

Michigan Memorandum 2002

I. CARDINAL RULES

These four cardinal principles underlie this Memorandum. Should question writers follow them, as well as the spirit of fairness they embody, no further instructions would be necessary.

1. All questions must contain many pieces (ideally 4+) of substantial information, with clues ordered from most obscure to least obscure. The challenge is to compact as much information as possible into 3 or fewer sentences. A well-written question will often contain 3-4 pieces of information per sentence.

2. All questions must clearly and succinctly move unidirectionally toward one unambiguous answer from the first word to the last. What that means is this: writers should read questions one word at a time, thinking of all possible answers at every point in the question. If the question at any point is narrow enough to draw a reasonable answer that is wrong, the question *must be rewritten*. Questions can be a little bit sneaky in terms of where they're going, so long as they don't invite someone to leap to a wrong answer.

3. Someone with perfect knowledge of the subject should usually know the correct answer first. Of course, that player may not always buzz-in first but questions should create conditions in which the most knowledgeable player is the one likely to answer the question first. In no event should knowledge be punished, though many of the best questions are puzzles that reward more than just "pure" knowledge.

4. When the above three rules are not violated, questions should also entertain as well as educate, as boring questions destroy the joy of the game.

An important, but unnumbered, rule is that the above rules can be violated. There are always some cases in which exceptions are perfectly OK. As you gain more expertise, you will learn these exceptions. However, know what you are doing first, as even experienced question writers should approach exceptions with caution.

This is a wickedly fast game played by many truly gifted players. Should one of your questions violate one of these rules and draw an unjust penalty from a good player, you justifiably deserve their wrath.

Anatomy of a Good Tossup

Consider these examples:

Example 1:

He is beaten by Maurice after he refuses to pay an extra five dollars for the prostitute he hired, but didn't sleep with, at the Edmont Hotel. He then makes a date with Sally Hayes, which falls apart after he asks her to run away to Vermont with him. He then tries to buzz Jane Gallagher, who he hasn't heard about since he left Pencey Prep. For 10 points – Identify this sixteen year-old who spends these days in New York in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
Answer: Holden Caulfield

This question is a straight-forward factually-dense question. It has many substantial clues: (1) the story about the prostitute, (2) the name of the hotel, (3) the name of the girl he tries to run away with, (4) the name of another girl, (5) the school he attended, (6) his age, (7) the city the novel is set in, and (8) the name of the novel.

Example 2:

This band was named partly in parody and partly in tribute of the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Their first full length album, *I take a Look Inside*, has 14 songs but clocks in at less than 22 minutes. Their other full releases, *Dave to Be Surprised* and *One Part Lullaby*, have not matched the popularity of their soundtrack work. For 10 points – Identify this band best known for its work on the 1994 soundtrack to *Kids* and the single *Natural One*.
Answer: The Folk Implosion

This question is lead-in has a twist, where the correct answer can be deduced from an obscure fact. It still has many substantial clues: (1) the origin of the band's name, (2) the names of three albums, (3) the length of the first album, (4) the band's involvement with the *Kids* soundtrack, (5) the time setting of the soundtrack, and (6) the band's best known single.

Someone who knows a lot about the band may be beaten on this question by someone who is able to figure out the answer based on the parody of "Blues Explosion." In the beginning, this question is more like a puzzle, rewarding deduction more than "pure" factual recall (but not punishing it). Many very good questions have this quality.

II. ANSWERS

The fundamental precept regarding whether or not an answer should be acceptable is simple: if a player buzzes in and gives an answer that shows precise, accurate knowledge based on the information provided by that point in the question, that answer is correct.

Players should not be penalized for failing to clairvoyantly predict the twists of a question or for not providing the exact answer listed on the packet. Therefore it is the question writer's responsibility to ensure that questions refer to one specific answer from the beginning of the question, and to ensure that all reasonable correct answers at all points in the question are listed on the packet.

1. When more than one answer is required for a tossup, that must be stated at the outset in some form. "These two U.S. presidents..." or "Two answers required."

2. When a lead-in could lead to multiple possible answers - and this cannot be corrected by rewriting the question - a prompt must be placed to either accept the other answer(s) as correct or to prompt for the listed answer. In a creator-creation situation, this caveat need not apply, as players may already give both pieces of information, but it is recommended.

Consider the question which begins: "F. Sherwood Rowland of the University of California-Irvine..." At this point there are at least two reasonable answers: "1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry" or "ozone layer," the subject of his research. A better lead-in is "It was the subject of research by F. Sherwood Rowland..." In no event is the original lead-in acceptable unless there is a note to accept both answers or to prompt on one of them.

In general, most notes are suboptimal solutions since moderators can easily miss them during a match. They also allow a question writer to write weaker questions. It is always better to have a question that leads unambiguously to one answer from the beginning.

3. All potential acceptable alternative answers should be listed. When these are insufficient to receive credit, a prompt must be included.

Whenever the answer given is substantially equivalent to the listed answer, but the given answer is later used as a clue in the question, the given answer must be accepted or a prompt must be given. For example, if an abbreviation for a group is given as a giveaway clue, but the player buzzes in early and gives the abbreviation, that should be taken as correct, or the player should be prompted for the group's full name.

a. Married and unmarried names for persons, especially women, must be supplied whenever appropriate. Birth names, as well as professional names and pen names must always be listed, along with common nicknames.

b. Royal titles must be listed whenever appropriate.

c. Scientific names must be listed as alternate answers whenever appropriate, especially for animals and plants.

d. Answers must also list commonly used symbols and letters that represent the same answer, such as the letter "c" for the speed of light. However, questions that ask what certain letters stand for in science are almost always awful, as the hundreds of major scientific fields all have their own abbreviations and symbols.

e. Official postal abbreviations should be accepted for states, or should be listed as answers that require prompts for more information.

f. Chemical symbols as well as element numbers should be accepted, or should be listed as answers that require prompts for more information. Also, many chemicals have several names and all names must be listed. (e.g. muratic acid = hydrochloric acid = HCl)

If the question is going to be reasonably gettable by most players, who have been through introductory chemistry, the formula should not be too hard in the first place.

However, a possible problem with formulae arises when the same empirical formula applies to different chemicals. For example, a question leading the answer "fructose" should prompt on $C_6H_{12}O_6$, but not accept it as the correct response since that formula also applies to a host of 6-carbon sugars, such as glucose.

If there is a question about whether a moderator can interpret the formula, spell it out (e.g. C-6-H-12-O-6 or equivalent rearrangements, although for this example, a chemist who states it as "C-6-C-6-H-12" is a sick puppy).

4. Only the minimum information necessary to distinguish should be underlined. "Eleanor Roosevelt" or "Food and Drug Administration" is sufficient.

a. The family name must be the one underlined; for languages other than English, this is not necessarily the last name listed. When in doubt, check a biographical dictionary. (Teams should always fact check all names of persons in a biographical dictionary before submitting a packet.)

b. Court case names usually require only the first party listed, though sometimes the second party alone is sufficient, especially if the first party listed is common. (e.g. Marbury v. Madison, Gilow v. New York, United States v. Nixon.)

Sometimes, legal scholars choose to refer to cases based on the letter party's name for other reasons (such as the first party having a long name or being a scumbag, e.g., Bowers v. Hardwick or Bowers), in which case either party's name should be acceptable, or may shorten the party's name. (Metlor Savings Bank v. Vinson or Vinson) Sometimes, especially with older cases, the parties may have a different order at the trial, appellate, and Supreme Court levels. Players should be prompted for a full case name only if the answer is ambiguous.

