

New York State Department of Civil Service Publication Civil Service Examinations

How To Take A Written Test

This booklet is for candidates who are applying for entry level jobs with New York State and with local governments in the state.

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Why A Test?

The New York State Constitution states that public employees must be hired for jobs on the basis of merit and fitness. The constitution also says that examinations have to be used to measure merit and fitness for most jobs.

In practical terms, merit and fitness means finding people who are best suited for a particular job. The idea is to hire people who will be able to do the job well. In fact, the State of New York and local governments are no different from private companies. Every employer wants workers who can do a good job.

There are several ways to find good workers. When private companies hire, they ask people what kind of work they have done in the past and how they would perform the relevant job duties. They also look at resumes and school records. Sometimes they give tests.

Through civil service examinations, New York State and local governments do many of the same things that private companies do when they hire.

All civil service examinations include one or more tests which are designed to determine how people would be able to perform on the job. Written and oral tests present candidates with questions and problems that cover critical competencies needed in the job. Training and Experience evaluations consist of a detailed look at the education, training and experience of job candidates. Performance tests are tasks that measure certain skills, like typing or entering computer data.

All examinations are based on the kind of job to be filled. The major difference between examinations and other ways of hiring is that examinations use some kind of formal rating scale or system that is as fair and objective as possible. Each candidate answers the same questions or does the same task. In any test, all candidates receive a score (rating) based on the same factors. This ensures that everyone has a fair chance to get a job, and it helps New York State and local governments find the people best suited for the available jobs. This is the why behind examinations.

How To Find Out About Jobs

Announcements are published for all New York State and local civil service examinations. You can find out what state examinations are coming up by checking with the New York State Department of Civil Service. Information about examinations and applications for positions in local government may be obtained from the municipal civil service agency that administers civil service in that area. Announcements may also be available at local libraries, New York State Department of Labor Community Service Centers or placement offices. State job announcements and applications are also available on the New York State Department of Civil Service web site at <http://www.cs.state.ny.us>.

What An Exam Announcement Tells You

When you pick up an announcement, you should read it carefully. A job announcement will tell you:

- the job title
- the job duties
- the salary
- where the job is located
- what education and/or experience is required (minimum qualifications)
- residence requirements (if any)
- the date tests will be held
- what tests (written, oral, performance, etc.) will be included
- how and where to get exam applications and exam announcements
- the processing or application fee (if any) and how the fee may be paid
- when the application is due and how the application may be filed

Here is an example from an announcement for Compensation Claims Clerk showing some of the information:
The Position: This position exists in the New York State Department of Labor, State Insurance Fund in Albany, Buffalo, Hempstead, New York City, Rochester and Syracuse. Most positions and vacancies are in New York City.

As a Compensation Claims Clerk, you would perform responsible clerical work in the development and processing of workers' compensation and disability benefits claims cases. Under supervision, you would organize and determine priority of claims bills; pay certain bills; review claim files; consult appropriate manuals, guidelines and schedules to determine if treatment is reasonable; verify ratings and compute allowable fees; complete vouchers; and respond to inquiries by doctors, billing offices and claimants concerning the status of bills. You would also recommend arbitration of disputed fees when appropriate. The description of the job duties helps people decide if they want to be a Compensation Claims Clerk. Such a clerk should like to:

- work with numbers (pay bills, complete vouchers)
- compare facts and figures (review claim files, consult appropriate manuals, guidelines and schedules to determine if treatment is reasonable)
- keep records and make routine decisions (organize and determine the priority of claims bills, recommend arbitration of disputed fees)
- write to members of the public or talk to them by phone (respond to doctors, billing offices and claimants concerning the status of bills)

Think about what you would like to do. If a job on an announcement looks interesting to you, read further.

Find out which jobs are open to you.

There are minimum qualifications for most jobs. These tell you the kind of background you must have before you can take the examination. Because each job has specific minimum qualifications, it is extremely important to read the examination announcement to be sure you qualify.

