



**Department of  
Civil Service**

# A Guide to the Written Test

for the

## Social Welfare Examiner Series

## Table of Contents

Introduction and list of subject areas.....	3
Subject areas, test tasks, sample questions and solutions	
1. Interviewing .....	4
2. Recording case notes .....	5
3. Interpreting and applying written social welfare program materials, and using basic arithmetic in determining eligibility for assistance.....	6
4. Preparing written material .....	7
5. Supervision.....	9
General test-taking guidelines.....	10
Strategies that may improve your test performance .....	11
Helpful tips.....	14
Test security .....	15

## **INTRODUCTION**

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The New York State Department of Civil Service has developed this test guide to familiarize you with the written test for the Social Welfare Examiner Series. This test guide provides a general description of the subject areas which will be tested and the different types of questions you may see on the tests for Social Welfare Examiner, Senior Social Welfare Examiner, and related titles.

Following is a list of the five subject areas included on the tests for these titles. The announcement(s) for the examination(s) you are taking will tell you the subject areas on which you will be tested. Some examinations may involve subject areas which are not included in this or any other test guide.

- 1. INTERVIEWING:** You must apply principles and techniques of interviewing to such problems as asking and answering questions, explaining requirements and helping the client understand his or her responsibilities, helping the client feel at ease, structuring and controlling the interview, reacting appropriately to inconsistencies, dealing with a variety of feelings of clients, maintaining confidentiality, and identifying the need for and making appropriate referrals. In addition, some questions may deal with contacting or interacting with other community organizations and agencies to benefit the client or the general public.
- 2. RECORDING CASE NOTES:** You will be given several sentences from a typical case report paragraph and one additional sentence. You must determine the best place in the paragraph to put the additional sentence in order to make the report coherent and meaningful.
- 3. INTERPRETING AND APPLYING WRITTEN SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAM MATERIALS, AND USING BASIC ARITHMETIC IN DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE:** You will be presented with written passages related to Social Services policies and procedures and be asked to interpret their meaning and/or apply this material to hypothetical case situations. Secondly, you will be given sets of written instructions and regulations regarding such Social Services programs as cash assistance, medical assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. You must read and understand the instructions given, including schedules of arithmetic figures, and apply these instructions to hypothetical case problems. Some questions require using arithmetic to compute the correct amount of assistance. Previous knowledge of Social Services programs or the eligibility process is not required.
- 4. PREPARING WRITTEN MATERIAL:** These questions test for the ability to present information clearly and accurately, and to organize paragraphs logically and comprehensibly. For some questions, you will be given information in two or three sentences followed by four restatements of the information. You must then choose the best version. For other questions, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order. You must then choose, from four suggestions, the best order for the sentences.
- 5. SUPERVISION:** These questions test for knowledge of the principles and practices employed in planning, organizing, and controlling the activities of a work unit toward predetermined objectives. The concepts covered, usually in a situational question format, include such topics as assigning and reviewing work; evaluating performance; maintaining work standards; motivating and developing subordinates; implementing procedural change; increasing efficiency; and dealing with problems of absenteeism, morale, and discipline.

The next sections of this test guide explain how you will be tested in each of the subject areas listed above. A **TEST TASK** is provided for each subject area. This is an explanation of how a question is presented and how to correctly answer it. Read each explanation carefully. This test guide also provides at least one **SAMPLE QUESTION** for each subject area. The sample question is similar to the type of questions that will be presented on the actual test. This test guide provides the **SOLUTION** and correct answer to each sample question. You should study each sample question and solution in order to understand how the correct answer was determined.

## **SUBJECT AREA 1**

**INTERVIEWING:** You must apply principles and techniques of interviewing to such problems as asking and answering questions, explaining requirements and helping the client understand his or her responsibilities, helping the client feel at ease, structuring and controlling the interview, reacting appropriately to inconsistencies, dealing with a variety of feelings of clients, maintaining confidentiality, and identifying the need for and making appropriate referrals. In addition, some questions may deal with contacting or interacting with other community organizations and agencies to benefit the client or the general public.