5. Answers must be listed in both English and the original language of the answer.

Ethnocentric English-only rules are never acceptable. The world is a diverse place, and this game is played by persons from all different parts of the world, as well as by persons from English-

speaking nations who have an expert knowledge of other cultures. Someone with a native or expert knowledge of a foreign language and culture should be rewarded for this knowledge, not actively punished. More importantly, the question is about something that was originally written in another language. Indeed, if only one answer must be preferred, the foreign language title is the only correct answer. The English translation of that work is only a derivative of the work, but one that we choose to accept for ease of administering the game.

a. Country names must also be listed in the country's own language. "Kingdom of Bhutan or Drak Yul." The names of countries in their own languages are listed in almost all almanacs and geographical dictionaries.

b. Works written in a language other than English must have all original language titles listed, as well as all English translations, e.g. Leviathan or The Quisler or The Stranger. Original titles are always listed in the various Bard's Reader's Encyclopedias, and most other reputable reference source.

c. Transliterated answers must be treated carefully, as they often generate a number of correct possible English translations. This is especially true of titles, such as "Night on the Bald Mountain," "Night on Bare Mountain," "Night on the Bald Mountain," and "Night on Bald Mountain," all of which are common English translations for the same Mussorgsky work.

6. When an exact answer is given that identifies the information in the question, that answer must be accepted, even if the listed answer is only an approximation of the given answer. Never should an exact answer to a question be counted as incorrect.

For example, if a question begins, "You want to find the area of a regular hexagon with sides 6," and a player answers "24 radical 3," that answer should be taken as correct, even if the question finishes with "is the area closest to 31.4, 41.4, or 51.4?" (although this a terrible question...see the section on multiple choice answers below)

a. In a calculation question, the units of the final answer should be specified in the beginning, or equivalent answers must be listed to handle otherwise correct, but early answers.

7. When the information in the question is actually performed by a closely related group, or a subgroup of the listed answer, that other answer must also be listed, or ruled out.

For example, it is easy to confuse the precise roles or relationships between of the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Reserve Open Market Committee or the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

8. Words with the same root that show knowledge of the correct answer should usually be listed also. For example, a question that begins, "this word is derived from," which asks for something like "linguist," should also accept "linguistic." This would normally be an example of exact and unambiguous knowledge, except that many writers at the end of the question include something like "...name this 8-letter word."

9. Questions that do not indicate a level of geographic specificity early must accept other answers that show exact and unambiguous knowledge, or must prompt for more information. For example, "The Headquarters of the International Labor Organization, GATT, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, WHO, ..." should ideally be answered "Geneva." However, if the question finishes "...are all located in what country," then the question is misleading.

10. Rules that allow blitzing (giving many correct facts hoping that one is the correct answer) are only necessary if questions are not written correctly, as correctly written questions lead to one unambiguous answer. Regardless of whether or not a specific tournament allows blitzing, it should be discouraged by question writers producing tightly worded questions that lead to only

one answer from the first word to the last.

III. LEAD-INS

The purpose of a lead-in is to reduce the number of answers from the billions possible before the first word is spoken down to one specific, unambiguous answer. If at any point, the question is narrow enough to draw a reasonable answer that is wrong, the question **must be rewritten**.

1. Non-unique lead-ins that narrow the field of possible answers to just a few are not acceptable. Lead-ins must uniquely pinpoint one possible answer as soon as possible, or must be general enough not to draw an incorrect early answer.

"Maya Angelou wrote a poem for this event..." is not acceptable, as she wrote poems for (among other events) both Clinton's inauguration and the Million Man March. Instead, the question lead-in must limit the range of answers to one (e.g., "In October 1995, Maya Angelou...")

However, lead-ins may take a few words to eliminate all answers but one: a player cannot buzz in after "This woman..." say "Susan B. Anthony" and argue that he or she is correct on the grounds that Susan B. Anthony, being a woman, satisfies all the information given up to that point in the question. It is obvious to everyone that there are billions of possible answers after those two words.

A good rule of thumb is that if there are less than ten possible correct answers at any point in your lead-in (and more than one) the question must be rewritten.

2. Question writers often use pronouns poorly. "It was inspired by Sauk Center, Minnesota..." is not acceptable, as it could draw an answer of both "Main Street" as well as "Gopher Prairie." A better lead-in is "This city was inspired by Sauk Center..." Another example is "President McKinley was assassinated here..." to which the answer could be "Burnito" or "Pan American Exposition."

a. Improper use of the passive voice may lead to multiple correct possibilities. "A new color was added in 1986..." could lead to either "blue," "M&M's," et cetera.

b. Too often, pronouns are used correctly, but do not distinguish between characters and actors. For example, "He uttered the famous line, 'Frankly my dear...'" does not distinguish between Clark Gable or Rhett Butler.

c. A related problem is recitation of quotations without specifying whether the speaker of the quote or the subject of the quote is wanted. For example, "Tell me what brand of whiskey he drinks, I would like to send a barrel of it to my other generals" could lead to either Grant or Lincoln.

3. Introductory phrases that modify a noun are not acceptable. For example, consider the lead-in "The author of the 1914 collection of short stories *Dubliners*, James Joyce was also famous for..." When someone hears "The author of the 1914 collection of short stories *Dubliners*," they will justifiably buzz in with "Joyce" and draw a penalty.

4. Introductions that do not have anything to do with the final answer are never acceptable.

a. Anything in the form "X is Y, but for 10 points, what is Z" must be rewritten (e.g., "A Tale of Two Cities was written by Charles Dickens, but who wrote *Moby Dick*?")

Similarly, the question "Adelbert Ames served as governor of Mississippi from 1874..." For 10 points - name the current governor" is unacceptable. Someone hearing "Adelbert Ames served as

governor..." will justifiably buzz in with Mississippi.

b. Many lead-ins are good, but do not lead to the desired answer. If a question begins, "Manzanar in Lone Pine, California..." and a player answers "Japanese Internment Camps," that answer should be accepted as it exactly identifies what was asked, even if the question (stupidly) goes on to ask "what group of Americans were interned there during WWII," and the listed answer is "Japanese Americans." This is a case in which the question is acceptable, but the answer listed is the wrong one.

5. Lead-ins should contain facts that are substantially related to the correct answer.

a. Lead-ins should remain in the same general category as the desired answer. A question on an academic subject should not begin with a pop culture lead-in, nor should a science question describe a scientist's appearance in a work of fiction. Interdisciplinary questions are always encouraged, but should not be written as to unfairly penalize specialists in specific subject areas.

b. "Son-of-a-bank" lead-ins should only be used when there is a useful reason to know the profession of a person's parents. For example, "Daughter of an entomologist..." is an acceptable lead-in for Margaret Atwood, as her relationship with her father is an important element of some of her works (e.g., *Cat's Eye*). However, "Son of a tallow chandler..." as a lead-in for Daniel Defoe is inane.

c. Madlib lead-ins (Born in (YEAR), he went to school at (SCHOOL) and studied under (PERSON)) should be used sparingly. A lead-in mentioning the year of birth should only be used when it is important to specify the proper time period early in the question.

6. Questions should be written in parallel structure when possible.

For example, a question that begins, "Until 1997, the tallest building in the world was located in Chicago..." could draw an answer of "Kuala Lumpur," the city in which the Petronas Towers were built. It is just misleading if the question goes on to ask "...in what country," wanting Malaysia, if the question wanted the country. It should not have dangled Chicago in the lead-in.