For example, here are minimum qualifications for Compensation Claims Clerk: Minimum Qualifications: On or before the date of the written test, candidates must meet the following requirements:

Either I

high school diploma or possession of high school equivalency diploma issued by an appropriate educational authority; or

II

four years of office, business, industrial or other work experience which involved public contact; or military experience. Each completed year of high school study (grades 9-12) may be substituted for one year of work experience. For many examinations, there is more than one way to meet the minimum qualifications. A candidate for Compensation Claims Clerk needs either a high school diploma or four years of work experience, but not both. A person who has two years of high school study and two years of work experience also qualifies.

Educational requirements differ, based on the needs of the job. Some jobs do not require any specific education, while others may require advanced degrees.

Examinations for some positions may have residence requirements to take the test or be appointed.

Be sure you meet the minimum qualifications before you decide to apply for an examination. Many examinations require a processing or application fee that is non-refundable.

Find out what the examination will be like.

There will be a part of the announcement marked Subject of Examination. It will tell you whether to expect a written test, an oral test, an evaluation of training and experience, a performance test, or a combination of tests.

This is the Subject of Examination part of the Compensation Claims Clerk announcement:

Subject of Examination: There will be a written test that candidates must pass in order to be considered for appointment. The written test will be designed to test for knowledge, skills and/or abilities in such areas as:

•Arithmetic computation •Arithmetic reasoning •Understanding and interpreting written material

What does this announcement tell you?

First, the examination will have a written test only. Most written exams consist of multiple-choice questions. There will be no oral test, no performance test and no rating of training and experience.

Second, the test will cover a limited number of areas.

People hired to be Compensation Claims Clerks must have enough knowledge and skill in these areas to do the job. In other words, these are critical areas. They may not be the only critical areas, but they are the only ones covered by this test.

If you are interested in the job, meet the minimum qualifications and wish to take the examination, be sure to send in an exam application.

How To Fill Out The Application

The examination announcement will tell you the type of application form required, where to get it and with whom to file it. Once you have the correct form, fill it out carefully, honestly, completely and neatly. Read all parts and fill out all of those that apply to you.

The information you provide must show how you meet any minimum job qualifications in order for you to be eligible to take the test. Therefore, it is important that you answer all questions and provide clear and complete information about your relevant education and experience.

Special reasonable accommodations can be made for people with disabilities to take a test. If you need special accommodations, there is a place on the application where this can be indicated. You must also directly contact the civil service agency that announced the examination to describe the accommodations you need. Special arrangements are also available for Sabbath observers, persons on active military duty, and persons taking examinations for more than one civil service jurisdiction on the same date.

War Time Disabled Veterans, War Time Veterans, and persons on full-time active duty (other than for training) are eligible for extra credits added to their exam score, if they pass. In most instances, these extra credits can be used only once for any permanent government appointment in New York State. If you want to have the extra credits added to your exam score, you must answer the appropriate questions on the application form. You can waive the extra credits later if you wish. You will be required to produce documentation, such as discharge papers, to prove that you are eligible for the extra credits.

On the application form, there is a place to sign a statement that all the information you have given is accurate. This is your legal affirmation that the statements on your application are true.

To apply for most examinations, you will be required to pay a fee. Information on the amount of the fee and how it can be paid will be found on the announcement. If some applicants are eligible to have the required fee waived, the announcement will explain the requirements for a waiver. Follow the instructions for submission of your application by the date shown on the announcement. It is advisable to keep a photocopy of your application along with the examination announcement for your records.

Mark the exam date on your calendar.

The following information applies specifically to written tests, although some of the information may be helpful in preparing for an oral test or a performance test.

Admission Notices

Approximately a week before the date of the test you will receive an admission notice telling you the date, time and place of the test, and a listing of the examination numbers of the tests you are scheduled to take. You are expected to present this notice at the test center, so be sure to save it. The admission notice tells you if you may or must bring anything with you to the test like a calculator or special equipment.

It also says to bring identification with you to the test center that shows your name, signature and photograph, such as a driver's license or a picture ID. If you have not received an admission notice by the Wednesday before the test or if you lose it, call the state or municipal civil service department that announced the examination to find out what to do.

Preparing The Day Before The Test

The day before the test get yourself ready just as you would for any other important appointment. Know where you are going and explore your options for getting there. Check bus or subway connections or get information on where to park ahead of time.

