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Study Tips:

Preparing for the

Texas Educator Certification Tests



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Introduction

On the pages that follow, you will find useful information on preparing for multiple-choice tests and constructed-response tests. The instruction, tips, and suggestions contained here can help you become a better-prepared test taker. As you probably know from your own experience in taking tests, good preparation is an important component of success.

How to Prepare for the Texas Educator Certification Tests

1. Learn What the Test Covers

The first step in preparing for a Texas educator certification test is to identify what information the test will cover by reviewing the competencies and domains for your field. A complete, up-to-date list of the competencies and domains are included in the preparation manual for each test field.

Competencies are organized into groups known as domains. The domains define the major content areas of the test. You will find a list of domains at the beginning of each competency list. The number of competencies within each domain typically reflects the emphasis given to that domain on the test. In general, domains with greater numbers of competencies will receive more coverage on the test.

Once you have a broad picture of what the examination includes, read each competency and its descriptive statements carefully to get a more specific idea of the knowledge you will be required to demonstrate on the examination. When you have become familiar with the competencies, make a list of those competencies about which you feel you know the least. Use this review of the competencies to set priorities for your study time. The competencies are the core of the testing program and a helpful study tool. Read them carefully to determine the areas of strength in your content knowledge.

2. Assess How Well You Know the Content

Use your review of the competencies to focus your study time on those areas containing knowledge and skills with which you are less familiar. You should leave yourself time to review the content of all domains and competencies, both the familiar and the less familiar ones, but the focus of your preparation time and priority in your studying should be placed upon those areas about which you are least confident.

Think carefully about how well you know each area; research has shown that test takers tend to overestimate their preparedness. People often glance at the specifications, or at the test questions (with “a peek” at the answers at the same time), and think that they know the content of the test. Many of these people also report after the test that they think the tests were not difficult, and that they did well.

What is happening in these cases? Situations vary, but it’s easy to think you are more prepared than you are. The tests are demanding enough to require serious review. The longer you’ve been away from the content, the more serious your review ought to be. If you have not been taking classes in your content area for two years or more, you can be sure of the need to organize a serious, all-out review. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose from such an approach.

3. If the Test You are Taking Contains Constructed-Response Questions, Practice Explaining the Key Concepts

Constructed-response questions/items assess your ability to explain content and its application, because as a teacher, you'll need to be able to explain concepts and processes to students in a clear, understandable way. You may know a great deal about your subject, but these items will assess your ability to explain what you know. In many cases, you will be required to explain fundamental concepts in your field, such as how authors use literary elements and/or devices to support themes.

Look over a high school text that is currently in use in your subject area. What are the major concepts you will be required to teach? You may “know” them in the sense that you know what they are, but can you explain them in your own words accurately, completely, and clearly? Practice explaining these concepts.

Talk with a professor or a high-school teacher whose knowledge you respect. Your goal is to discover the most current approaches to teaching your subject area.

For many candidates, this aspect of constructed-response tests is the hardest. These fundamental questions do not look difficult, but they are for many people who have never actually had to explain them before. To be successful on the Texas educator certification constructed-response items, you must be able to explain key concepts in your own words.

4. Understand How Constructed-Response Questions Will be Scored

Information about scoring constructed response test questions can be found in the *Faculty Manual* that can be downloaded from the TExES Web site at www.texas.ets.org. Familiarize yourself with the scoring information provided in the *Faculty Manual*, and be sure your responses take this information into account.

5. Collect the Materials You Need to Study

For all content areas, think about where you might be able to obtain materials for review: Did you have a course in which the area was covered? Do you still have your book or your notes? Does your college library have a good introductory college-level text in this area? Does your local library have a high school-level text? Can you borrow one from a local school? Collecting and organizing the materials for review are critical steps in preparing.

Do you know a teacher or professor who can help you organize your study? Would a study group suit you and help you maintain momentum? People have different study methods that work for them—use whatever you know works for you.

For most Texas educator certification tests, test preparation manuals are available for free download. Each test preparation manual provides a combination of test preparation and practice, including sample questions and answers with explanations.

To download a test preparation manual, visit the TExES Web site at www.texas.ets.org. You may also purchase a printed copy of any test preparation manual from the Web site.

6. Plan and Organize Your Time

You can begin to plan and organize your time while you are still collecting materials. Allow yourself plenty of time to review without “cramming” new material at the end. The *Registration Bulletins*, available on the TExES Web site at www.texas.ets.org, tell you the dates of the administrations for the current testing year. There are plenty of opportunities to take the test, so choose a testing date far enough in the future that you can be fully prepared.

