

Study Tips: Preparing for a Texas Educator Certification Exam



Last Updated September 2018

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Get Ready to Show What You Know

You have gained the knowledge and skills you need for your teaching career. Now you are ready to demonstrate your abilities by taking a Texas Educator Certification Program exam.

Using all the resources that are available to you on the Texas Educator Certification Examination Program website is a smart way to prepare for the exam so you can do your best on exam day. These materials can help you stay on track and make the most efficient use of your study time.

Effective exam preparation doesn't just happen. You'll want to set clear goals and deadlines for yourself along the way. Otherwise, you may not feel ready and confident on exam day.

How to Prepare for a Texas Educator Certification Program Exam

Learn What the Exam Covers

You may have heard that there are several different versions of the same exam. It's true. You may take one version of the exam and your friend may take a different version. Each exam has different questions covering the same subject area, but both versions of the exam measure the same skills and content knowledge.

You'll find specific information on the exam you're taking in the "About the Test" section of the preparation manual, which outlines the content areas that the exam measures and what percentage of the exam covers each area.

Begin by reviewing the preparation manual for your exam in its entirety, paying particular attention to the content specifications. The content specifications detail the knowledge and skills to be measured on the exam. The "Educator Standards" section of the prep manual lists the standards necessary for a teacher of that subject.

Once you have reviewed the preparation manual and the standards, you can create your own personalized study plan and schedule based on your individual needs and how much time you have before exam day. Be sure to also seek other resources to strengthen your content knowledge.

Keep in mind that study habits are individual. There are many different ways to successfully prepare for your exam. Some people study better on their own, while others prefer a group setting. You may have more energy early in the day, but another test taker may concentrate better in the evening. Use this guide to develop the approach that works best for you.

Your teaching career begins with preparation. Good luck!

Assess How Well You Know the Content

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

Think carefully about how well you know each area; research shows that test takers tend to overestimate their preparedness. People often glance at the specifications, or at the exam questions (with “a peek” at the answers at the same time), and think that they know the content of the exam. This is why some test takers assume they did well and then are surprised to find out they did not pass.

The Texas Educator Certification Examination Program exams are demanding enough to require serious review. The longer you’ve been away from the content the more preparation you will most likely need. If it has been longer than a few months since you’ve studied your content area, make a concerted effort to prepare. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose from such an approach.

Familiarize Yourself with the Different Types of Exam Questions

Texas Educator Certification Examination Program exams include several types of exam questions, which can be broken into two categories: selected response (multiple choice) and constructed response (for which you write or record a response of your own that is scored by trained raters based on scoring guidelines). You may be familiar with these question formats from taking other standardized tests. If not, familiarize yourself with them so you don’t spend time during the exam figuring out how to answer them.

How to Approach Unfamiliar Question Formats

Some questions include introductory information such as a table, graph, or reading passage (often called a stimulus) that provides the information the question asks for. New formats for presenting information are developed from time to time. Exams may include audio and video stimulus materials, such as a movie clip or some kind of animation, instead of a map or reading passage.

Exams may also include interactive types of questions. These questions take advantage of technology to assess knowledge and skills that go beyond what can be assessed using standard single-selection selected-response questions. If you see a format you are not familiar with, **read the directions carefully**. The directions always give clear instructions on how you are expected to respond.

For most questions, you will respond by clicking an oval to choose a single answer choice from a list of options. Other questions may ask you to respond by:

- **Selecting all that apply.** In some questions, you will be asked to choose all the options that answer the question correctly.
- **Typing in an entry box.** You may be asked to enter a text or numeric answer. Some questions may have more than one place to enter a response.
- **Clicking check boxes.** You may be asked to click check boxes instead of an oval when more than one choice within a set of answers can be selected.

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- **Clicking parts of a graphic.** In some questions, you will choose your answer by clicking on location(s) on a graphic such as a map or chart, as opposed to choosing from a list.
 - **Clicking on sentences.** In questions with reading passages, you may be asked to choose your answer by clicking on a sentence or sentences within the reading passage.
 - **Dragging and dropping answer choices into “targets” on the screen.** You may be asked to choose an answer from a list and drag it into the appropriate location in a table, paragraph of text, or graphic.
 - **Selecting options from a drop-down menu.** This type of question will ask you to select the appropriate answer or answers by selecting options from a drop-down menu (e.g., to complete a sentence).

Remember that with every question, you will get clear instructions on how to respond.