**TEST TASK:** You will be presented with questions that describe specific client-worker situations. Each question will be followed by four choices listing different ways to handle the situation. You must select the most appropriate course of action to take, based on an analysis of the situation, the application of the information provided, and the ramifications of various interviewing principles and strategies. **Note:** *You may be able to think of a better approach than any of the choices provided, but you must pick the best of those provided.*

### **SAMPLE QUESTION:**

You have been reviewing an application for public assistance with a client and are satisfied that you have all the information necessary to make an eligibility determination. However, the client just will not stop talking and is repeating, in slightly different words, the information that he has already given you. Which one of the following is the best way to deal with this situation?

- A. Tell the client that the interview time is up and that if he has more to say, you can set up another appointment for the near future.
- B. Thank the client for the information. Tell him that you believe you have all that you need and that you will contact him if you should need additional information.
- C. Tell the client you would like to hear more, but that it will have to be postponed to some future date.
- D. Thank the client for coming in, but explain that others are waiting so you must end the interview.

*The correct answer to this sample question is B.*

### **SOLUTION:**

**Choice A** gives the initiative to schedule another appointment to the client. This may lead to an unnecessary appointment. You already have enough information to make the necessary decisions, and there is no need for another appointment with the client in the near future.

**Choice B is the correct answer to this question.** By thanking the client for the information, you are being positive. By telling him that you believe you have what you need, you continue in this positive direction. By telling him that you will contact him if you need additional information, you make it clear that you have the necessary data, and you maintain the initiative to schedule another appointment.

**Choice C**, like choice A, gives the initiative to schedule another appointment to the client and may result in an unnecessary appointment. Also, telling the client you would like to hear more, but postponing it to some future date, is contradictory and sends the client a mixed message.

**Choice D** begins well -- thanking the client for coming in is positive. However, explaining that others are waiting so you must end the interview leaves the client with the impression that you are rushing him out and that you are more concerned with the people who are waiting than you are with him.

## **SUBJECT AREA 2**

**RECORDING CASE NOTES:** You will be given several sentences from a typical case report paragraph and one additional sentence. You must determine the best place in the paragraph to put the additional sentence in order to make the report coherent and meaningful.

**TEST TASK:** You will be presented with a number of sentences which should be read **in order**, to make up **most** of a well-organized paragraph. Below them appears a single sentence, labeled X, which has its proper place at the beginning, in the body, or at the end of the paragraph. You must decide which of the four choices, A, B, C, or D, describes the **best** location for Sentence X.

### **SAMPLE QUESTION:**

1. A fire has destroyed the apartment in which a client's family was residing.
2. The family was placed in emergency housing for one evening.
3. The rent and utility connection bills were paid by emergency grant.
4. The children were registered in their new school district.
5. The family was given funds for the purchase of new furniture.

In which position does **Sentence X** best fit the above paragraph?

**Sentence X** – The next day, the family found an apartment for the same rent they had been paying.

- A. before sentence 1
- B. between sentences 2 and 3
- C. between sentences 3 and 4
- D. between sentences 4 and 5

*The correct answer to this sample question is B.*

### **SOLUTION:**

**Choice A** would present the information out of sequence. The first sentence should introduce the subject that the case record is about. This choice starts the paragraph with "The next day" which clearly indicates that something else happened first. So Sentence X cannot begin the paragraph.

**Choice B is the correct answer to this question.** It presents the information in the paragraph in the best logical sequence. The family's immediate shelter need had to be addressed before they could search for another apartment.

**Choices C and D** also present the information out of sequence. The family would have to find a new apartment before they could arrange for the payment of rent and utility bills. They would also need to know the location of the new apartment in order to determine the appropriate school district in which to register the children.

## **SUBJECT AREA 3**

**INTERPRETING AND APPLYING WRITTEN SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAM MATERIALS, AND USING BASIC ARITHMETIC IN DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE:** You will be presented with written passages related to Social Services policies and procedures and be asked to interpret their meaning and/or apply this material to hypothetical case situations. Secondly, you will be given sets of written instructions and regulations regarding such Social Services programs as cash assistance, medical assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. You must read and understand the instructions given, including schedules of arithmetic figures, and apply these instructions to hypothetical case problems. Some questions require using arithmetic to compute the correct amount of assistance. Previous knowledge of Social Services programs or the eligibility process is not required.

**TEST TASK:** You will be given sets of written instructions and regulations regarding such Social Services programs as cash assistance, medical assistance, and food stamps. You must read and understand the instructions given, including schedules of arithmetic figures, and apply these instructions to hypothetical client situations.