The lead-in above, while it illustrates this point, is misleading for other reasons, as players could buzz in after "Until 1997, the tallest building in the world..." with either "Sears Tower" or "Petronas Towers," depending on where they think the question is going - the player should never be required to guess in this fashion.

a. Giving one half of a well-known pair in a lead-in, when not asking for the other half as the answer, is often misleading. For example, "One type of cholesterol is LDL..." would lead to an answer of "HDL." If the question goes on to ask "what does LDL stand for" or any other information, it is misleading. Similarly, if the question begins "Leader swam the Hellespont nightly to be with his love..." a player would buzz in with "Hero," if the question then goes on, however, to ask about Lord Byron swimming the Hellespont to re-enact this scene, the lead-in is misleading and must be rewritten.

7. The lead-in "for a quick 10 points" is not acceptable, nor are the questions that usually follow it. Questions that are only valuable to differentiate the split-second reactions of 8 simultaneous buzzes have no place in competition. Questions can be of varying length, but the absolute minimum question length should be two sentences.

8. Describing a work or a scene from a work when not asking for the title or author is misleading. A question beginning "A rat is killed with a frying pan is thrown across the room in a small Chicago apartment..." is acceptable if the answer is "Native Son," but not if the answer is "Bigger Thomas."

9. Calculation tossups are acceptable if used *very sparingly*, but they must be carefully written not to mislead players into buzzing before they have all the operations they must perform. In addition, they should never be exercises in brute, mechanical calculation speed.

10. A stylized type of question is a list tossup, where a large number of people or events sharing one common denominator are listed, followed by a giveaway. This type of question should be used sparingly (no more than once a packet) ideally, the first two items in the list should be sufficient to uniquely identify the answer; if the answer cannot be uniquely identified after four items, the question must be rewritten.

a. Questions which list events and ask for which came first (or last) are unacceptable, as they devote into buzzer races when the nature of the question is revealed.

b. A question of the form "which does not belong" is always unacceptable. For example, "*Innocent Abroad*; *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *The Origin of Species* - which one was not written by Mark Twain?" is simply uncondemnable.

IV. GIVEAWAYS

The purpose of a giveaway is, obviously, to give the answer away. It should not always contain one of the easiest possible clues about the desired answer (without being insultingly easy) and should never contain a swerve or twist that leads to an answer that's different from the one that the lead-in has directed the player towards.

The giveaway is usually the part of a tossup that gauges to a tossup to a certain difficulty. Please see the note on the distribution of difficulty attached as the appendix.

1. Giveaways should always contain the phrase "For 10 points." This can appear at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, and it indicates that the reader is in the final sentence of the tossup. There should be no lengthy pauses after the FTP clue, although the sentence that follows FTP can sometimes be rather long.

2. The giveaway should not eliminate any possible answers. If there are still possible answers that need to be eliminated by the giveaway, the rest of the question needs to be rewritten.

a. Spelling tossups are inappropriate for competition except in *extremely rare* circumstances in which it is clear to everyone from the beginning of the question that the tossup is a spelling question. Giveaways along the lines of "For 10 points - spell this word," are simply evil if there has been no previous hint that the tossup is a spelling question.

b. Too often, question writers end questions with "name this 11-letter word," which punishes someone who gives an adjective form instead of a noun form.

3. Ball and switch giveaways should be used sparingly. These occur when giveaways provide information about a more well-known person or event with the same name that is only tenuously related to the subject of the question. (e.g. "For 10 points - identify this German after whom the capital of North Dakota is named.")

a. Giveaways that ask for something of the same name that has absolutely no relation to the subject asked about before the giveaway are unacceptable. (e.g. "For 10 points - identify this saint who shares his name with a 10-year-old on *The Simpsons*.")

V. STYLE

Questions should be written to maintain the focus on factual information, not on the writer's personal preferences or beliefs.

1. Discriminatory language is unacceptable.

a. Sexist language as well as questions that assume certain social roles for women are unacceptable. Women should be identified primarily by their accomplishments, not their relationships to men. Inappropriate comments and questions about women's weight, bodies, sexual roles, etc. must be removed from the game.

b. Racist language or racially insensitive questions must similarly be avoided.

c. Inside jokes are almost always inappropriate, as are negative comments about other schools.

d. Use of the phrase "politically incorrect" and other meaningless stock-phrases should not be used, especially if they are used derogatorily toward underrepresented players in the activity.

e. Editorial slants in the questions are unacceptable; the object of the game is to reward knowledge of facts, not the question writer's opinions.

2. Questions must be easy to read aloud. We recommend that writers read the entire packet aloud as a final edit.

a. The use of the word "blank" in questions is often hokey and confusing, especially in tossups.

b. Writers must use correct grammar. Though many strict grammatical rules interfere with the flow of questions meant to be read aloud, basic grammar rules must be followed whenever possible.

c. Simple past tense should be used when appropriate. Past perfect should be used only to refer to events completed at or before a past time spoken of. Simple past also removes the extra word "had."

3. Questions must be tightly edited to remove all extraneous words and syllables. Correct editing can significantly reduce the length of questions. In a timed game, this means more questions may be asked. In an untimed game, tight editing prevents the game from deteriorating into drudgery and boredom.

4. Information that is time dependent or may become out of date must be date-stamped. Usually, a month and year is sufficient.

VI. SUBSTANTIAL INFORMATION

All information in a question should help players determine the correct answer. Too many questions contain vague, weak, fluff, or insubstantial information, or meander for 2-3 lines before the meat of the question begins. *Just ask the question.*

1. Clues must be ordered from most to least obscure. Writers still do not apply this basic rule, perhaps because many lack the experience and knowledge to anticipate what other players will and will not know.

a. Too many questions have very difficult clues followed by very easy clues, with no intermediate levels of information. If a question topic lacks intermediate information, the subject may be inappropriate for a tossup. When a potential 80+ point swing hinges on every question, every professional attempt must be made to make the tossups multi-leveled and favorable toward players with more knowledge.

b. Stock clues should usually be avoided, and should never be used as lead-ins.

Question writers should strive to uncover new and interesting information about familiar subjects. Using tired, often-repeated information as clues makes for boring games and provides an unnecessary advantage for warhorse players over novices.

c. Non-clues are a waste of space.

Question writers should avoid using clues like "131 rivers flow into this lake, but only one flows out of it." No one is going to know which lake has 131 rivers flowing into it, and only one river flows out of all sorts of lakes. All information in a question should help someone answer the question, if it doesn't, don't put it in.

2. Inexplicit Criteria must be avoided.

Qualifiers like the costliest, the most expensive, etc. invariably lead to protests. The criteria need to be explicitly stated.

What is meant by the "biggest insurers"? The insurance companies with the most employees, the most office space, the greatest net profits, most insured, greatest gross revenues? What is meant by "the most expensive film ever made"? Adjusted for inflation by the CPI? In unadjusted dollars? Does it include advertising? Depending upon the qualification, this could lead to different answers and could change with time.

a. When questions refer to events that occurred in geographical entities that no longer exist, the question must carefully pinpoint which answer is desired. A question referring to a 1970 natural disaster in what is now Bangladesh would likely cause a protest if East Pakistan is not an acceptable answer, since that was the entity's name in 1970. The same goes for the USSR, Yugoslavia, etc. If the desired information is not pinpointed very early in the question, a prompt must be placed in the answer should a player give the older (or, as appropriate, newer) name for an entity.

b. Some information differs because the sources differ. When a conflict among reputable sources differs, the information must be omitted, or the conflict of the sources must be noted.

c. Word and phrase origins cause persistent protests. Take the example of the notoriously unreliable history or "OK." One reference source lists over a dozen possible derivations. Unless this conflict is the meat of the question, it is inappropriate to write a question about the derivation of "OK" as it will just lead to protests.

d. Dubious honorifics must be avoided. A question that begins with "He has long been considered the supreme lawyer of the English language..." is not acceptable (Answer: Samuel Johnson). Who has "long considered" him "the supreme lawyer of the English language"? Though it makes questions slightly longer, if writers want to include such dubious honorifics, they must include who bestowed them for a semblance of credibility.