Approaches to Answering Selected-Response Questions

The information below describes some selected-response question formats that you will typically see on Texas Educator Certification Examination Program exams and suggests possible ways to approach thinking about and answering them. These approaches are intended to supplement and complement familiar test-taking strategies with which you may already be comfortable and that work for you. Fundamentally, the most important component in ensuring your success is familiarity with the content that is covered on the exam. This content has been carefully selected to align with the knowledge required to begin a career as a teacher in the state of Texas.

The questions on each exam are designed to assess your knowledge of the content described in the competencies of each exam. In most cases, you are expected to demonstrate more than just your ability to recall factual information. You may be asked to think critically about the information, to analyze it, to compare it with other knowledge you have, or to make a judgment about it.

Be sure to read the directions carefully to ensure that you know what is required for each exam question. Leave no questions unanswered. Your score will be determined by the number of questions you answer correctly.

Question Types

You may see the following types of selected-response questions on the exam:

- Single Questions
- Clustered Questions

On the following pages, you will find descriptions of these commonly used question formats, along with suggested approaches for responding to each type.

Single Questions

The single-question format presents a direct question or an incomplete statement. It can also include a reading passage, graphic, table, or a combination of these. Four or more answer options appear below the question.

Example

The children in a kindergarten classroom often become so engaged in their activities that the teacher has trouble getting them to stop what they are doing and begin transitioning to another activity. The teacher can best address this problem by using which of the following approaches?

- A. Organize each activity in ways that prompt children to begin at a high level of energy and then shift gradually to lower energy levels
- B. Establish a routine in which the teacher begins each day by discussing with the class the planned schedule of activities for that day
- C. Assign individual children, on a rotating basis, to help the teacher monitor and direct transitions from one activity to the next
- D. Establish an agreed-upon signal, such as clapping or ringing a bell, that alerts children that it is time to pay attention

Suggested Approach

Read the question carefully and critically. Think about what it is asking and the situation it is describing. Eliminate any obviously wrong answers, select the correct answer choice, and mark your answer.

This question addresses how a kindergarten teacher can best make children aware that it is time to move from one activity to another. When young children are engrossed in what they are doing, they may find it difficult to disengage and turn their attention elsewhere. Teachers can often overcome this problem by getting children in the habit of responding automatically to a particular stimulus, such as a bell ringing or clapping. Therefore, **option D is the single best answer.**

Option A, organizing activities that progress from high-energy components to low-energy components, is not feasible in many situations and would probably fail to address the problem described. With regard to option B, it would be unreasonable to expect children at the kindergarten level to be able to adhere to a schedule of activities described to them early in the day. Similarly, children of this age would not be capable of effectively helping the teacher monitor and direct their peers' transitions (option C).

Clustered Questions

Clustered questions are made up of a stimulus and two or more questions relating to the stimulus. The stimulus material can be a reading passage, a graphic, a table, a description of an experiment, or any other information necessary to answer the questions that follow.

You can use several different approaches to respond to clustered questions. Some commonly used strategies are listed below.

- Strategy 1** Skim the stimulus material to understand its purpose, its arrangement, and/or its content. Then read the questions and refer again to the stimulus material to obtain the specific information you need to answer the questions.
- Strategy 2** Read the questions *before* considering the stimulus material. The theory behind this strategy is that the content of the questions will help you identify the purpose of the stimulus material and locate the information you need to answer the questions.
- Strategy 3** Use a combination of both strategies. Apply the “read the stimulus first” strategy with shorter, more familiar stimuli and the “read the questions first” strategy with longer, more complex or less familiar stimuli. You can experiment with the sample questions in the preparation manuals and then use the strategy with which you are most comfortable when you take the actual exam.

Whether you read the stimulus before or after you read the questions, you should read it carefully and critically. You may want to note its important points to help you answer the questions.

As you consider questions set in educational contexts, try to enter into the identified teacher’s frame of mind and use that teacher’s point of view to answer the questions that accompany the stimulus. Be sure to consider the questions only in terms of the information provided in the stimulus — not in terms of your own experiences or individuals you may have known.

Example

First read the stimulus.

Read the information below to answer the questions that follow.

Mr. Hall, a middle school teacher, has the following goals while creating his behavior management program.

Goal 1: Develop an effective set of behavior expectations for students, including rewards and consequences.

Goal 2: Establish positive relationships with students' parents to get support for the behavior management program.