**NOTE:** You will be allowed to bring a calculator and use it during the test.

### **SAMPLE QUESTION:**

Single individuals and childless couples between 21 and 64 years of age and not blind or disabled are eligible for inpatient care and services under the catastrophic illness provision. Under this provision, the applicant is responsible for the cost of medical care equal to the lesser of (a) 25% of his annual net income, or (b) the amount of annual net income in excess of the cash assistance eligibility level.

#### **Cash Assistance Eligibility Levels**

Number in Household	1	2
Annual Cash Assistance Eligibility Level	\$2,210	\$3,180

Assuming that Mr. and Mrs. Jones, age 62 and 61 respectively, are otherwise eligible, which one of the following is the amount of their financial responsibility for inpatient care and services for Mrs. Jones if their annual net income is \$3,400 and their hospital bill is \$4,000?

- A. \$ 220
- B. \$ 850
- C. \$1,000
- D. \$1,190

*The correct answer to this sample question is A.*

### **SOLUTION:**

*To arrive at the correct answer, you must calculate the figure obtained from both method (a) and method (b) and then use the lower figure obtained. Under (a) 25% of the annual net income is \$850 ( $0.25 \times \$3,400$ ). Under (b) the amount of annual net income in excess of the cash assistance eligibility level for **two** people is \$220 ( $\$3,400 - \$3,180$ ). Since \$220 is the **lesser** of the two figures obtained, this is the amount of their financial responsibility for inpatient care and services for Mrs. Jones. **(choice A)***

## **SUBJECT AREA 4**

### **PREPARING WRITTEN MATERIAL:**

These questions test for the ability to present information clearly and accurately, and to organize paragraphs logically and comprehensibly. For some questions, you will be given information in two or three sentences followed by four restatements of the information. You must then choose the best version. For other questions, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order. You must then choose, from four suggestions, the best order for the sentences.

**TEST TASK:** There are two separate test tasks in this subject area.

- For the first, **Information Presentation**, you will be given information in two or three sentences, followed by four restatements of the information. You must then select the choice which presents the information most clearly, accurately, and completely.
- For the second, **Paragraph Organization**, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order, and then be asked to choose, from among four suggestions, the best order for the sentences.

### **INFORMATION PRESENTATION SAMPLE QUESTION:**

Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions. His failure to take proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

Which one of the following best presents the information above?

- A. Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions that caused a personal injury accident.
- B. Proper precautions, which Martin Wilson failed to take, caused a personal injury accident.
- C. Martin Wilson's failure to take proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.
- D. Martin Wilson, who failed to take proper precautions, was in a personal injury accident.

*The correct answer to this sample question is C.*

### **SOLUTION:**

**Choice A** conveys the incorrect impression that proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

**Choice B** conveys the incorrect impression that proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

**Choice C is the correct answer to this question.** It best presents the original information: Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions and this failure caused a personal injury accident.

**Choice D** states that Martin Wilson was in a personal injury accident. The original information states that Martin Wilson caused a personal injury accident, but it does not state that Martin Wilson was in a personal injury accident.

## **SUBJECT AREA 4 (cont.)**

### **PREPARING WRITTEN MATERIAL (cont.)**

#### **PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION SAMPLE QUESTION:**

The following question is based upon a group of sentences. The sentences are shown out of sequence, but when correctly arranged, they form a connected, well-organized paragraph. Read the sentences, and then answer the question about the best arrangement of these sentences.

1. Eventually, they piece all of this information together and make a choice.
2. Before actually deciding upon a human services job, people usually think about several possibilities.
3. They imagine themselves in different situations, and in so doing, they probably think about their interests, goals, and abilities.
4. Choosing among occupations in the field of human services is an important decision to make.

Which one of the following is the best arrangement of these sentences?

- A. 2-4-1-3
- B. 2-3-4-1
- C. 4-2-1-3
- D. 4-2-3-1

*The correct answer to this sample question is D.*

#### **SOLUTION:**

**Choices A and C** present the information in the paragraph out of logical sequence. In both **A** and **C**, sentence 1 comes before sentence 3. The key element in the organization of this paragraph is that sentence 3 contains the information to which sentence 1 refers; therefore, in logical sequence, sentence 3 should come before sentence 1.

