

PRAXIS II: SUBJECT ASSESSMENTS

# General Information and Study Tips



The ETS Higher Education Division is committed to supporting learning and advancing teaching through a coherent approach to the licensing, advanced certification, and professional development of teachers and school leaders.

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# Introducing The Praxis Series™ Assessments

## What Are The Praxis II: Subject Assessments?

The Praxis Series™ Subject Assessments are designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to assess your knowledge of specific subject areas. They are a part of the licensing procedure in many states. The Subject Assessments test your knowledge of the actual content you will be expected to teach once you are licensed. Your state has adopted The Praxis Series tests because it wants to confirm that you have achieved a specified level of mastery in your subject area before it grants you a license to teach in a classroom.

The Praxis Series tests are part of a national testing program, meaning that the tests covered in this study guide are required in more than one state for licensure. The advantage of a national program is that if you want to move to another state, you can transfer your scores from one state to another. However, each state has specific test requirements and passing scores. To determine the test(s) you need to take, refer to the **State Requirements** section of the Praxis Web site ([www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis)).

## What Is Licensure/Certification?

Licensure in any area—medicine, law, architecture, accounting, cosmetology—is an assurance to the public that the person holding the license possesses sufficient knowledge and skills to perform important occupational activities safely and effectively. In the case of teacher licensing, a license tells the public that the individual has met pre-defined competency standards for beginning teaching practice.

Because a license makes such a serious claim about its holder, licensure tests are usually quite demanding. In some fields, licensure tests have more than one part and last for more than one day. Candidates for licensure in all fields plan intensive study as part of their professional preparation: some join study groups, others study alone. But preparing to take a licensure test is, in all cases, a professional activity. Because it assesses the entire body of knowledge for the field you are entering, preparing for a licensure exam takes planning, discipline, and sustained effort.

## Why Does My State Require The Praxis Series Assessments?

Your state chose The Praxis Series Assessments because the tests assess the breadth and depth of content—called the “domain”—that your state wants its teachers to possess before they begin to teach. The level of content knowledge, reflected in the passing score, is based on recommendations of panels of teachers and teacher educators in each subject area. The state licensing agency and, in some states, the state legislature ratify the passing scores that have been recommended by panels of teachers.

## What Kinds Of Tests Are The Praxis II: Subject Assessments?

Two kinds of tests comprise the Praxis II: Subject Assessments: multiple-choice (for which you select your answer from a list of choices), and constructed-response (for which you write a response of your own). Multiple-choice tests can survey a wider domain because they can ask more questions in a limited period of time. Constructed-response tests have far fewer questions, but the questions require you to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge in that area. The two kinds of tests require different preparation, so they will be discussed separately.

## What Do The Tests Measure?

The Praxis Series Subject Assessments are tests of content knowledge. They measure your understanding and skills in a particular subject area. Multiple-choice tests measure a broad range of knowledge across your content area. Constructed-response tests measure your ability to provide in-depth explanations of a few essential topics in a given subject area. Content-specific pedagogy tests, most of which are constructed-response, measure your understanding of how to teach certain fundamental concepts in a subject area. The tests do not measure your actual teaching ability, however. They measure your knowledge of a subject and of how to teach it. The teachers in your field who help us design and write these tests, and the states that require them, do so in the belief that knowledge of your subject area is the first requirement for licensing. Teaching combines many complex skills, only some of which can be measured by a single test. While the tests covered in this study guide measure content knowledge, your teaching ability is a skill that is typically measured in other ways; for example, through observation, videotaped practice, or portfolios.

## How Were These Tests Developed?

ETS began the development of The Praxis Series Subject Assessments with a survey. For each subject, teachers around the country in various teaching situations were asked to judge which knowledge and skills a beginning teacher in that subject needs to possess. Professors in schools of education who prepare teachers were asked the same questions. These responses were ranked in order of importance and sent out to hundreds of teachers for review. All of the responses to these surveys (called “job analysis surveys”) were analyzed to summarize the judgments of these professionals. From their consensus, we developed guidelines, or specifications, for the multiple-choice and constructed-response tests. Each subject area had a committee of practicing teachers and teacher educators who wrote the specifications, which were reviewed and eventually approved by teachers. From the test specifications, groups of teachers and professional test developers created test questions that met content requirements and satisfied the ETS Standards for Quality and Fairness.\*\*

When your state adopted The Praxis Series Subject Assessments, local panels of practicing teachers and teacher educators in each subject area met to examine the tests and to evaluate each question for its relevance to beginning teachers in your state. This is called a “validity study” because local practicing teachers validate that the test content is relevant to the job. For the test to be adopted in your state, teachers in your state must judge that it is valid. During the validity study, the panel also provides a passing-score recommendation. This process includes a rigorous review to determine how many of the test questions a beginning teacher in that state would be able to answer correctly. Your state’s licensing agency then reviewed the panel’s recommendations and made a final determination of the passing-score requirement.