Now you are prepared to respond to the first of the two questions associated with this stimulus.

1. Which of the following introductions would best ensure that students will accept and follow the classroom behavior standards?
 - A. Posting a list of specific behavior standards on a poster at the front of the classroom
 - B. Allowing the students to discover through trial and error before discussing the importance of the behavior standards
 - C. Developing the behavior standards as a classroom community with student input and discussion
 - D. Inviting the school principal to participate during the discussion of the importance of the behavior standards

Suggested Approach

Read the question carefully and critically. Think about what it is asking and the situation it is describing. Eliminate any obviously wrong answers, select the correct answer choice, and mark your answer.

This question addresses the teacher's ability to gain student support and ownership of classroom behavior standards. It is important to allow the students to have an opportunity to be a part of the development of rules and rewards. Therefore, **option C is the single best answer.**

With regard to the other responses, while it is true that posting the rules is a good practice, not allowing the students to have input will not be effective in gaining their acceptance of the rules (option A). It is also true there should be a discussion about behavior standards, but it should happen before students practice them (option B). With regard to option D, allowing the principal to be involved in the development of classroom rules can undermine both the students' and the teacher's ability to develop the sense of ownership of the rules.

Now you are prepared to respond to the second of the two questions associated with this stimulus.

2. Which of the following could Mr. Hall do to best achieve his main goal related to parents?
- A. Meeting with the parents as soon as the students violate the behavior standards
 - B. Sending an introductory letter home on the first day of school that asks for a conference in the first month
 - C. Calling the parents when help is needed to maintain an appropriate level of the standards
 - D. Soliciting parental involvement when there is an after-school grade-level activity

Suggested Approach

Read the question carefully and critically. Think about what it is asking and the situation it is describing. Eliminate any obviously wrong answers, select the correct answer choice, and mark your answer.

This question tests understanding of the importance of family involvement in students' classroom behavior. It is important to make contact with parents and start building a relationship before there are any behavioral concerns. Therefore, **Option B is the correct response.**

With regard to the other responses, waiting for a student to misbehave (option A) or until the teacher needs help (option B) are both missed opportunities to encourage positive parent involvement. With regard to option D, getting parents involved with after-school activities will not support a classroom behavior management program.

Understanding Constructed-Response Questions

Constructed-response questions require you to demonstrate your knowledge in a subject area by providing in-depth explanations on particular topics. Essay, problem-solving, and oral-response are types of constructed-response questions.

For example, an essay or oral-response question might present you with a topic and ask you to discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the opinion stated. You must support your position with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations or reading.

Take a look at a few sample essay topics:

- “Discuss two differences between narrative text and expository text.”
- “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.”

Keep these things in mind when you respond to a constructed-response question:

1. Answer the question accurately. Analyze what each part of the question is asking you to do. If the question asks you to describe or discuss, you should provide more than just a list.
2. Answer the question completely. If a question asks you to do three distinct things in your response, you should cover all three things for the best score. No matter how well you respond, you will not be awarded full credit if you do not answer the question completely.
3. Answer the question that is asked. Do not change the question or challenge the basis of the question. You will receive no credit or a low score if you answer another question or if you state, for example, that there is no possible answer.
4. Give a thorough and detailed response. You must demonstrate that you have a thorough understanding of the subject matter. However, your response should be straightforward and not filled with unnecessary information.
5. If your response is written, reread it. Check that you have written what you thought you wrote. Be sure not to leave sentences unfinished or omit clarifying information.

Understand How Constructed-Response Questions Will be Scored

Information about the scoring of constructed-response exam questions can be found on the “Understanding Your Exam Results” page on the Texas Educator Certification Examination Program website. Familiarize yourself with the scoring information provided in this page, and be sure your responses take this information into account.

Gather Study Materials

For all content areas, think about where you might be able to obtain materials for review:

- Did you have a course in which the area was covered?
- Do you still have your book or your notes?
- Does your college library have a good introductory college-level text in this area?
- Does your local library have a high school-level text?

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 that works for you.

For all Texas educator certification exams, exam preparation manuals are available as free downloads. Each prep manual provides a combination of exam preparation and practice, including sample questions and answers with explanations. To obtain a prep manual, visit the “Prepare” section of the Texas Educator Certification Examination Program website. In this section of the website, you can also find some Interactive Practice Tests and informational tutorials.