e. Subjective judgments asserted as fact must be avoided. Lead-ins like "the most important book of the 19th century..." lead to debates about *The Origin of Species*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and many other works.

f. Whenever debatable judgments are made, the criteria must be specified. For example, what is meant by "the major persecuted ethnic minority of a country - the most oppressed? Oppressed by the most people? The biggest group of people who are oppressed? The most noticeably oppressed? The group most in a position to bring its oppression to public debate? This is not the time to generate political, theological, or other endless debates. Use specific, verifiable facts in your questions.

g. Questions with weak premises should be avoided. A common such premise is "He is the last entry in the biographical dictionary." Depending upon the dictionary, this could be Zwingli, Zworykin, or perhaps others. This is not a constant fact, and the ordering of someone's name in a dictionary is just stupid information compared to their accomplishments.

h. Questions should not assume that the United States or Europe is the world. Information like "the most influential musician of the 1800s..." begs the question "influential to whom?" It is also important to specify humans when appropriate (e.g., "I will give you the name of an organ, you tell me..."), as many biologists play this game who know information about quite a number of species.

4. Factual errors occur with far too much frequency. Some occur because writers do not consult reference sources carefully when writing their questions. It is *always* inappropriate to write questions from memory. Others occur because some reference sources are not reliable.

a. More errors occur because misinformation permeates the information/reference source industry, as writers and publishers attempt to come up with the most outrageous, scintillating "facts" to sell their books. If something seems suspicious, check it with a reliable source. If it cannot be verified, strike the fact from the question. Overly dramatic questions with unverifiable assertions about history must be avoided.

b. In an effort to make questions creative and colorful, writers often speculate about motives, ideas, and thoughts of the question subject, or offer interesting interpretations of limited factual data. Such coloration, however, often makes questions factually inaccurate. Any "creativity" which butchers factual accuracy for cleverness isn't worthy of the label. A creative question will express information in a different, surprising, or thoughtful way, but not in a way that renders the information absurd or wrong. If speculation will make a question more interesting, it must be noted as speculation with qualifiers like "perhaps."

c. Works performed by teams should not be attributed solely to the group's leader, as it is factually inaccurate.

5. Questions with answers that are academic disciplines or broad fields of thought should be avoided. Such questions with answers as existentialism, anthropology, sociology, etc. are invariably vague, limited, and wrong. Modern academic disciplines, with dozens of subfields, do not allow for such questions. Ask something about the content of the field instead.

6. Calculation of the number of years that elapse between dates should usually be avoided, especially if rounding could yield conflicting answers (e.g., "If the next landing of humans on the moon occurs in the year 2025, how many years will have elapsed since the first?" as it depends on whether the landing takes place after July 20, 2025.) Asking for the current year in other calendar systems has the same problem. The exact reference points must be specified.

7. Make sure not to confuse similar terms in your questions.

a. Largest does not mean most populous. The largest city in the United States is not New York City, but Anchorage. Questions that ask for population figures must specify the measured entities (cities, SMSAs, etc.) as well as what measurement is being used (e.g., the 1990 Census).

b. Writers must correctly distinguish between percent and percentage. "Percentage" is a mass unit number which carries the unit of the original, while "percent" is a fraction of 100. If 18 of 24 tossups are answered correctly, the "percentage" answered correctly is 18 tossups, or 75 percent.

VII. BONUSSES

Unlike tossups, a team receiving a bonus question has the opportunity to hear the entire question

- before answering; however, many of the same principles still apply. Bonuses should of course contain correct/factual information, but they should also be succinct, easy to read, and interesting.
- All bonuses are worth 30 points, and all possible point values are multiples of five. Bonuses should distinguish between teams with little knowledge of the subject of hand, those with some knowledge, and those with deep knowledge.
 - Commonly used bonus formats includes three questions of 10 points each, three questions, one worth 5 points, one worth 10, and one worth 15, four questions, two worth 5 points and two worth 10, the 30-20-10 progressive bonus, two 15-10 or 15-5 progressive questions, five 5 point question with a bonus five points for answering all correctly, or a one-part question asking a team to identify five or six related items.
 - Questions that stop when the players miss an answer are unacceptable. Players should not be penalized based on an arbitrary ordering of questions.
 - All or nothing single-answer bonuses cannot be used. These bonuses penalize a team, with slightly less than perfect knowledge just as much as a team with no knowledge, and are therefore inappropriate.
 - 40-point clues and 1-point clues used in trash competitions are unacceptable for academic events.
 - Bonuses with a single answer per part should have no fewer than 3 parts, and no more than 5. The more bonus parts that are used, the shorter the text of the question has to be; bonuses should take no more than 40 seconds to complete in timed events, and only slightly longer to complete in untimed events.
 - Questions should not repeat the point value in each sub-part when it is the same. Just say "for 10 points each" at the beginning and ask the questions. Repeating the point value wastes time.
 - Questions with less than 3 answers should use progressive clues to have at least three prompts. The 30-20-10 bonus, as well as two 15-5 or 15-10 progressions are accepted formats.
 - Questions that require ordering of a list, with points awarded for placing each item in the proper place, are unacceptable, because they reward luck and guessing and can frequently punish knowledge. A team that places only one item out of order may receive no points. They also permit a team with no knowledge of the subject whatsoever to win a tied match by guessing the same answer for each slot. Write instead about something substantial about the subject. Content-based questions requiring exact factual recall are always better.
 - Ordering a short (3-item) list on an all-or-nothing basis is acceptable for a bonus part. (e.g. For 10 points - put the following events in order: Balboa discovers the Pacific; Cortez conquers the Aztecs; De Soto discovers the Mississippi.)
 - In a list like the one above, players should only need to give short bits of information that uniquely identify the items to get points--such as "Balboa," "Mississippi" - although "the first one" and the like are not acceptable.
 - Ordering items correctly can be used as a bonus in a question that asks for them to be named. (e.g. "Identify the five most populous countries in Africa, with a bonus five points for putting them in order from most to least populous.") However, questions that require both the derivation and the correct ordering of a list are punitively difficult and thus unacceptable.
 - Multiple choice questions are never acceptable. If you expect teams to know nothing about the question - so much so that you must give choices - then the question is inappropriate; write a

- different question. Again, it is never acceptable for teams to get points by guessing when the team has no knowledge of the subject whatsoever. The same applies to true/false and other limited choice questions (even with 4+ choices). A question that does not lend itself to a unique, verifiable answer is inappropriate.
- Progressive, or 30-20-10 questions are often written poorly.
 - The first clue must always pinpoint one unique gettable answer. For example, "This writer was born in 1907 in New York City" is unacceptable as it could apply to at least dozens of people.
 - The 30-point clue should neither be impossibly difficult or inane/easy; approximately 10-20% of teams should answer the 30-point clue correctly.
 - The 10 point clue is often far too easy. Teams are not entitled to 10 points automatically. Teams should be able to get the question at some point 80-90% of the time, though.
 - Bonus parts with more than one clue should follow a less strict pyramidal style, not to reward the team with more knowledge (as with tossups) but to make the question more interesting. If a bonus part reads "The capital of Denmark, this city is home to the Little Mermaid statue and Tivoli Gardens," a team will want to answer after "Denmark," and the rest of the question will be ignored. Repeating the question as "Home to the Little Mermaid statue and Tivoli Gardens, this city is the capital of Denmark" is better, as teams will be more likely to need to hear the whole question before answering.
 - Phrasing bonus parts in this modified pyramidal style also makes it more difficult for teams trailing in timed matches to use the "hurry-up offense." In order to both save time and earn points, they will have to have deeper knowledge of the subject.
 - Trivia, insipid lead-ins to bonuses should not be used. Anything resembling the following is off limits:
 - "My roommate Al has a complete Beatles collection..."
 - "Everyone has heard of..."
 - "We all know that..."
 - "Let's play that game; match the artist..."
 - "It's time again for everyone's favorite African capitals quiz..."
 - "You might know (or not know) about X, but this question is about Y..."
 - "For example, if I said X, you'd say Y..." (if the question is that difficult to understand, you might consider not asking it.)
 - "How well do you know your Athenian history?..."
 - "The breakup of Yugoslavia has created a bunch of new world capitals for any good academic competitor to memorize. How far along are you..."
 - "We all grew up listening to early 90s rock and roll..."
 - "Let's hearken back to the not so distant past..."
 - "It's time for your favorite biology game..."
 - "It's time again for everyone's favorite question..."
- Don't waste time: just ask the question.

