

B is the best answer.

Practice Question 2

What is a best practice when utilizing interpretation services with a person diagnosed with or exposed to an infectious disease?

Best Answer: A. Pause frequently for interpretation.

READ... The question is about communicating effectively when working with an interpreter.

IDENTIFY... You're being asked to identify a best practice for using interpretation services.

DECIDE... The best response should support accurate, clear communication among the DIS, interpreter, and person receiving services.

CHECK...

A gives the interpreter time to accurately convey information throughout the conversation.

B is not the best approach. Medical terminology may make communication more difficult.

C shifts communication toward the interpreter rather than the person receiving services.

A is the best answer.

TAKE THIS APPROACH WITH YOU

You won't know every answer immediately, and some questions will require more thought than others. When you encounter a challenging question, return to the same process:

READ → IDENTIFY → DECIDE → CHECK

- Read what is actually there.
- Identify exactly what you're being asked.
- Decide what the best response should accomplish.
- Check each option against the question.

Your knowledge and experience are what help you answer CDI exam questions. Careful reading helps you apply them to the question in front of you.