**Choice B** also presents the information in the paragraph out of logical sequence. Choice **B** places sentence 4 in between sentence 1 and sentence 3, thereby interrupting the logical sequence of the information in the paragraph.

**Choice D** presents the information in the paragraph in the best logical sequence. Sentence 4 introduces the main idea of the paragraph: "choosing an occupation in the field of human services." Sentences 2-3-1 then follow up on this idea by describing, in order, the steps involved in making such a choice.

## **SUBJECT AREA 5**

**SUPERVISION:** These questions test for knowledge of the principles and practices employed in planning, organizing, and controlling the activities of a work unit toward predetermined objectives. The concepts covered, usually in a situational question format, include such topics as assigning and reviewing work; evaluating performance; maintaining work standards; motivating and developing subordinates; implementing procedural change; increasing efficiency; and dealing with problems of absenteeism, morale, and discipline.

**TEST TASK:** You will be presented with situations in which you must apply knowledge of the principles and practices of supervision in order to answer the questions correctly.

### **SAMPLE QUESTION:**

Assume that the unit you supervise is given a new work assignment and that you are unsure about the proper procedure to use in performing this assignment. Which one of the following actions should you take FIRST in this situation?

- A. Obtain input from your staff.
- B. Consult other unit supervisors who have had similar assignments.
- C. Use an appropriate procedure from a similar assignment that you are familiar with.
- D. Discuss the matter with your supervisor.

*The correct answer to this sample question is D.*

### **SOLUTION:**

**Choice A** is not correct. *Since this assignment is new for your unit, your staff would not be expected to be more knowledgeable than you about the proper procedure.*

**Choice B** is not correct. *Although discussing this matter with other supervisors may increase your knowledge of the new assignment, similar assignments performed in other units may differ in some important way from your new assignment. Other units may also function differently from your unit, so the procedures used to perform similar assignments may differ accordingly.*

**Choice C** is not correct. *Since this assignment is new for your unit, you would have no way of knowing whether the procedure from a similar assignment is appropriate to use. You would need someone with the appropriate knowledge, usually your supervisor, to determine if the procedure from a similar assignment could be used before you actually employed this procedure in the performance of your new assignment.*

**Choice D is the correct answer to this question.** *Your supervisor is more likely to be informed about what procedure may be appropriate for work that he or she assigns to you than would other unit supervisors or your staff. Even if your supervisor does not know what procedure is appropriate, a decision regarding which procedure to use should be made with his or her participation, since he or she has the ultimate responsibility for your unit's work.*

## **GENERAL TEST-TAKING GUIDELINES**

**Read all test directions and instructions carefully.** Make sure that you carefully read and follow all directions and any special instructions for the test. If sample questions are provided, do them for practice. *Make sure you understand the directions and instructions before you start to answer the questions.*

**Make sure you are answering the correct test questions in the correct test booklets.** The particular test you are taking may involve skipping some questions in the test booklet or may involve answering questions in more than one test booklet. You are responsible for making sure you get the right test booklets for your particular test and for determining which questions you are to answer. Refer to your test materials for information on which test booklets and questions you are to answer.

**Make sure the choice you mark on your answer sheet matches the question you are answering in the test booklet.** Most written multiple-choice tests are scanned and scored by machine. You will not get credit for choices you mark in the wrong place on the answer sheet. Check your work to make sure that the number of the question you are answering in the test booklet matches the choice you are marking on your answer sheet.

**Make sure you record all your answers on the answer sheet.** Only the answers you mark on your answer sheet will be counted toward your score.

**Make sure you fill in the circles for your choices completely and carefully.** Avoid making stray pencil marks on your answer sheet. The scanning machine may interpret these marks to be your answers.

## **STRATEGIES THAT MAY IMPROVE YOUR TEST PERFORMANCE**

### **Budget your time wisely**

Take note of the test time allowance and of the starting and stopping times. Look at the whole test first and then decide how much time to allow yourself for each part.