Working backward from the test date, calculate how much time you will need for final review and review of each content area. Be frank about when you can actually study—if you can’t really study at night after working all day, don’t set yourself up for frustration by scheduling study on weeknights. Set a realistic schedule, one that can help you succeed. Isn’t that what you would tell your students to do?

7. Study

After you have become familiar with the domains and competencies, you may want to review the sample test directions, the test question formats, and suggested approaches contained in the appropriate preparation manual. Preparation Manuals are available for download from the TExES Web site at www.texas.ets.org. Try to answer the sample multiple-choice questions for the test you are taking. If your test includes one or more constructed-response assignments, you should try to respond to the sample assignment(s) as well.

Next, review the correct responses and explanations for the sample multiple-choice questions. If your test includes one or more constructed-response assignments, you should review the sample response(s) or the description of task/assignment that is provided.

If you are retaking a test, use the information on your score report to help you prepare. Your domain and competency performance as indicated on your official score report can help you identify possible areas on which to focus your studies. However, this information may be based on comparatively few test questions, and you should use it cautiously. You may wish to focus your initial studies on the domains and competencies in which you did least well. You may also wish to concentrate your studies on those domains or sections of the test that include the greatest number of test items and that count the most toward your total test score.

8. Take Additional Courses

Consult with your program advisor/director about whether you have completed sufficient coursework to prepare for the test. Your advisor may be able to identify specific courses that may cover content you have not yet studied.

9. Form or Join a Study Group

Joining a study group can be effective for reviewing test-related content. You may gain the most from participation in a study group if you have already identified the domains and competencies with which you are less familiar and that you may need to review more. If you have a specific need or area of weakness, a study group that focuses on that need or area may be best for you.

Preparing for Multiple-Choice Tests

Types of Multiple-Choice Questions and Tips for Answering

1. Complete the Statement

To check your answer to a complete-the-statement multiple-choice question, re-read the question and add your answer choice at the end. Be sure that your choice best completes the sentence.

2. Which of the Following

An example of this question type is shown below.

Which of the following are pronounced differently depending on whether they are used as nouns or verbs?

- (A) lick, bottle, can
- (B) table, herd, carpet
- (C) drive, catalog, board
- (D) sow, entrance, present

The question above asks you to pick the group of words pronounced one way when they are used as nouns and another way when they are used as verbs. Pronounce these words to yourself to check your answer.

The correct answer is D.

TIP

To check your answer, replace “which of the following” with your selection and read the statement.

3. Roman Numeral Choices

This format is used when there can be more than one correct answer in the list. One useful strategy in this type of question is to assess each possible answer before looking at the answer choices. Then evaluate the answer options.

TIP

To check your answer, reread the question and substitute your answer choice for the words, “which two of the following activities.” Make sure the Roman numerals in the answer you select match the Roman numerals of your choices in the list above.

4. Questions Containing “NOT,” “LEAST,” “EXCEPT”

This question type is discussed at length in the next section. It asks you to select the choice that does not fit. You must be very careful with this question type, because it is easy to forget that you are selecting the negative. This question type is used in situations in which there are several good solutions or ways to approach something, but also a clearly wrong way to do something.

5. Questions about Graphs, Tables, or Reading Passages

The important thing to keep in mind when answering questions about tables, graphs, or reading passages is to provide only the information that is asked for in that question. In the case of a map or graph, you might want to read the questions first, and then look at the map or graph in light of the questions you have to answer. In the case of a long reading passage, you might want to go ahead and read the passage, marking places you think are important, and then answer the questions. Again, the important thing is to be sure you answer the question as it refers to the material presented, so read the question carefully.

6. Other Formats

New formats are developed from time to time in order to find new ways of assessing knowledge with multiple-choice questions. If you see a format you are not familiar with, read the directions carefully.

Read and approach the question the way you would any other question, asking yourself what you are supposed to be looking for, and what details are given in the question that help you find the answer.

Understanding Multiple-Choice Questions

You will probably notice that multiple-choice questions use word order (or *syntax*) that is different from the word order you're used to seeing in ordinary things you read, like newspapers or textbooks. One of the reasons for the unusual word order of multiple-choice questions is that many such questions contain the phrase, "which of the following." The purpose of the phrase, "which of following" is to limit your choice of answers only to the list given.

TIP

Do not be put off by words you don't understand. It might be easy to be upset by words like "recursive" or "inferential." Read carefully to understand the question and look for an answer that fits. Sometimes it helps to put the question in your own words. An outline is something you are probably familiar with, and expect to teach to your students. So slow down, and use what you know.

TIP

Do not make the questions more difficult than they are. Don't read for "hidden meanings" or "tricks." There are no "trick questions" on the Texas educator certification exams. They are intended to be serious, straightforward tests of subject knowledge.