Throughout the development process, practitioners in the teaching field—teachers and teacher educators—participated in defining what The Praxis Series Subject Assessments would cover, which test would be used for licensure in your subject area, and what score would be needed to achieve licensure. This practice is consistent with how professional licensure works in most fields: those who are already

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\*\* *ETS Standards for Quality and Fairness* (2003, Princeton, NJ) are consistent with the “Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing,” industry standards issued jointly by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (1999, Washington, DC).

licensed oversee the licensing of new practitioners. When you pass The Praxis Series Subject Assessments, you and the practitioners in your state will have evidence that you have the knowledge and skills required for beginning teaching practice.

### How Are The Praxis II: Subject Assessments Different From Other Tests I Have Taken?

These tests are different from a final exam or other tests you may have taken because they are comprehensive—that is, they cover a whole field or content area, and thus cover material you may have learned in several courses, during more than one year. They require you to synthesize information you have learned from several sources, and to understand the subject as a whole. You will also be required to understand fundamental concepts in your field, the kinds of concepts you will be teaching to students with different learning styles.

As a teacher, you will need a thorough understanding of your subject, its fundamental concepts and misconceptions, and the ways the various concepts of the field fit together. You will also be required to apply your knowledge to situations in the classroom. Because these are tests for licensure to teach, many of the content questions are embedded in pedagogical situations—student work or student performance in the classroom, or planning, instructional, or assessment strategies of some kind.

In addition, the content-specific pedagogy tests are specifically about teaching situations. If your state requires a constructed-response pedagogy test, you will want to study the *Tests at a Glance* to see what you will be expected to demonstrate about teaching your subject. The *Tests at a Glance* information is available online at [www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis).

These tests are also very different from the Praxis I: Academic Skills Assessments, the SAT<sup>®</sup>, or other assessments of your reading, writing and mathematical skills. You may have heard it said that you can't study for the SAT. What this means is that the SAT assesses skills you should have learned throughout your school years, and that you can't learn reading skills or reasoning skills shortly before you take the exam.

The Praxis Series tests assess a content knowledge you have learned in order to teach it to others. This is a domain you can review and prepare to be tested on. Moreover, studying for your licensing exam is a great opportunity to reflect on your knowledge and skill and develop a deeper understanding of the subject before you begin to teach it to others.

### How Should I Prepare To Take These Tests?

You can best prepare for these tests by allowing plenty of preparation time and following some clear steps:

#### Decide Whether Or Not You Are Ready To Take The Test

At the end of this booklet is an “Are You Ready?” checklist. Be frank with yourself as you answer the questions in the checklist. Taking the test before you are ready is expensive and needlessly stressful. However, if you are ready, don't put it off.

#### Figure Out Which Tests You Need To Take

Obviously, you will want to know exactly which Praxis Series tests you need to take in order to become a licensed teacher in the state or states in which you hope to teach. To determine the correct test for you, refer to the **State Requirements** section of the Praxis Web site ([www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis)). You may also contact a state's teacher licensing commission, usually located in the state department of education.

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.

## Preparing for Multiple-Choice Tests

### How To Prepare For Multiple-Choice Tests

#### 1. Learn What The Test Covers

The specifications for a multiple-choice test can be found in the *Tests at a Glance* available on the Praxis Web site ([www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis)). You may have heard that there are several different test “forms” (different versions of the same test). It’s true. You might take one version of the test in January, and your friend might take a different version of the test in April. The two of you will have different questions covering the same subject area. But the tests are “parallel”: they measure the same content domain, because they are both built to the same specifications. ETS continually monitors the performance of candidates to ensure that all test forms measure content knowledge in the same ways.

The specifications are like a recipe for the test: every version of the test covers the same specifications and contains the same proportion of questions based on each topic. It is this coverage that makes the test parallel from form to form. The actual questions may be different (a question on the Civil War may ask you about the surrender at Appomatox on one test form, and about Sherman’s March to the Sea on another test form), but the content coverage will still be that required by the specifications (in this case, a question on a significant event of the Civil War).