You may want to answer the easy questions first. You get just as much credit for an easy question as for a hard one. Do not take too much time trying to answer the difficult questions. Jot down the number of the difficult questions and then come back to them later if you have time. (*If you do skip a question in the test booklet, make sure you skip that answer on your answer sheet as well.*)

Keep track of the time as you go through the test. Know how much time you have and how many questions you have left to do. If some parts of your test are separately timed, work as rapidly as you can but stay calm and pay attention to the time limit.

### **Read each question carefully**

Make sure you read what is actually printed in the test booklet. The questions are designed to test your knowledge, skills, or abilities in a subject area. They are not meant to trick you or to be deceptive.

- Read each question carefully, follow the directions given, and answer each question based on the information given and on the actual question asked.
- After you read the question carefully, read each choice carefully.
- Make sure that you understand each choice before you decide which one is best.
- Pick the one choice that best answers the question given.
- Do not jump to conclusions.
- Be thorough and think about all the choices. If you do not read each choice carefully, you could easily miss the best one.

### **Be alert to key words**

Key words establish a condition that only the *correct* answer meets. Words like *best*, *greatest*, *always*, or *most* are examples of key words. If a question asks you to identify the *best* choice among four given, it may be that each of the four choices is a *possible* answer, but only *one* of the four choices is the *best* answer. To answer this type of question correctly, you must carefully read and compare all the choices given.

Here are some examples of questions that contain key words. These examples may be different than the types of questions used in the tests covered by this test guide. They are presented here only to illustrate the importance of key words.

1. Of the following foods, which one provides the **most** vitamin C in a one-cup serving?
  - A. grapefruit juice
  - B. sliced peaches
  - C. mashed potatoes
  - D. chopped broccoli

### **Answer:**

This question asks which of the foods listed provides the **most** vitamin C in a one-cup serving. The key word in this question is **most**. All of the foods mentioned in the choices contain some vitamin C. Many people know that citrus fruits, like oranges, lemons, and grapefruits, are good sources of vitamin C. That makes choice A look attractive. But one cup of broccoli actually contains more vitamin C than one cup of grapefruit juice. Choice D is the **best** answer. To answer this question correctly, you must read **all four** choices carefully before you can determine the **best** answer.

2. Of the following, which one is **generally** the **best** way to repair a Compton machine that will not start?

- A. Replace the entire engine.
- B. Replace the ignitions wires.
- C. Clean the carburetor.
- D. Clean the valves.

**Answer:**

This question asks which one of the choices listed is generally the best way to repair a Compton machine that will not start. The key words in this question are **generally** and **best**. Assume that in 99 out of 100 cases, the best way to repair a Compton machine that will not start is to replace the ignition wires. Then choice B, replace the ignition wires, is **generally** the **best** way to do the repair. Choice B is the correct answer to this question.

Questions that use words like *generally* are looking for the rule, not the exception. Other key words of this type are *common, likely, more, often, primarily, probably, typically, and usually*. When you see these words in a question, look for the choice that would be correct most of the time.

- Do not select the choice that would be correct only some of the time or on rare occasion.
- Be alert to questions that use words like *disadvantage, except, least and not*.
- If the question asks about a *disadvantage*, be sure not to choose an advantage as your answer. Words that begin with *non-* or *un-* are ways of saying *not*.

3. If grease in a pan catches fire, it is **unwise** to do which one of the following?

- A. Cover the pan with a lid.
- B. Pour water on the fire.

**Answer:**

This question asks you to identify which action is unwise to do if grease in a pan catches fire. The key word in this question is **unwise**. This word should alert you that the question is looking for what you should **not** do, rather than what you should do if grease in a pan catches fire. Choice A, covering the pan with a lid, would smother the fire by cutting off the oxygen it needs to burn. Choice A is what you *should* do if grease in a pan catches fire. However, since this question asks what is unwise to do, choice A is the *wrong* answer to this question. Choice B, pouring water on the fire, would cause the grease and fire in the pan to spatter because water and grease do not mix. This could cause injury or make the fire spread. So, it is *unwise* to pour water on the fire. Therefore, Choice B is the *correct* answer to this question.

4. If an alarm goes off in a mechanical room and the situation appears to be a threat to health or safety, what should you do **first**?

- A. Turn off the power.
- B. Call your supervisor.
- C. Call the security staff.
- D. Have people leave the area.