Because people expect test-making companies to write with more grammatical correctness than most media use today, test questions can look old-fashioned, or just plain difficult to follow. The important thing is to determine *what the question is asking*. Figuring out the *answer* is the second step. With enough practice, you should be able to figure out what any question in any field is asking. Knowing the answer is, of course, a different matter, but you have to understand a question before you can answer it.

TIP

Read the questions carefully. Try writing the question or describing the situation in your own words. Try substituting the phrase "which of the following" with the answer you select.

Understanding the Details of the Question

Another factor in understanding questions is to understand all of the details of the question that may help you find the answer. You may find that it helps you to circle each of the details of the question in your test book so that you do not miss any of them. It's only by looking at all parts of the question carefully that you will have all of the information you need to answer the question.

TIP

Once you have determined your answer, make sure to fill in the answer sheet. Pay particular attention to ensure that the number on the answer sheet corresponds to the question number.

Understanding Questions Containing “NOT,” “LEAST,” “EXCEPT”

The words “NOT,” “LEAST,” and “EXCEPT” can make comprehension of test questions more difficult. You are being asked to select the answer choice that does not fit. You must be very careful with this question type because it is easy to forget that you are selecting the negative. This question type is used in situations where there are several good options, but also a clearly wrong answer.

TIP

It is easy to get confused while you are processing the information to answer a question with a “NOT,” “LEAST,” or “EXCEPT” in the question. If you treat the word “LEAST” as one of the details you must satisfy, you have a better chance of understanding what the question is asking. And when you check your answer, make “least” one of the details you check for.

Preparing for Constructed-Response Tests

What are Constructed-Response Tests?

As their name indicates, constructed-response questions require you to construct a response (e.g., write an essay, draw a graph, make a chart, and write out a math proof) rather than select the correct answer from a list, as you would do for a multiple-choice question.

Constructed-response tests typically have fewer questions than multiple-choice tests do, because each question takes longer to answer. Consequently, each question on a constructed-response test usually counts for more points toward your score than does each question on a multiple-choice test. Therefore, it is important that you know how points are awarded for answers.

Understanding Constructed-Response Questions

Many, many points are lost in scoring because test takers haven’t read the questions carefully before starting their responses.

1. Know What the Question is Asking You to Do

Take a moment to be sure what the question is asking. You might find it helpful to underline the words in the task that tell you what you are supposed to do. Many test takers lose points because they do not read the question carefully enough and start working before they’re sure what they are supposed to do. If you answer a question other than the one that is being asked, you will not receive credit.

Here is an example of a constructed-response question:

Discuss two differences between narrative text and expository text.

What is this prompt asking you to do?

Notice that you are not being asked what the two kinds of text have in common; you are being asked about differences. In your response, you would probably first define what narrative text and expository text are. Then you would go on to cite two differences. If you cited only one difference, you would not be given full credit for your response.

Here is another example:

When children fail to succeed despite their best efforts, they may develop a sense of learned helplessness. Describe learned helplessness and how it affects children's achievement.

What are you being asked to do in this example?

Here you are asked to do two things: to talk about ("Describe") the concept of learned helplessness and to tell how it affects children's achievement. Here is an example of a response that received full credit for addressing both parts of the question completely and accurately.

The condition of learned helplessness is when a child is told time and time again, either verbally or nonverbally, that he or she is unable to perform a task or tasks. The child begins to believe this, and therefore puts forth no effort to try. If this continues, the child's achievement in that area, and in other areas, suffers, because the child views himself or herself as unable or incompetent, and therefore achieves very little.

2. Answer All Parts of the Question

Many points are lost in scoring because test takers do not answer all parts of the question. Some constructed-response tests have tightly-structured questions, and test takers are expected to address everything they are asked to explain. It may help to list the elements your answer has to contain.

Other Information

Taking the Test

You should have ended your review a day or two before the actual test date. On the day of the test, you should:

- Be well-rested.
- Take an acceptable and valid photo identification with you.
- Take a supply of well-sharpened No. 2 pencils (at least 3) and a blue or black pen for the essay or constructed-response tests.
- Eat before you take the test and bring food with you to eat during break, to keep your energy level up.
- Be prepared to stand in line to check in or to wait while other test takers are being checked in.
- Wear comfortable clothes and dress in layers.

You can not control the testing situation, but you can control yourself. Stay calm. The supervisors are well trained and make every effort to provide uniform testing conditions, but don't let it bother you if the test does not start exactly on time; you will have the necessary amount of time once it does start. You can think of preparing for this test as training for an athletic event. Once you have trained, prepared, and rested, give it your best effort...and good luck!