The specifications lists within the *Tests at a Glance*, called “Topics Covered,” contain the percent of the whole test that each topic will represent. The greater the percent, the more questions there will be on that topic, and the greater your knowledge of that area will be required to be.

#### 2. Frankly Assess How Well You Know The Content

Print the Study Plan on page 30. Fill in—in as much detail as possible—the content to be covered by the test. Then fill in the column asking you how well you know the content, either in words (e.g., “well,” “not at all”) or in symbols, such as +, ?, -, for “well,” “not sure,” and “not at all.”

Whatever notation system you use, 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. And yet a surprising number of these same people actually do not pass.

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. And 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 you need to organize a serious, all-out review. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose from such an approach.

### 3. Collect The Materials You Need To Study

For all subject 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 test? 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 some tests in The Praxis Series, study guides are available for purchase. Each study guide provides a combination of test preparation and practice, including sample questions and answers with explanations. To purchase a study guide, visit the Praxis Web site at [www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis).

### 4. 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 Praxis Series tests are administered seven times per year. The *Information and Registration Bulletin*, available on the Praxis Web site, tells you the dates of the administrations for the current testing year (which runs from September to August). 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, figure out 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?

### 5. Study

ETS has developed a comprehensive array of Praxis test preparation materials, each developed by the people who created the Praxis series of tests. These materials include *Tests at a Glance*, Study Guides, and Practice Tests.

Free *Test at a Glance* (TAAG) publications are available for download at [www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis). Each TAAG includes detailed test descriptions, sample questions with answers and explanations, and test-taking strategies, including tips on pacing and guessing. The TAAGs also include scoring guides for constructed-response questions to help you understand the criteria against which your response will be evaluated, information on any listening or speaking sections, and requirements for presenting original work.

For some tests in The Praxis Series, study guides and practice tests are available for purchase. Each study guide provides a combination of test preparation and practice. These guides include key topics and exercises to guide your study, sample multiple-choice questions and answers with explanations, sample constructed-response questions with real responses from actual test-takers, and test-taking strategies to maximize success.

Each Practice Test Booklet includes an authentic paper-based test that was given at an actual test administration. These booklets also include the correct answers and content category for each question and a score conversion table so you can convert your score to a scaled score and compare your scaled score with your state's passing score. To order a study guide or practice test, visit the Praxis Web site at [www.ets.org/praxis](http://www.ets.org/praxis).

### Why The Multiple-Choice Tests Take Time

In Praxis II: Subject Assessments there are very few simple identification questions of the “*Which of the following authors wrote Moby Dick?*” sort. When the Praxis tests were first being developed by teachers and teacher educators across the country, it was almost universally agreed that prospective teachers should be able to analyze situations, synthesize material, and apply knowledge to specific examples. In short, they should be able to think as well as to recall specific facts, figures or formulas. Consequently, you will find that you are being asked to think and to solve problems on your test. Such activity takes more time than simply answering identification questions.

In addition, questions that require you to analyze situations, synthesize material, and apply knowledge are usually longer than are simple identification questions. The Praxis Series test questions often present you with something to read (a classroom situation, a case study, a sample of student work, a chart or graph) and ask you questions based on your reading. Strong reading skills are required. You must read carefully, but not slowly. Both on this test and as a teacher, you will need to efficiently process and use what you read.

If you know your reading skills are not strong, you may want to take a reading course. College campuses have reading labs that can help you strengthen your reading skills. Many campuses have a computerized instructional system which has a diagnostic test as part of its instruction. Such a diagnostic test could tell you which specific reading skills you need to develop and the instructional component can help you strengthen those skills.

### Be Familiar With Multiple-Choice Question Types

You will probably see more than one question format on a multiple-choice test. Here are examples of some of the more common question formats.

## 1. Complete The Statement

In this type of question, you are given an incomplete statement. You must select the choice that will make the completed statement correct.

The underlying concepts of division most likely will be understood by the greatest number of children if the teacher

- (A) presents the concept of division in several ways
- (B) thoroughly explains the theory of division
- (C) provides one easy step-by-step procedure for dividing
- (D) stresses the everyday usefulness of understanding division

### TIP

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

The correct answer is A. Current learning theory supports the idea of appealing to the various learning styles in a classroom. The more ways a teacher can show what division is, the more likely it is that students will understand. If they understand the concept of division, they will be more likely to understand and perform the procedure.

## 2. Which Of The Following

This question type is discussed in detail in the next section. Also discussed in the next section are strategies for helping you understand what the question is asking, and understanding details in the question that help you select the correct choice.