**Answer:**

This question asks what you should do first if an alarm goes off in a mechanical room. The key word in this question is **first**. When a question uses the word *first*, consider the choices in the order in which they should be done. For the question above, all four choices list actions that should be taken. The important thing to know is which to do first in the situation. Since the situation could be life-threatening or could result in injury, the first thing to do is to have people leave the area. This allows people to remain safe while the reason for the alarm is determined and the situation is fixed. Choice D is the first thing to do. If the situation were **not** life-threatening, choice A, turning off the power, might be the first thing to do.

When you see a question like this, make sure you understand the question and the situation thoroughly. When you think you have decided the right order for the actions, mark down the choice that you think is the first action to take in the situation. That way, you think about the whole series of possible actions to take, not just one action by itself, and you are more likely to choose the correct answer.

**Break large problems into smaller parts**

A very large or complex problem may make more sense if you break it down and look at it one part at a time. Make diagrams or notes on your scrap paper to help you understand each of the separate parts, and how those parts collectively make up the whole problem. Sometimes you can work backwards from the answer to see which answer best fits the problem. Try each answer, in turn, to find the one that works best.

**Use a process of elimination**

Most multiple-choice questions give you four possible choices. You may not be sure of the answer, but you may see right away that one or two of the choices are not correct. If this is the case, immediately eliminate the choices you know are not correct. Then, just think about the others. Pick the best of the choices that remain. Even if one choice seems only a little better than the others, pick that one. If you can eliminate one or more of the choices and make an educated guess about the choices that remain, your chances of success are better than if you make a completely wild guess.

**Guess if you do not know the answer to a question**

If you do not answer a question, you will not get credit for it. If you guess correctly, you will get credit. Therefore, if you are not sure of an answer, you should still try to answer the question.

## **HELPFUL TIPS**

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Your attitude and approach to the test will influence how well you perform. A positive attitude will help you do your best.

### **Before the test...**

- Study and review this guide to become familiar with what the test will cover.
- Study and review the subject areas that will be covered on the test.
- Study and review the New York State Department of Civil Service publication, “How to Take a Written Test.” It is available on the same page as this and other test guides through [www.cs.ny.gov](http://www.cs.ny.gov), Job Seekers, Employment Opportunities with NYS Government, State Examinations, Test Guides and Resource Books. The direct link is: <http://www.cs.ny.gov/pio/publications/howtotakeawrittentest.pdf>. It includes a considerable amount of information on Civil Service tests, including a section titled, General Test-Taking Guidelines.” This includes advice such as: **Read each test question carefully and completely. Read all of the choices before selecting your answer.**

### **On the day of the test...**

- Arrive at the test site on time.
- Bring your Admission Notice, two No. 2 pencils, a photo ID containing your signature, a quiet lunch or snack, and any other **allowed** materials.
- Do **NOT** bring this test guide to the test site.

### **At the test site...**

- Do **NOT** bring cell phones, beepers, headphones, or any electronic or other communication devices to the test site.
- The use of such devices anywhere on the grounds of the test site (in addition to the test room, this includes hallways, restrooms, building, grounds, and parking lots) could result in your disqualification.
- Do **NOT** use the calculator function on your cell phone.

### **During the test...**

- Read and follow all directions on your Admission Notice, test booklets, answer sheets, and Candidate Directions.
- Follow the Monitor’s instructions.
- Keep track of time.

### **After the test...**

- Do **NOT** remove any test materials from the test room.
- Do **NOT** paraphrase, reconstruct, or reproduce the test material in any way.
- Do **NOT** discuss the test material with others.

## ***TEST SECURITY***

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The test you will be taking is the property of the New York State Department of Civil Service.

1. Candidates may not remove test material from the test site and may not reproduce, reconstruct, or discuss the test content with others.
2. Unauthorized possession or disclosure of the test material is prohibited by law and punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine.
3. Candidates violating test security may be disqualified from appointment to positions for which the examination is being held and from being a candidate for any civil service examination for five years.
4. You should not discuss the questions and answers, even in general terms, after you take the test.
5. You should be careful that you do not inadvertently violate test security and put yourself at risk.

It is the policy of the New York State Department of Civil Service to provide reasonable accommodation to ensure effective communication of information to individuals with disabilities. If you need an auxiliary aid or service to make this information available to you, please contact the New York State Department of Civil Service Public Information Office at (518) 457-9375.

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