Plan and Organize Your Time

You can begin to plan and organize your time while you are still collecting materials. Allow yourself plenty of review time to avoid cramming new material at the end. Here are a few tips:

- Choose a testing date far enough in the future to leave you plenty of preparation time. For exam date information, refer to the exam’s information page on the Texas Educator Certification Examination Program website.
- Work backward from the exam date to figure out how much time you will need for review.
- Set a realistic schedule — and stick to it.

Develop Your Study Plan

A study plan provides a roadmap to prepare for the exams. It can help you understand what skills and knowledge are covered on the exam and where to focus your attention. A blank study plan worksheet is available in the back of this guide. You can use this worksheet to:

1. **Define Content Areas:** List the most important content areas for your exam as defined in the preparation manual.
2. **Determine Strengths and Weaknesses:** Identify where you have thorough understanding and where you need additional study in each content area.
3. **Identify Resources:** Identify the books, courses, and other resources you plan to use to study for each content area.
4. **Study:** Create and commit to a schedule that provides for regular study periods.

Practice

Exams with constructed-response questions assess your ability to explain material effectively. As a teacher, you'll need to be able to explain concepts and processes to students in a clear, understandable way. What are the major concepts you will be required to teach? Can you explain them in your own words accurately, completely, and clearly? Practice explaining these concepts to test your ability to effectively explain what you know.

Using Study Materials as Part of a Study Group

People who have a lot of studying to do sometimes find it helpful to form a study group with others who are working toward the same goal. Study groups give members opportunities to ask questions and get detailed answers. In a group, some members usually have a better understanding of certain topics, while others in the group may be better at other topics. As members take turns explaining concepts to each other, everyone builds self-confidence.

If the group encounters a question that none of the members can answer well, the group can go to a teacher or other expert and get answers efficiently. Because study groups schedule regular meetings, members study in a more disciplined fashion. They also gain emotional support. The group should be large enough so that various people can contribute various kinds of knowledge, but small enough so that it stays focused. Often, three to six members is a good size.

Here are some ways to use the preparation manual as part of a study group:

- Plan the group's study program. Parts of the study plan template can help to structure your group's study program. By filling out the first five columns and sharing the worksheets, everyone will learn more about your group's mix of abilities and about the resources, such as textbooks, that members can share with the group. In the sixth column ("Dates planned for study of content"), you can create an overall schedule for your group's study program.
- Plan individual group sessions. At the end of each session, the group should decide what specific topics will be covered at the next meeting and who will

present each topic. Use the content subareas and objectives in the preparation manual to select topics, and then select practice questions.

- Prepare your presentation for the group. When it's your turn to present, prepare something that is more than a lecture. Write two or three original questions to pose to the group. Practicing writing actual questions can help you better understand the topics covered on the exam as well as the types of questions you will encounter on the exam. It will also give other members of the group extra practice at answering questions.
- Take a practice test together. The idea of a practice test is to simulate an actual administration of the exam, so scheduling an exam session with the group will add to the realism and may also help boost everyone's confidence. Remember, if you take a practice test, allow only the time that will be allotted for that exam on your administration day. You can use the questions in the preparation manual for your practice test.
- Learn from the results of the practice test. Check each other's answers. An answer key for the selected-response questions with explanations for the answers is included in the prep manual. If your exam includes constructed-response questions, look at the constructed-response sample questions, which contain sample responses to those types of questions and shows how they were scored. Then try to follow the same guidelines that the test raters use.
 - **Be as critical as you can.** You're not doing your study partner a favor by letting him or her get away with an answer that does not cover all parts of the question adequately.
 - **Be specific.** Write comments that are as detailed as the comments about the sample responses. Indicate where and how your study partner is doing an inadequate job of answering the question. Writing notes for your study partner may also help.
 - **Be supportive.** Include comments that point out what your study partner got right and that therefore earned points.

Then plan one or more study sessions based on aspects of the questions on which group members did not perform well. For example, each group member might be responsible for rewriting one paragraph of a response in which someone else did an inadequate job.

Whether you decide to study alone or with a group, remember that the best way to prepare is to have an organized plan. The plan you follow should set goals based on specific topics and skills that you need to learn, and it should commit you to a realistic set of deadlines for meeting these goals. Then you need to discipline yourself to stick with your plan and accomplish your goals on schedule.

Smart Tips for Success

Learn from the experts. Take advantage of these answers to questions you may have and practical tips to help you navigate the exam and make the best use of your time.

Should I guess?