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.

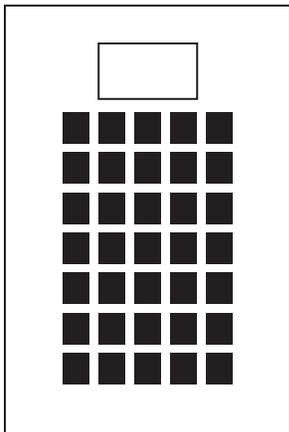
The correct answer is D.

### 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. The following question refers to the diagram of a classroom seating arrangement:



The way the desks in the classroom are arranged in the diagram to the left is best suited to which two of the following activities?

- (I) Independent work
  - (II) Hands-on demonstration
  - (III) Lecturing by the teacher
  - (IV) Writing exercises in which small groups of students work together
- (A) I and II
  - (B) I and III
  - (C) II and III
  - (D) III and IV

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. In the question above, the classroom design is suited to both independent work and lecture. So the answer is B.

**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.

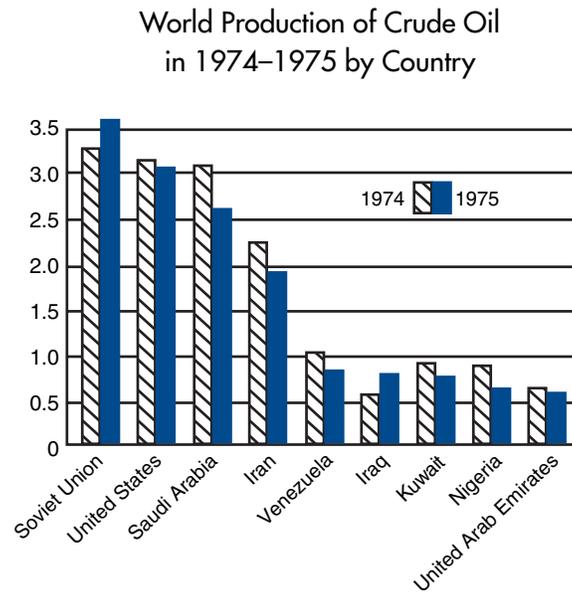
### 4. Questions Containing “NOT,” “LEAST,” “EXCEPT”

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.

Look at this example:



How many of the countries shown in the graph above produced more crude oil in 1975 than in 1974?

- A. None
- B. One
- C. Two
- D. Three

There is no reason to spend a great deal of time trying to understand the graph fully when you are being asked a very specific question about it. Here, the best approach is to read the question and then to read the graph with the question in mind. You can quickly see that two countries produced more crude oil in 1975 than in 1974, so the answer is C.

Here is another example, this one taken from the Social Studies section of the Middle School: Content Knowledge test:

Estimated Population Of American Colonies, 1630 And 1750		
	<u>1630</u>	<u>1750</u>
New England		
White Inhabitants	1,796	349,029
Black Inhabitants	0	10,982
Middle Colonies		
White Inhabitants	340	275,723
Black Inhabitants	10	20,736
Southern Colonies		
White Inhabitants	2,450	309,588
Black Inhabitants	50	204,702
Total		
White Inhabitants	4,586	934,340
Black Inhabitants	60	236,420

**Which of the following is a correct statement supported by the table above?**

- A. Religion was a powerful force opposing slavery in the American colonies.
- B. Slavery grew rapidly throughout the American colonies despite restrictions on the slave trade.
- C. Southern landholders preferred the labor of indentured servants to slave labor.
- D. By 1750, the southern colonies had become demographically distinct from the other colonies.

As with the question about the graph on the previous page, the best way to approach this question would be to read the question before studying the table. You might want to look over the table briefly in order to get yourself oriented. (What is it about? How is it organized?) But the key to answering correctly is reading the question and using only the information presented in the table to answer it.

The only claim that is fully supported by the table is D. All the other answers provide conclusions that cannot be drawn solely from the information presented in this chart.

**TIP** Read the questions before studying graphs, maps, or tables.

## 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. Then 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.

Here is an example of a format you might not have encountered before:

**Directions:** The following question asks you to analyze teacher goals and actions intended to lead to the achievement of the goal. Decide whether the action makes it likely or unlikely to lead to the achievement of the goal.

