

To one who has been a practicing paralegal for more than 18 years, writing 40 multiple-choice questions should not be a big problem, right? Believe me, it was much harder than I had anticipated. Having been gently prodded into submitting my resume as a volunteer for the PACE exam, I was assigned to the second item writing committee. When I received the letter of instruction and materials from Professional Examination Service (PES, the test development firm), I questioned what I had gotten myself into this time. Write questions from your life experience should not be too hard BUT write across practice areas harder AND have a reference for each question much harder. I wrote my two sample questions, and feedback was positive. I sweated and slaved over the next 38 questions and soon found myself on the way to a meeting in Kansas City. I met two of my fellow item writers on the way from the airport and was relieved to learn that they too had equal difficulty in writing the questions.

After lunch we had an orientation session where everyone introduced himself or herself. We were given our assignments for the weekend. I was pleased to discover in attendance educators and attorneys, along with practicing paralegals, from various practice areas and from all parts of the U.S. Lori and Paul from PES broke us up into groups of three to review, rewrite and validate each others questions. It was a grueling process but we were prodded, encouraged and questioned by Lori and Paul from PES and Diane Gallo, the PACE Coordinator. The dynamics of reaching a consensus and deciding the importance of concepts while trying to reach across practice areas was interesting to me as an estates paralegal working with two litigation paralegals. After a day and a half of reviewing and rewriting someone else's questions, the hour came when each person received back from the review group the questions he or she had individually written, a humbling but encouraging experience. Overall we learned the group rejection rate of 52% was average, i.e., only 48% of the approximately 800 questions written were accepted. The accepted questions went on to PES to be further analyzed, critiqued and checked before being admitted to the question bank.

Overall, I found the process to be a very interesting experience. In spite of our fatigue that first night, most of us congregated in the hotel lounge to get to know one another. As always, I was impressed by the caliber of the people attending this NFPA meeting. Equally impressive were Lori and Paul from PES for their professionalism, their ability to group people who worked well together, and their desire for feedback both positive and negative. Diane Gallo deserves accolades for encouraging everyone, helping us stay focused and on an even keel. I cannot really say the process was fun, but it was a challenging learning experience.

*Cyganovich is an estates and trust paralegal with Boylan, Brown, Code, Fowler, Vigdor & Wilson, LLP, in Rochester, New York. She is a former NFPA Administrative Vice President and Region IV Director. She has held numerous offices in the Paralegal Association of Rochester and is the recipient of that association's first Individual Achievement Award.*