Yes. Your score is based on the number of questions you answer correctly, with no penalty or subtraction for an incorrect answer. When you don't know the answer to a question, try to eliminate any obviously wrong answers and then guess at the correct one. Try to pace yourself so that you have enough time to carefully consider every question.

Are there trick questions on the exam?

No. There are no hidden meanings or trick wording. All of the questions on the exam ask about subject matter knowledge in a straightforward manner.

Are there answer patterns on the exam?

No. You might have heard this myth: The answers on selected-response exams follow patterns. Another myth is that there will never be more than two questions with the same lettered answer following each other. Neither myth is true. Select the answer you think is correct based on your knowledge of the subject.

Can I write on the erasable sheet(s) I am given?

Yes. You can work out problems or make notes to yourself on the erasable sheet(s) provided to you by the test administrator. You may use your notes in any way that is useful to you, but be sure to enter your final answers on the computer. No credit is given for anything written on the erasable sheet(s).

Tips for Taking the Exam

1. **Skip the questions you find extremely difficult.** Rather than trying to answer these on your first pass through the exam, leave them blank and mark them. Pay attention to the time as you answer the rest of the questions on the exam, and try to finish with 10 or 15 minutes remaining so that you can go back over the questions you left blank. Even if you don't know the answer the second time you read the questions, see if you can narrow down the possible answers and then guess.
2. **Keep track of the time.** Keep an eye on the timer, and be aware of how much time you have left to complete your exam. You will probably have plenty of time to answer all of the questions, but if you find yourself becoming stuck on one question, you might decide to move on and return to that question later.
3. **Read all of the possible answers before selecting one.** Then, reread the question to be sure the answer you have selected really answers the question. Remember, a question that contains a phrase such as "Which of the following does NOT ..." is asking for the one answer that is NOT a correct statement or conclusion.

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4. **Check your answers.** If you have extra time left over at the end of the exam, look over each question and make sure that you have answered it as you intended. Many test takers make careless mistakes that they could have corrected if they had checked their answers.
 5. **Don't worry about your score when you are taking the exam.** No one is expected to answer all of the questions correctly. Your score on this exam is not analogous to your score on other similar-looking (but in fact very different!) exams. It doesn't matter on the exams whether you score very high or barely pass. If you meet the minimum passing scores along with any other requirements for obtaining teaching certification, you will receive a license. In other words, what matters is meeting the minimum passing score.
 6. **Use your energy to take the exam, not to get angry at it.** Getting angry at the exam only increases stress and decreases the likelihood that you will do your best. Highly qualified educators and exam development professionals, all with backgrounds in teaching and educational leadership, worked diligently to make the exam a fair and valid measure of your knowledge and skills. The best thing to do is concentrate on answering the questions.

Other Information

Do Your Best on Exam Day

You followed your study plan. You are ready for the exam. Now it's time to prepare for exam day.

Plan to end your review a day or two before the actual exam date so you avoid cramming. Take a dry run to the test center so you're sure of the route, traffic conditions, and parking. Most of all, you want to eliminate any unexpected factors that could distract you from your ultimate goal — passing the exam!

On the day of the exam, you should:

- Be well-rested.
- Bring two pieces of original (no photocopies or digital ID) and valid (unexpired) identification, printed in English in the name in which you registered. Your identification must contain your name, a recent recognizable photograph, and your signature. For more information, refer to the "ID Policy" page on the Texas Educator Certification Examination Program website.
- Arrive at least 30 minutes before the scheduled reporting time.
- Eat before you take the exam to keep your energy level up.
- Wear comfortable clothes and dress in layers.

You cannot 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. You can think of preparing for this exam as training for an athletic event. Once you have trained, prepared, and rested, give it your best effort...and good luck!

Are You Ready?

Review this list to determine if you're ready to take your exam.

- Do you know the Texas testing requirements for your teaching field?
- Have you followed all of the exam registration procedures?
- Do you know the topics that will be covered in each exam 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 exam 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 that you may encounter during your exam?
- Are you familiar with the recommended test-taking strategies?
- Have you practiced by working through the practice questions in the preparation manual?
- If constructed-response questions are part of your exam, do you understand the scoring criteria for these items?
- If you are repeating an exam, have you analyzed your previous score report to determine areas where additional study and exam preparation could be useful?

If you answered "yes" to the questions above, your preparation has paid off. Now take the exam, do your best, pass it — and begin your teaching career!