**GOAL:** To increase the participation of low-achieving middle-school students in whole-class discussions.

**ACTION:** Instead of asking for volunteers, the teacher randomly calls on students to discuss homework assignments.

- (A) Likely, because students who feel anxiety about being called on will be more at ease and will pay more attention to class discussion.
- (B) Likely, because low-achieving students often hesitate to volunteer and random questioning will increase responses from these students.
- (C) Unlikely, because students in the middle-school grades prefer to have a choice in responding to discussions.
- (D) Unlikely, because students' positive feelings toward the teacher will decrease.

In order to answer this question correctly you must read the directions, which explain how the paragraph marked "GOAL", the paragraph marked "ACTION," and the answer choices fit together.

The answer is B because it is the only action that is both "likely" to be successful and "likely" the right reason. To answer this question, you would first decide whether or not the action was likely to achieve the desired goal. Then you would select the reason. This two-part selection process would bring you to your 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. For example, look at this question:

**Which of the following is a flavor made from beans?**

- (A) Strawberry
- (B) Cherry
- (C) Vanilla
- (D) Mint

You may know that chocolate and coffee are flavors made from beans also. But they are not listed, and the question asks you to select from among the list that follows (“which of the following”). So the answer has to be the only bean-derived flavor in the list: vanilla.

Notice that the answer can be substituted for the phrase “which of the following.” In the question here, you could insert “vanilla” for “which of the following,” and have the sentence “Vanilla is a flavor made from beans.” Sometimes it helps to cross out “which of the following” and insert the various choices.

Also, looking carefully at the phrase, “which of the following” helps you to focus on both what the question is asking you to find and on the answer choices. In the simple example here, all of the answer choices are flavors. Your job is to decide which of the flavors is the one made from beans.

The vanilla bean question is pretty straightforward. But the phrase, “which of the following” can also be found in more challenging questions. Look at this question:

**Entries in outlines are generally arranged according to which of the following relationships of ideas?**

- (A) Literal and inferential
- (B) Concrete and abstract
- (C) Linear and recursive
- (D) Main and subordinate

The placement of “which of the following” tells you that the list of choices is a list of “relationships of ideas.” What are you supposed to find as an answer? You are supposed to find the choice that describes how entries, or ideas, in outlines are related.

Sometimes it helps to put the question in your own words. Here, you could paraphrase the question as “How are outlines usually organized?” Since the ideas in outlines usually appear as main ideas and subordinate ideas, the correct answer is D.

**TIP** Don’t 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. 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**

Don't make the questions more difficult than they are. Don't read for "hidden meanings" or "tricks." There are no "trick questions" on Praxis II: Subject Assessments. 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. Look at this question from the Elementary Education test:

**In which of the following theories is the influence of rewards most likely to be emphasized explaining behavioral change?**

- (A) Information-processing theory
- (B) Operant conditioning theory
- (C) Classical conditioning theory
- (D) Cognitive development theory

Write the question in your own words here:

After spending a minute with the question, you can probably see that you are being asked to find the theory which explains changes in behavior in terms of rewards. (The correct answer is B.) The important thing—if you're not planning to take the Elementary Education test—is figuring out *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.

It takes more work to understand "which of the following" questions when there are more words in a question. The Praxis Series test questions often portray actual classroom situations and actual teaching strategies. You will be asked to apply your knowledge of teaching theory to a specific situation, just as you would in a classroom. Questions that require application of theory to practice invariably require more reading than straight naming-the-theory questions would.

Consider this question:

A teacher gives her students a list of items to use in an essay and intends the list to serve as a kind of learning support called a scaffold. If the students use the list effectively, which of the following would be an appropriate next step for the teacher to take when assigning the students their next essay?

- (A) Asking the students to come up with their own list of terms to use in the new assignment.
- (B) Giving the students a longer list of terms to use in the new assignment.
- (C) Giving the students a list of terms and asking them to write down a definition of each before beginning the new assignment.
- (D) Asking the students to use the same terms in the new assignment.

Given the placement of the phrase, “which of the following,” you can tell that the list of answer choices is a list of “next steps.” What are you supposed to select from the list? An “appropriate next step.”

Being able to select “an appropriate next step” depends on our understanding the situation described in the question. Describe the situation in your own words here:

Also, selecting the appropriate next step depends on your knowing what “scaffolding” is, and knowing that after “scaffolding” (in this question, providing the students with a list of words), a teacher is supposed to shift the supporting to the students themselves (called “fading”).

Instead of asking “What comes after scaffolding?” the question asks you to apply your knowledge of these strategies to a specific situation. Selecting the correct answer (A) depends on your being able to read accurately and process information efficiently.

