Fairness Review Checklist

Avoid Cognitive Construct-Irrelevant Variance:

1. Does the item assume knowledge in subject areas not relevant to the focal construct?

For example:
Post-collegiate-level vocabulary in a quantitative reasoning item
Geometric formula in a biology item
Geographic knowledge in a reading passage
Chemical compounds in an anatomy item

2. Does the item contain language, concepts, or objects familiar only to test takers from a certain geographical region, ethnic group, or religious affiliation?

For example:
Political jurisdictions: borough, province, county, parish
Food: bouillabaisse, potage, gumbo, goulash
Weather: snowflakes, pack ice, riptide,
Sports: hockey, jet ski, grand slam, triple play

3. Does the item contain specialized, vocational or professional language or terminology not relevant to the focal construct? Note: if the focal construct involves use of this language, it would be appropriate to include it.

For example:
Farming: combine, thresher
Finance: arbitrage, hedge fund
Medicine: prophylaxis, amyloidosis
Dentistry: bruxism, debridement
Optometry: astigmatism, emmetropia

4. Does the item employ literary devices?

For example:
Humor
Irony or satire
Double entendre
If so, these should be present only to test understanding of such devices and when it is important for valid measurement (as in some literature tests).5

Avoid Affective Construct-Irrelevant Variance:

1. Does the item contain subject matter (images or language) that might evoke strong emotions?

For example: Accidents, illnesses, or natural disasters
Death and dying
Advocacy of religious or political agenda
Children in peril
Cruelty to animals

2. Does the item reference potentially offensive, controversial, or sensitive topics?

For example: Particular holidays or activities surrounding holidays
Tobacco, drug, or alcohol use
Music, dancing, social dating

3. Does the item describe or refer to individuals using any of the following attributes?

For example: Age
Disability
Ethnicity
Gender
National or regional origin
Native language
Race
Religion
Sexual orientation
Socioeconomic status

If so, and the description or reference is necessary, use correct, specific terminology.
For example: Use White or Black people, instead of "Whites" or "Blacks"
Use the phrase "sexual orientation" rather than "sexual preference."

4. Does the item state or imply the superiority of one group over another?

For example:

Culturally-deprived group: implies that the majority culture is superior and that any differences from it constitute deprivation.

5. Does the item depict social situations unfamiliar to any groups?

For example:
Experiencing luxuries
Frivolous spending
International travel

6. Does the item/test depict stereotypes (either positive or negative) or repeated representations of certain societal roles (either positive or negative)?

For example:
Phrases such as women's work, or man-sized job
Repeated depictions of men or women in certain occupations
Assumed characteristics of certain categories of individuals:
Boys like to play with trucks
Asian people are smart
Native American people are in tune with nature

Avoid Physical Construct-Irrelevant Variance

1. Does the item contain content or utilize stimulus material (images, graphs, etc.) that may not be easily interpreted by all groups?

For example:
Small print in labeling of a graph
Small print of superscripted mathematical symbols
Blurred radiograph
Colored lines in a graph

Note: The preceding checklist should not be considered comprehensive. It will be revised and updated to incorporate changes in assessment theory, societal perceptions, medical/dental practice and terminology, and additional concerns. Additionally, this checklist is not meant to interfere with test purpose or test validity. It is meant to generate talking points regarding possible occurrences of construct-irrelevant variance.