Writing Questions

1. Before Writing Questions

Look around you. Look around you. Just look around you. Do you see what we're looking for yet? That's right, the subject of today's lesson is **sources**.

I'd like to start this guide with a general discussion of what makes a good question-writing source. There are many things that one can use, but obviously not all sources are equally reliable. Notably unreliable sources include Wikipedia and random geocities web pages. Reliable sources include scholarly journals, textbooks, published books, and encyclopedias of various sorts. If you can get your hands on it, the electronic version of the Encyclopaedia Britannica is superb for many topics, particularly history. Masterplots are a good resource for literature plot summaries, and there are many topic-specific encyclopedias that are surely available at your local university (or public) library (I'm assuming that virtually all of you have some sort of university affiliation).

Wikipedia may be worthy of a special topic of its own; I mention it here to point out that while it may be a nice source for brainstorming before you actually start writing, you should be thrice-wary of anything you read on Wikipedia. I don't want to get into a discussion of the problems that inhere in the Wikipedia model. Suffice to say that it is not a trustworthy source, though it does in fact contain much that is true. Anything read on Wikipedia should be cross-checked with a more reliable scholarly source. For that matter, pretty much anything you read on the Internet that doesn't come from a journal should be double-checked. There are some sites which are pretty reliable and contain some useful information; those are usually associated with universities in some way. The worst part of using Wikipedia as a source is the noted problem of **Wikiplagiarism**, which is what occurs when people just copy sentences out of Wikipedia. Wikiplagiarism can be easily spotted by competent editors because it contains weird phrasings that usually shouldn't appear in questions, as well as editorializing. I'll have more on style topics below.

All this makes it sound like sources are hard to get to and require a lot of work. For the most part, you should be able to get a lot of mileage out of a few books available from whatever library is easiest for you to get to.

2. Deciding What to Write About

This is arguably the hardest phase of the whole process; I know for me it's usually the stumbling block, whereas once I have my topics picked out things generally go pretty smoothly. How can you make a good decision regarding what to write? Read below to find out!

First, you have to know your audience. Are you writing for a novice tournament, a standard invitational, or ACF Nationals? This will determine, to some degree, what answer selections are appropriate in your packet, and later on, what clues you use to construct this question. Second, you should ask yourself whether the answer you are thinking about will make for a good question, although most answers are fine, all other things being equal, some answers don't lend themselves well to good questions and should be avoided if possible. I'll try to

outline some of that below. Finally, you should ask yourself whether writing on this particular answer choice is going to require a lot of research. This has less to do with writing a good question and more with budgeting time for doing so. If you find yourself spending an hour per tossup, you're either doing something wrong or picking topics that take far more time to research than they should.

With regard to difficulty, context matters a lot. If you're writing for a tournament like ACF Fall, which is going to include a lot of new players who are, at best, familiar with the high school canon, the goal should be for every tossup to be answered by every team if read to that team to completion against empty chairs. Obviously, this is an ideal; sometimes, people blank on the answer, and sometimes they just don't know it, but at tournaments which are supposed to be introductions to collegiate quizbowl for most participants, the great majority (90%, say) should at least have heard of the answer. So, a tossup on Herbert Spencer would be fine, whereas a tossup on *Social Statics* is almost certainly too hard.

For harder tournaments, the field of allowable answers is expanded, but it can still be hard to know whether what you're writing is appropriate. I think the following method provides a decent rule of thumb that one can follow: consult past instances of this tournament. If a clue appears multiple times in a tossup, but doesn't appear as a bonus part, it may be all right to make it the hard part of a bonus. If something appears as the hard part multiple times, you could probably promote it to one of the easier parts. If something appears multiple times as a middle or easy part of a bonus, it's probably good tossup material. At first, this might seem like a daunting task, but I think you'll find that if you read packets in practice and go to tournaments, you'll quickly get a handle on what's hard and what's not. At the very worst, by following this method, you will likely err on the side of an easier topic, which is fine. It also makes a difference whether you're writing tossups or bonuses. For example, a European history bonus that included parts on the War of the Spanish Succession, the Treaty of Utrecht, and Philip V would be perfectly reasonable for ACF Fall, but a tossup on Philip V himself would probably be excessive. On the other hand, Philip V might be acceptable as a tossup at ACF Nationals.

It'd also like to address a particular misconception that has formed around some tournaments like ACF Nationals and Regionals. It appears that these tournaments are erroneously viewed by some teams as the perfect opportunities to dig out that tossup on minor works of Selma Lagerlof. Please resist the temptation to do this; before writing, you should really do what I suggest above and check to make sure that whatever it is you're going to write about has a decent chance of being answered. Depending on the results of the above procedure, you might do better by making this subject a bonus part or a clue to something more gettable. Many times, an inexperienced player will hear something that he thinks is tossup-worthy in class and rush to write about it, only to stump an entire tournament. Also, it's generally a good idea to avoid things that are too highly specialized. Some specialist material, especially in science questions, is inevitable, but even within the category, no one should have to have a Ph.D. in the subject to answer the question.

Mostly, I've been writing about tossups. As far as bonuses are concerned, a good way of constructing a bonus is the "easy-middle-hard" model which is now pretty much predominant in quality tournaments. The easy part of the bonus should be answerable by pretty much any team at the tournament. The middle part might be answerable by about half the teams,

whereas one might need to have really good knowledge to get the third part, probably no more than 20% of teams should reasonably be able to 30 a bonus. Of course, bonuses vary in difficulty for different teams, but in general, a tournament with well-distributed bonus difficulty will have bottom teams converting not much less than (preferably around) 10 PPB, whereas the best teams could conceivably top 20 PPB, and bonus conversion should be well-correlated with overall place in the tournament.

This brings me to the somewhat peripheral but still important issue of consistency. This is less important for tossups, which contain internal difficulty gradations, than it is for bonuses. If all the science bonuses at a tournament are super hard, you're going to screw some teams really badly. For this reason, following the above bonus writing model is a good way to ensure that you aren't making any one category too hard. Some teams are going to just not know some areas, and that's fine, but if some bonuses are consistently harder than others, that has the potential to really damage teams. In accordance with this principle, the practice of the impossible third bonus part should also be avoided. The possibility of getting 30 points on a bonus should always be there for the talented team; overly difficult bonus parts effectively turn 30 potential points into only 20, which tends to really narrow the gap between teams.

Ok, this is the part where I address some objections to my own advice. There are some people who adhere to the view that one should write about things people are likely to know about. Instead of things that have come up before. Matt Weiner is one notable proponent of this view. I'd like to note that I don't completely disagree with this, but I am of the opinion that things that have come up in packets before are things that people are likely to know. One might make the argument that this rewards people who read or hear lots of packets, and this is of course true. But I contend that these people will be rewarded anyway, because if you write about what people know, and people play on those packets, the people who played on them will have the same advantage when the same topic comes up, regardless of the reason for why it comes up in quizbowl.