Plan what to take with you to the test. Review your announcement and your admission notice the night before the test to be sure you have everything that you need to bring. Since many tests last three or more hours, you may want to bring a quiet lunch with you. Having a snack or thermos of coffee with you may make you more comfortable during the test. The night before you should consult your admission notice to determine what you will need to take in the morning: Number 2 pencils, a quiet hand-held calculator without keyboard (if allowed), a driver's license or picture ID, your admission notice, watch (to time yourself if you cannot see a clock), and any other required materials.

Get to bed early the night before. Set your alarm clock and allow yourself time to relax. Being rested and having a clear head on the day of the test may help as much as any last minute review.

Also, you should be aware that smoking is NOT allowed at the test center or on the test center grounds.

What To Expect On Test Day

When you leave in the morning, allow extra time to find the room where you will be taking the test and to get yourself settled; however, you will not be allowed into the test centers until one-half hour before your reporting time.

The Test Monitor

There will be a test monitor in the room. The monitor will assure that the tests you are taking are administered fairly to all candidates. On the desk or table you will find the answer sheet you will use for the test, which has directions on how to complete it and a copy of the Candidate Directions. Take the time to familiarize yourself with them while you wait for other candidates to arrive.

The monitor will begin the testing process by giving you some general testing instructions. The monitor will verify your identification, and have you sign your admission notice. The monitor will distribute your test booklets when appropriate, and time your test, announcing and then recording the start time on the chalkboard. The monitor may also give you special oral instructions for your test.

Your monitor will help you if you have a problem. If something goes wrong, if there is a page missing or a misprint or if you have to leave the room, just raise your hand and the monitor will assist you. If someone else is distracting you, bring it to your monitor's attention. Do not look at the work of other people in the room or you may be disqualified.

When you leave, you must turn in all test materials, even any scrap paper that you may have had during the test. The monitor will collect all your materials before you leave.

The Candidate Directions

Be sure to read the Candidate Directions carefully. The Candidate Directions include information specific to your examination, including the time allowance for the test and if some questions are worth more than others. Unless you are told otherwise, all questions count the same.

There will be explicit directions on determining which questions you are to answer for some tests you do not have to answer every question in every test booklet. But you may have to answer some questions in several test booklets. It is important that you read this portion of the directions VERY carefully. You are responsible for determining which questions you are to answer. The monitor cannot give you specific advice about any test questions, or help you determine the questions you are to answer. That part is up to you.

How To Prepare For The Exam

In most cases you will have some time between when you apply for an examination and the date of the test. You can use this time to better prepare yourself for taking the test so that you can do your best on the test date. The following sections of this booklet will give you some general test taking and studying techniques that you should find helpful. Studying For A Written Test

Most New York Civil Service examinations include a written multiple-choice test. The examination announcement will always provide information on what the test will cover. You can use this information to better prepare yourself to take the test.

The announcement's Subject of Examination section will list the areas that the test will cover. As we saw earlier, for the Compensation Claims Clerk examination, the written test will cover three areas, 1) arithmetic computation, 2) arithmetic reasoning, and 3) understanding and interpreting written material.

Sometimes it is apparent by the name of the subject area on what you will be tested. "Arithmetic Computation", for example, would cover simple arithmetic operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Also, there could be some questions on percents and averages.

Usually, the announcement will contain (or indicate where you can get) an "expanded description" of what will be covered in an area. These paragraph-long descriptions provide additional information on what you will be tested. You should read these sections very carefully, because they provide the best information on what will be covered.

For example, the expanded description for "Arithmetic Reasoning" states: "These questions will test your ability to solve an arithmetic problem presented in sentence or short paragraph form. You must read the problem, understand the situation presented, decide what must be done to solve it, and apply the appropriate arithmetic operation(s) in the appropriate order, in order to determine the correct answer. Knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division will be necessary. Questions may also involve the use of percents, decimals, and fractions."

This information provides a clearer picture of the type of mathematical questions that you will see on the test.

There are certain words that appear often in the names and descriptions of the areas that will be covered by the examination:

•principles, practices, procedures, methods, techniques •understanding, interpreting, applying, reasoning, solving

The first set of words is usually a sign that you will be asked about your knowledge of a given subject. The second set of words usually indicates that you will be tested for a skill or ability. You would prepare differently for a test of knowledge than for a test of a skill or ability.