**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. Here is an example of such a question:

In order to determine how well the students in an eighth-grade class are reading as compared to other students in the nation, a teacher should examine the results of which of the following kinds of tests?

- (A) A criterion-referenced reading test
- (B) A norm-referenced reading test
- (C) An aptitude test
- (D) An informal reading inventory

The placement of “which of the following” tells you that you are selecting a kind of test for your answer. The details in the question that help you determine your answer are: eighth-grade students; reading test; comparison with other students in the nation. These are the conditions that your answer must fit. These are also all clues that can help you select your answer.

All of the choices seem appropriate for eighth-graders, and all of the tests listed might be used to assess reading skills. But only B satisfies the detail that you want to compare these students’ scores with scores of other students in the nation. Such a comparison is provided by a norm-referenced test.

### TIP

You may find that it helps you to circle each of the details of the question in your test book so that you don’t 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.

Here is another example of a question. Write in the space provided what you’re looking for as an answer, and list the other details of the question.

Which of the following events would result in a bias that may affect the validity of the standardized test scores for a test that presents multiple-choice questions and uses a gridded answer sheet?

- (A) Three students use a geometric pattern to fill out their answer sheets.
- (B) A teacher gives the entire class an extra ten minutes to complete the test because three students with learning disabilities need more time
- (C) A teacher selects a test that has questions that match the skills and concepts taught in the classroom.
- (D) Students taking the test have taken a different form of the same test the previous year.

What I'm looking for as the answer:

What are the other details of the question?

You're looking for an event that would bias (i.e., negatively affect) the validity of a standardized test. Other details presented in the question are: the test is multiple-choice and uses a standardized ("gridded") answer sheet.

In order to answer the question correctly, you would have to know something about the factors affecting the validity of standardized tests. Nevertheless, with this strategy of looking at the question, and looking at the details of the question, you can understand what the question is asking, whether you know the answer (B) or not. When you understand the question, you can at least make an educated guess at the answer. Often, when you understand the question, you will find that you know the answer.

**TIP**

Once you have determined your answer, make sure to fill in the answer sheet.

### 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's easy to forget that you're selecting the negative. This question type is used in situations where there are several good options, but also a clearly wrong answer. These words are always capitalized when they appear in The Praxis Series test questions, but they are easily (and frequently) overlooked.

For the following test question, determine what kind of answer you're looking for, and what the details of the question are.

According to most researchers on bilingualism, which of the following would be **LEAST** helpful for children whose native language is not English and who have limited English proficiency to acquire knowledge of a subject?

- (A) Teaching them the subject exclusively in English.
- (B) Teaching them the subject in their native language until their English skills permit instruction in English.
- (C) Developing their English skills while they are learning the subject.
- (D) Strengthening native language skills to support subject-matter instruction.

What I'm looking for:

Details of the question:

You're looking for the strategy that would be **LEAST** effective. The details are that the students' native language is not English, they have limited English proficiency, and the goal is for them to acquire knowledge of a subject (not simply English language skills). Another detail is that the answer you select has to be based on research on bilingualism; not just what might seem like a good answer. A is the correct answer—that is, all of the other choices are more effective than A.

**TIP** It's easy to get confused while you're 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.

Here's a slightly more difficult example of "NOT" kind of question to test your developing skills. First look at what the question is asking you to find, and then list the details of the question.

A high school teacher is trying to help nonfluent speakers of English understand an English text. During the class, the teacher asks the students to read aloud and focuses on correcting errors in pronunciation. Which of the following is a principle of second language development that this approach fails to take into account?

- (A) For most nonfluent speakers of a language, the fastest way to learn the language is to imitate the way native speakers speak it.
- (B) Reading skills have to be well established before a student of a language can learn a language.
- (C) Nonfluent speakers of a language can understand what they are reading before they can accurately pronounce all the sounds in the language.
- (D) Students should not attempt to read aloud before they can read grade-level texts silently with understanding.

What I'm looking for:

Details of the question:

You're looking for a theory of language learning that the teacher's actions "fail to take into account." This is a kind of NOT question. It could easily be worded "which of the following theories of language learning does NOT support the teacher's actions?"

## General Information & Study Tips

Details of the question are in the situation described. The students are “nonfluent.” They are reading aloud. The teacher “focuses on” correcting their pronunciation and is trying to help them understand the content of the text.