3. Actually Writing the Questions

Ok, with that long preamble out of the way, we can get down to the business of actually writing some questions. I'll try to provide some guidelines for general question writing and also dissect some questions to demonstrate what makes for good and bad tossups and bonuses. Here we go!

3.1. Tossups

The first principle of good tossup writing is pyramidal. What is pyramidal, you ask? Pyramidal is simply the principle of putting harder clues earlier in the questions, with the idea being that the more knowledgeable team will answer the tossup first because they know more about the subject. I like to think of the pyramid as representing the proportion of teams that would know the answer to the tossup at some particular spot in the question. So the apex of the pyramid represents a specialist in the subject, and the base represents most people who play quizbowl and have heard of the answer. Ideally, there should be a relatively smooth gradation between the apex and the base, although of course real tossups resemble zigzags (or perhaps masabags) more than actual pyramids. Nevertheless, the idea is clear: there are gradations of clue difficulty in tossups which is intended to distinguish between more

knowledgeable and less knowledgeable players.

There's no magic formula for writing tossups, unfortunately. If there were, we could have computer write tossups for us and the problem of generating questions would be solved once and for all. While Ray Luo labors to come up with such a machine, I'll just go ahead and describe, in general terms, what the various levels of the tossup pyramid might look like and what kind of clues they might contain. Keep in mind that this is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but I hope it will prove instructive.

The first clue of a question should contain information that is unlikely to be known by anyone who has not spent at least some time studying whatever the answer might be. When I say "studying" I don't necessarily mean studying in school, but rather this word should be read as meaning "absorbing information about," and I write "studying" for short. So, reading a book by or about, say, Herman Melville, qualifies as studying in this sense. If I were determined to learn a lot about *Moby Dick* I would certainly read the work itself, but I might also read various critical interpretations of it. That kind of clue would be pretty useful to me then; it would give me an advantage over someone who has just read the book but not the criticism. In science, such a clue might reference a little-known application of some effect, for instance. In history, it could be a clue about an academic historian's interpretation of some event. And so on.

I think this is a good point to insert a brief caveat about such first clues. It can be hard sometimes, especially when employing clues of the type "Joe Blow said this-and-that about this work," to decide if a clue will actually be useful to anyone. I address this below in the section entitled "The Usefulness of Clues." Moving on:

The next couple of clues (what I'm going to refer to as "the middle") should successively narrow the answer space down to the actual correct answer of the tossup. This is the part that is usually the hardest to execute, since clues that are really easy or really hard might be obviously so, but the arrangement of middle clues is rough because you're trying to create a relatively fine gradation from the start to the end of the tossup. It's hard to say exactly what those clues should be, but maybe some examples would be instructive. If the question is on a work of literature, (say, the very same *Moby Dick*), you might describe a somewhat-little-known episode in the book, followed by the actions of some better-known characters, followed by some even better-known names or events. In a science tossup, you might talk about a lesser-known consequence of some effect, then maybe the equation that describes this effect, followed by a better-known consequence. Or something like that.

The key component of clue ordering is to ask yourself, what would a person who knows a lot/a decent amount/not so much/very little (pick one) be likely to know about whatever it is that you're writing about. This requires some intuition in some cases, because unless you've been around the circuit for a while, you probably don't know that certain clues for certain things are considered "stock" and thus shouldn't be anywhere but in the end of a tossup. However, for many situations, you can figure this out; in literature, for example, it should be straightforward to see which characters are minor and which are major, which events are central to the work, and which are just vignettes. If you're writing on some idea or theory, the name of its formulator probably belongs in the end, unless it's obscure. Likewise for common definitions (like in a math question), or major scenes in novels, or most famous lines of

poetry, or whatever. You should quickly get some sense for what the clue ordering might be like by reading a bunch of tossups; that's not to say that you have to slavishly emulate what came before you (maybe you found a neat new clue or something), but it does mean that if you follow the conventional clue order you will probably write a decent tossup.

The giveaway is self-explanatory. It should contain the most famous bit of information about whatever the answer is. It should *usually* not, in my opinion, contain tangential clues (the James Webb telescope comes to mind) about what the answer sounds like or anything that requires lateral thinking. Note the emphasis on "usually." Sometimes an oblique reference to another thing that may help someone get the question is fine (mostly I'm thinking of common-link tossups), but most of the time it's not.

3.2. Bonuses

There's a lot less to say about writing bonuses than about writing tossups, mostly because the confusion associated with pyramidality is to some extent absent in bonuses. Bonuses should generally follow the "easy-medium-hard" model of bonus parts and the majority of the bonuses you write should be of the 10-10-10 variety. We can loosely define "easy" to mean that we would like 90% of the field to convert this part, "medium" to mean that maybe 40-50% of the field will convert it, and "hard" to mean that perhaps 10-20% of the field should convert it. These are not hard-and-fast numbers, they are just vague signposts to explain what is meant by the difficulty levels. Obviously, these may be adjusted downward or upward for various tournaments, but I think they are generally a good indication of how to break down bonus parts by difficulty.

In writing bonuses, avoid the "impossible third part." A sufficiently competent team may not get 30 points on each bonus, but the potential for 30 points should be there. A bonus part on something that no one who is not an expert on some particular subcategory wouldn't even have heard of is a bad idea. It is also bad to have the bonus difficulty differ substantially across categories within a tournament (and especially within a single packet). Such bonuses tend to screw an unfortunate team and can make the difference in class games. Of course, there will be variability between teams, and some categories will be known better than others, but the potential for the structure of the packet (rather than the clue content) to influence the outcome of the game should be minimized.

3.3. Style

This may be the most subjective section of all, but I think it's necessary to say something about the stylistic issues inherent in question writing. It should go without saying that packets should be grammatically correct, but they're often not, so please read your questions out loud to yourself to make sure the sentence structure makes sense. We all make mistakes of course, but some tournaments I've been to have featured missing words or spelling errors or grammatical mistakes in almost every question. This is the minimum that can be expected of any writer. I'll say it again: PROOFREAD!

The first clue of a tossup should always be uniquely identifying (to the best of the writer's abilities; sometimes information may match two answers despite the writer's best attempts). Also, the first pronoun should refer unambiguously to the answer and should appear IN THE

FIRST SENTENCE. I can't stress this enough! If the first sentence of a tossup finishes and I don't know what category the answer goes in (person, place, or thing) then this question is bad because it doesn't make clear what it's looking for.

More generally, there are different ways to word questions, and different approaches to writing. On one level, you may choose between simple, declaratory sentences (e.g. "This guy wrote about Joe Blow in Work X. Then he wrote about Jane Doe in Work Y.") or compound sentences with clauses and subclauses (e.g. "This guy wrote about Joe Blow in Work X, after which he used his experience in the Pastry War to write about Jane Doe in Work Y."). You get the idea, I'm sure. I personally like the latter style, but some people like the former. I don't think there's anything wrong with either one, provided you are economical about your word choice. Since questions are typically limited in length by editors, you should make sure that all the words you use are meaningful. If a clue can be rewritten with shorter words in place of longer ones, you should probably do that. This saves space and helps you pack more information into a tossup.

Within clues, there are different ways of ordering information. For example, notice how above I used the form "wrote about Joe Blow in Work X," rather than, "His Work X concerns the adventures of Joe Blow." This is deliberate; any random quizbowl player is less likely to know the main character of any given novel than the name of the novel itself. And so on. I recommend using this construction to create pyramidality within clues themselves.

