Short-Answer Format

The item format is intended to provide an alternative to traditional multiple-choice questions (MCQs) by requiring you to manually fill in the answer to a specific question. With this item format, patient information is presented much like it is in a traditional MCQ. Here are the key differences:

- Instead of being given a list of options from which to choose an answer, the patient information will be followed by a question such as "What is the most likely diagnosis?"
- Your answer must be typed into a response field.

Your answer should be brief and should:

- respond directly to the question and only to the question (i.e., do not provide a rationale)
- consist of no more than a few words (i.e., antibiotic therapy). NOTE: There is a 60-character limit applied to the response field.

Scoring considerations:

- You should provide a single answer. Only one answer will be counted as a response, and responses will be scored as either correct or incorrect.
- It is acceptable to use the most common medical abbreviations, but please avoid shorthand.
- Spelling is not taken into consideration.
- Keep in mind that when you respond to the question "What is the most appropriate next step?", the answer could be diagnostic or therapeutic; it may also be appropriate to indicate that no further steps are needed.

Sample item

A 30-year-old woman comes to the physician because of an itchy, scaly rash for 1 year; the rash is most severe over her elbows and knees. The rash occurs only in the winter months and is moderately relieved by emollients. Examination shows discrete oval plaques 4-6 cm in diameter over the knees and elbows; they have an erythematous base and the overlying scale is silvery. What is the most likely diagnosis?

Please note that the Highlight and Notes features are not available for the short-answer item type.