The question sets up a relationship between understanding content and pronunciation. The teacher seems to think that correct pronunciation of words will help promote understanding. The correct answer (C) says that nonfluent speakers can understand the content of a language without being able to pronounce all the words correctly. This is the theory that the teacher “fails to” (or does NOT) take into account.

This question is difficult. It requires careful reading and processing of information. The content of the question is probably something you know about, and when you understand exactly what the question is asking, you will be able to show what you know by selecting the correct answer.

Here’s an example of a question that uses the word “EXCEPT”:

If there are exactly 5 times as many children as adults at a show, all of the following could be the number of people at a show EXCEPT

- (A) 102
- (B) 80
- (C) 36
- (D) 30

What I’m looking for:

Details of the question:

You're looking for the number that cannot be the sum of a number plus five times that number. There are several ways to solve this problem ( $x + 5x = 6x$ ), including trial and error. You may also know that all possible numbers must be multiples of 6. The only number that is NOT a multiple of 6 is 80. The correct answer is B.

Again, the key to answering these questions correctly is remembering that all of the choices EXCEPT one are actually correct, and that you are looking for the incorrect one.

## 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, 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.

### How To Prepare For Constructed-Response Tests

#### 1. Learn What The Test Covers

The first thing to do is look at the description of the test in the *Test at a Glance* information. Look for the test specifications that tell you what kinds of questions will be on your test and what content will be covered.

#### 2. Frankly Assess How Well You Know The Content

Print out the Study Plan at the end of this document. Have you had a course that covered this material? If so, do you have course notes? Do you have access to a textbook? Where can you find the information you need to know?

#### 3. Practice Explaining The Key Concepts

Constructed-response tests assess your ability to explain materials, 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 tests 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 probability, the law of supply-and-demand, or photosynthesis. In the English Language and Literature test, you may be asked to respond to student writing, or to address a theoretical question such as whether it's better to teach the standard great works to high school students, or whether it's better to give them a sense of less well-known writings by members of other cultures and by American minorities.

Look over a high school text that is currently in use in your subject. 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 don't look difficult, but they are for many people who have never actually had to explain them before. To be successful on the Praxis II constructed-response tests, you must be able to explain key concepts in your own words.

### 4. Understand How Questions Will Be Scored

Look at the scoring documents or information guide for the test questions. Scoring guides can be found in the *Tests at a Glance*. These are the categories for which you will be awarded points. You will not be scored on any other aspect of your response: you will not be scored on spelling, grammar, handwriting, ability to write an essay (except where stated, as on the English Language and Literature test), or any other feature. **YOUR RESPONSE WILL BE SCORED ONLY ON THE FEATURES LISTED IN THE SCORING GUIDE FOR YOUR TEST.** Of course, if your handwriting is illegible, and the scorers can't make out the words, your score may suffer. But the scorers are trained to ignore misspellings, less-than-perfect handwriting, and second-language problems. So familiarize yourself with the features of the scoring guide, and be sure your responses take the scoring guide into account.

## Understanding Constructed-Response Questions

Here are some specific suggestions from Chief Readers who have scored thousands of essays from the Praxis Series tests. Paying attention to these suggestions can help you improve your test performance. 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 don't 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.

## General Information & Study Tips

Here is a sample of a response that received the maximum three points for a response on this test. It answers by fully explaining narrative text, then contrasting that explanation with an explanation of expository text.

Narrative text is text that tells a story. The reader sees the story through the narrator's eyes. Narrative text uses a lot of description and relates actual conversations as they occur. Narrative text also sets up situations to give the reader an idea of how the characters feel by what they say and what they do.

Expository texts are written to put forth a viewpoint. The purpose is to convince the reader. Expository text is also textbook writing: for the purpose of giving information. Narrative writing is in the form of a story, but expository writing is arranged according to introduction, body, and conclusion. Narrative text deals more with feelings and expository text with facts.

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 don't 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. Here is an example:

Choose one country or geographic region in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East that was colonized by Europeans and that achieved its independence after the Second World War. Write an essay describing the ways in which that country or geographic region has been affected by European colonialism. Your essay should address at least two of the following: the economic, cultural, social, or political legacy of European colonialism.

List below the elements your answer has to contain. First, the country or geographic region you describe must meet all of the conditions specified in the question. These include:

1. One country or geographic region in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East
  
2. Colonized by Europeans

Add other conditions here.

- 3.
  
- 4.

Then your essay must focus on at least two of the effects of European colonialism.

List them below.

- 1.
  
- 2.
  
- 3.
  
- 4.

Here is an example of a response that achieved the maximum score. Note how it addresses each part of the question.