Finally, a word on gender. For a long time, there has been what I think is a nasty trope in quizbowl, which involves writing things like "this writer," or "this scientist," or whatever in an attempt to disguise the fact that the person in question is female. This is annoying, because instead of saying "she," which is shorter, you're now using up more space and you're not even hiding the fact that it's a woman, because everyone now knows to watch for this. So my suggestion is that people use "this [blank]" in the first couple of clues, but then just transition to the male or female pronouns. In most cases, the field of women whatever's is not nearly so narrow as to shrink the potential answer space down to something obvious.

3.4. The Usefulness of Clues

This is another problem that I see come up over and over again. Clues get used in tossups that are just not useful to anyone. Egregious examples of these kinds of clues are "Joe Blow notably studied this thing." These clues are unhelpful because unless you know exactly who Joe Blow is (and even then, he might have notably studied several things), you can't possibly get anything out of this. Such a clue could be converted into a useful one by writing, "Joe Blow notably addressed this issue in his tract 'On Stuff,'" provided that "On Stuff" is actually about only that one thing. Clues containing numbers in science questions (e.g. "Its albedo is a million," "This quantity is 234.9 for water," etc.) are also useless, because no one memorizes these numbers. Vague clues like "In this novel one character goes to the store for some lettuce," are also not useful since they are probably not uniquely identifying. Clues like "This river is 543 miles long" are also dumb because no one, not even geography wizard Jeff Hoppes, knows these things. In short, if you are tempted to pad a question with the kind of information found in an almanac, don't. Make sure that all your clues convey useful information that someone could actually get the question from.

All this leads me to the culmination of this lengthy opus, which is perhaps the most important part.

3.5 What to Avoid, and Why

I've done my best to cover how questions ought to be written; now I'll point to some mistakes people make in writing questions and explain why you shouldn't do these things.

Tossups

- **Giveaways in the first line are bad.** Since pyramidal is good and this makes the question not pyramidal, it is bad. Ok, that was the obvious one
- **Stock clues.** These are clues that were abundant in old, pre-2002 or so quizbowl, like Michael Faraday being apprenticed to a bookbinder or Saussure writing about Indo-European languages (must be the most reused lead-in ever). These clues are bad because instead of learning anything about the subject at hand, people just memorize clues which end up being recycled by lazy writers. Sometimes, the recycling of these clues by beginning writers is inevitable, but editors should know better. Keep in mind that not every lead-in is a "stock" clue, since there are plenty of different ways to write a tossup on, say, Herman Melville, and some of them may recycle clues about his lesser-known works. However, clues that come up again and again (the Saussure clue becoming "stock"). My suggestion for avoiding this is to search the Stanford Archive for the topic and then see if the lead-in you want to use appears many times in older packets. If it does, don't use it.
- **Question Transparency.** This is a huge one, and I didn't really address it above. I'll do so now. The idea of question transparency is that if you write the question poorly (or if you choose your answer poorly), it will become very obvious what the answer is without the player actually having to know anything. Case in point, picked at random from whatever Moon Pie packet I happened to be looking at: a tossup on Grimm's Law, which mentions something about exceptions to it being described by the spritant law and later in the first sentence mentions voiceless dentals. Now, I know nothing, but nothing about voiceless dentals. All I have is a little radar that beeps "linguistics" when I hear that line. Also, I speak English well so I know that laws have exceptions. What is a law of linguistics? Why, Grimm's law is! This is the classic example of a question that rewards lateral thinking and knowing that an answer vaguely matching the characteristics being described exists. Basically, if someone can "figure out" the answer based on the fact that it becomes obvious (for reasons having to do with poorly placed clues, linguistic hints, whatever) within the first two clues or so (as opposed to because they actually know it from information provided), then the question is bad.
- **Editorializing and needless verbiage.** Everything you write in a tossup should contain information that helps players answer the question. I've seen at least one packet from Moon Pie that contains all sorts of needless editorial content and mountains of words that don't help at all when playing. Any words that don't contain useful clues are just

- hindrances for the players; moreover, since space is limited, these questions tend to suffer from sharp difficulty drops and create buzzer races. Speaking of which...
- **Buzzer races.** If you write a question that contains clues on nothing but Melville's poetry and then a giveaway on *Moby Dick* you have engineered a stupid and pointless buzzer race, because one either has to be a Melville expert to get this question or wait until the end and hope one is fast enough to beat everyone else who will buzz at the same time. This goes contrary to the idea of pyramidal and having clues which get progressively easier. It also fails to discriminate between two teams with potentially different Melville knowledge, neither of which contains Melville experts.
- **List tossups.** These kinds of questions violate several rules of good question writing, including the one that mandates that the subject of the answer be revealed in the first sentence. This has the added effect that potentially any commonality between the listed things should logically be an acceptable answer. For example, a question that begins "Julius Caesar, John F. Kennedy, William McKinley" with the intended answer being "they were all assassinated" would be terrible anyway, but logically would have the answer "they were all men" be acceptable. This is stupid and wrong, so don't write these questions, as nothing good can come of it. There does not exist a list tossup that cannot be remade into a better question with the same answer just by changing the wording of the question.

Bonuses

- **List bonuses.** These are dumb and uninteresting. These bonuses amount to almanac memorization and tell you nothing interesting about the subject at hand. Authors from works, VSEPR shapes, rulers from dates of rule, whatever. All these are equally dull and should be avoided. The presence of such questions is one of the best indicators of lazy question writing.
- **Almanac bonuses.** These include memorizing Nobel Prize lists, physical constants, and so on. A relative of the list bonus, and bad for all the same reasons.
- **Wacky bonus forms.** The 5-10-15 is deprecated; so is the 30-20-10, which is better as a tossup anyway. The 5-10-15 is bad because it penalizes the team twice: once for not knowing the hard part, and once again for making the hard part worth more. The 10-10-10 is king; you should follow this bonus convention unless you have a good reason to change the value of some of the parts (such as if you have two answers required for one part and you'd like to make them 5 each).
- **Varying bonus difficulty.** Already discussed above, but all your bonuses should aim to be roughly the same in difficulty. They won't be of course; some teams will know some categories and not others, and that's ok. But if all teams are doing poorly on a certain category, then your bonus difficulty is unbalanced. Also, randomly difficult bonus parts in supposedly easy tournaments are also bad.

Writing Questions

Every Team member is required to write questions. It is probably the best way to learn for quiz bowl. You have on your cd and/or in your notebook the Michigan Memorandum for writing questions. Use it.

Here's an example of a well-written tossup:

He is the author of more than 30 books including Graveyard for Lunatics and Yesterday. A number of his books have been made into movies. His creativity also found expression as an Imagineer at Walt Disney Enterprises where he designed the Spaceship Earth exhibition at Epcot Center. Name the author of Something Wicked This Way Comes and Fahrenheit 451.

Ray BRADBURY

A tossup should be several sentences long, moving from very general (or very obscure) to very specific—pyramidal style. You aren't supposed to know the answer until deep into the question.

Here is an example of a well-written bonus:

According to Greek mythology, who are these characters?

- A) The winged horse who sprang from the blood of Medusa when Perseus decapitated her: PEGASUS
B) The maiden whose pride in her weaving caused her to be transformed into a spider: ARACHNE

A Bonus should have two parts and a question stem.
There are other examples on your CD.

Your job will be to write questions from you major and minor areas. Use information from the internet, books in the room, magazines, your notebooks, wherever. You can write them at home or in practice sessions or anytime in my room before or after school.

We'll write the questions on 3 by 5 index cards, one tossup or one bonus per card. You should get a pack of 100. If you need cards, get a pack from me. In order to attend the tournaments in October, November, and December, you will be expected to turn in at least 25 cards by October 20. By January 8, you should have turned in 25 more for a total of 50. By March, all 100 should be completed and turned in. Print in ink neatly or type and proofread.