**Economic  
Legacy**

The Indian subcontinent had been subjected to European colonialism for over two centuries. Although, initially just in the south (especially in the present day country of Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon) by the Portuguese, the British have been the dominant influence on the area for the last hundred years.

Economic exploitation of India's labor and natural resources (especially cotton) was systematically entrenched by the establishment of a British viceroy who ruled over the colony with the aid of "favored" local rulers and groups (i.e. Sikhs). The colony was not only an abundant source of raw materials but it also served as an export outlet for the British textile industry. Mahatma Gandhi, the non-violent, Indian nationalist, seized upon the import of British textiles as a vital statement of Indian independence after WWII.

**Political  
Legacy**

After India became independent, it preserved much of the existing judicial and administrative infrastructure left behind by the British Empire and used the parliamentary model of democracy.

**Cultural  
and  
Social  
Legacy**

The most significant legacy of British imperialism across the board has been the proliferation of the English language. This was an especially vital point for unifying India because it was a new nation, composed of numerous peoples and nearly a thousand languages and regional dialects. English became the primary language of government, commerce and national education. It also gave India a competitive edge in the world, especially since many of the Indian elite had received English education and had connections throughout the "commonwealth".

However, India's main problem did not go away after independence. In fact it may have been exacerbated by the British policy of "divide and rule". There persisted much ethnic and religious tension between the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities. Gandhi, the "Father of Independence," had tried desperately to preserve national unity. However, after his death, forces pulling the nation apart could not be contained. Pakistan broke away from India. The tension between these and other regional groups persists today. Although India has benefited from many of the British institutions left behind, it has perhaps suffered by not being allowed to continue its indigenous social evolution. This might have produced a more natural and cohesive state of affairs in the area.

## Use The Constructed-response Items In The “Tests At A Glance” For Practice

Do not look at the sample responses before you try to practice.

- Prepare to practice by reviewing material in the subject and by practicing explaining the basic concepts in your field. Try writing out your explanations as part of your review.
- Look carefully at the scoring guide and make sure you understand what the scoring criteria are. When it’s time to practice, try to simulate testing conditions as closely as possible. Write your responses in a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed for the entire time.
- Time yourself. Make sure you allow yourself the same amount of time you will be allowed in the actual testing situation.
- When you have finished, look at the explanations of the scores for responses in the *Tests at a Glance*. See which sample response your response is most like. Can you tell what score you would have received? Can you tell why? Do you see ways of improving your score?
- If you are having difficulty applying the scoring guide to your own writing, take your responses to someone whose judgment you trust: a colleague, a teacher, a practitioner in the field, someone who has taken a Praxis Series test and done well. Maybe he or she can help you evaluate (and, more importantly, improve) your performance.

## Other Information

### If You Have A Disability Or If English Is Not Your Primary Language

You can apply for special accommodations to take your test (see the Bulletin Supplement for *Test Takers with Disabilities* or the *Information and Registration Bulletin* for eligibility criteria).

### 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). 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't 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 doesn't 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've trained, prepared, and rested, give it everything you've got.

### A Summary

To recap, you need to prepare thoroughly for each test in The Praxis Series that you plan to take. Here are some important steps to take in preparing:

- Know which test(s) your state requires
- Honestly evaluate your readiness for each test
- Fill in the Study Plan to help you decide where to obtain study materials, and to help you plan your study.
- Plan your preparation time and stick to your plan.
- Finish your review two or three days before the test.
- Be prepared for delays and disruptions. That way, if nothing happens, you'll be pleasantly surprised.
- Take the tests, pass them, and become licensed.

**GOOD LUCK AND FRUITFUL STUDYING.**

## Are You Ready?

Complete this checklist to determine if you're ready to take your test.

- Do you know the testing requirements for your teaching field in the state(s) where you plan to teach?
- Have you followed all of the test registration procedures?
- Do you know the topics that will be covered in each test you plan to take?
- Have you reviewed any textbooks, class notes, and course readings that relate to the topics covered?
- Do you know how long the test will take and the number of questions it contains?  
Have you considered how you will pace your work?
- Are you familiar with the types of questions for your test?
- Are you familiar with the recommended test-taking strategies?
- Have you practiced by working through the practice questions in the *Tests at a Glance* booklet?
- If constructed-response questions are part of your test, do you understand the scoring criteria for these items?
- If you are repeating a Praxis Series test, have you analyzed your previous score report to determine areas where additional study and test preparation could be useful?