Major or Minor Area

(T)ossup or (B)onus

Question

Format

Your name

Writing Good Academic Quiz Bowl

Questions

(Taken from Carleton's question-writing guide, written by Eric Hillmann)

GENERAL

In writing full packets, make sure the questions are balanced, both across broad subject categories (literature, history, science, etc.) and also within categories (e.g., history questions should be a mix of American and world history, and not concentrated too much on any particular time period; science questions should be scattered among the various subdivisions, physics, biology, chemistry, etc.) All information should be correct--an obvious consideration, but faulty factsoids do creep into packets on occasion. Use reputable reference works as a check on your personal knowledge. Answers should be precisely targeted, not calling for much interpretation on the part of the moderator as to what is a correct response. Alternative correct answers should be anticipated and provided for the moderator. Answers should be clearly visible and separated from the question to be read. Underline the part of an answer that is the minimum needed for a correct response. First names of persons should be required only when there is a possibility of confusion. The initial articles "A," "An," or "The" may be dropped from titles when answering, and should not be underlined as necessary to a correct answer. Questions should be challenging but not impossible. (See below for more on the relative difficulty between most tossups and bonuses.) Questions which merely stump both teams due to obscurity are boring for everybody. Questions which are markedly too easy are also annoying, but less frustrating than ones that are far too esoteric. Be nice to the moderator: put pronunciation guides into questions where needed, typically for foreign, scientific, or other difficult-to-pronounce terms.

TOSSUPS

85-90% or more of tossups should be answerable by most teams at the event for which the questions are written, if read to completion. Tossups are there to be answered, to get to the bonuses--but should

reward the team which can answer them *first*, either by anticipating the direction the question is headed, or by having deeper knowledge of the subject. Good tossups are generally produced by presenting interesting clues, to something answerable by most teams, arranged in so-called "pyramidal" style: clues generally moving from relatively obscure to increasingly familiar. Typically, the easiest clue should appear as the very last word or last several words of the tossup. The question should use the phrase "for 10 points" somewhere near the end.

usually just before the final clue. See the sample questions provided for examples. Misleading introductions or false lead-ins which invite minus fives are supremely evil--never write a tossup which will predictably penalize knowledge and speed. A made up example: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 are the first few terms of the Fibonacci series. For 10 points--the mathematician Fibonacci was a native of what Italian city?

answer: Pisa
This is a lousy question on several counts, including that it has only one clue to its answer. (Good tossups tend to have multiple clues to the eventual answer, presented at multiple "trigger points.") But what makes it absolutely unacceptable is that it misleads a knowledgeable player into buzzing in early to say "Fibonacci" or "Fibonacci series." Questions should never penalize knowledge by tricking a knowledgeable player to buzz in early before an unpredictable change of direction. Never, ever, mislead with words like "he", "her", "it", "this" and so forth. The first pronoun without an antecedent must always refer to the answer! Example:

Vowing that he would never go to Canossa, the Chancellor of Germany announced a cultural struggle against Roman Catholicism in the 1870s. For 10 points--what three-syllable German noun named this anti-Catholic campaign?
answer: Kulturkampf

This question tricks a player into answering "Bismarck" early. It could be rewritten as: German Chancellor Bismarck, vowing never to go to Canossa, announced a cultural struggle against Roman Catholicism in the 1870s known--for 10 points--by what three-syllable German noun?
answer: Kulturkampf
Avoid writing overlong tossups. NAQT, which writes for timed-play tournaments, does not allow any

tossup to exceed 425 characters, excluding the answer line. For untimed tournaments, such concision is less crucial, but still desirable. One sentence tossups, signalled by beginning the question with a warning such as "For a quick 10 points--", were long in use, but were widely unpopular and have now become quite rare. Most tossups are 2-4 sentences--but the main consideration is overall length, rather than number of sentences.

BONUSES

The quizbowl circuit has moved in recent years almost entirely to bonus questions uniformly worth 30 points. The College Bowl Co. still writes bonuses worth 20 or 25 points, in addition to 30 points, and some rare invitational may still ask for variable point bonuses. If variable point bonuses are called for, packets should contain roughly equal numbers of each value. In such packets, all bonuses should be clearly marked with their point value, and any subdivided scoring should also be made clear: i.e., for 5 points each, 5 for the first two and 10 for each one after that, etc. Most often, however, packets should consist entirely of 30 point bonuses. (Subdivided scoring still needs to be clear!) Bonuses can be more difficult than tossups--average teams at a given event might typically expect to convert about 50% of bonus points. Generally avoid True-False or Yes-No type bonuses, or any multiple choice, especially where there are fewer than four choices. Arranging lists in order, or matching two lists can reward luck and should be used sparingly. The College Bowl Co. is regularly reviled for using one part, one answer bonuses worth 20 or 25 points for a single answer--often for questions that are nothing but tossups labelled as bonuses, complete with giveaway clue at the end. The rest of the quizbowl world now eschews the one part, one answer bonus, and you should too. Some typical bonus formats are:
Multiple part (usually related by a common theme). The parts of the question may be of varying difficulty, with partial point conversion likely. Take care not to make these questions over lengthy.
Example:
For 10 points each--identify the novel from its final sentence.
A. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

answer: The Great Gatsby [by F. Scott Fitzgerald]
B. "John Thomas says goodnight to Lady Jane a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart."
answer: Lady Chatterley's Lover [by D. H. Lawrence]

C. "I been there before."
answer: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn [by Mark Twain]
Such questions may be worth 10 points each per three parts, 15 each for two, or other variants, such as 5-10-15, or 5-5-10-10, or whatever seems appropriate. Six parts, worth 5 each, is generally considered too time consuming for use in timed tournaments, but is sometimes used in untimed tournaments. If six-parters are used at all, each part should be very short, such as "For 5 points each--given the opera, name its composer."
One question, multiple answers. You ask for a list of things, and give points for each correct answer.

Be sure to specify clearly the number of items for which you are looking, especially if the question will accept "any three of the four", etc. Asking teams to generate long lists with many possible answers (e.g., "name any six OPEC nations", or "name eight Common Market nations for 15 points...") tends to be difficult to moderate and should generally be avoided. A precise and manageable list should be used. *Example:*
Only five major league pitchers have ever thrown more than 45 consecutive scoreless innings. For 5 points each, and a bonus 5 for all correct--name them.
answer: Carl Hubbell, Bob Gibson, Walter Johnson, Don Drysdale, Orel Hershiser
Progressive (30-20-10) questions. These questions are asked in three parts. Each part is an additional clue to the same answer, and the clues should be arranged from hardest to easiest. The general category is usually given in the original question ("30-20-10. Name the artist.") As a variant, some questions will ask for identification of more than one thing on a 15-10 or 15-5 or 10-5 basis. In all these cases the original clue should already precisely identify one correct answer: (i.e., "He was born in Cleveland in 1915" is unacceptable as a 30 point clue, because there are multiple correct answers at that point--though it may be used as a 20 point clue.) *Example:*
30-20-10. Name the entertainer.
A. As a teenager, his stage name was Rockin' Randall. His nickname of "Bocephus" was given him

by his father.

B. He earned a 1991 Emmy for writing and singing the theme for *Monday Night Football*.

C. At age 15 he sang all the songs on the soundtrack of his father's film biography, *Your Heart*.

answer: Hank Williams, Jr.

As with tossups, avoid unnecessary verbosity. NAQT's maximum length for bonus questions (in timed play) is 650 total characters. Going much beyond that is probably a bad idea.