

How To Take The Test

How To Take A Written Test

This pamphlet will introduce you to civil service examinations. You will get some advice on preparing for written tests. You will also see sample written test questions.

First, we would like to give you some background.

Why A Test?

The New York State Constitution says that public employees must be hired for jobs on the basis of their 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 to a particular job. The idea is to hire people who will be able to do that job well. In fact, the State of New York is no different from private companies. Any employer wants workers who can do a good job.

There are several ways to find a good worker. When private companies hire, they ask people what kind of work they have done in the past and how they would do the company’s job. They also look at resumes and school records. Sometimes they give tests.

Through civil services examinations, New York State does many of the same things in a structured way that private companies do when they hire.

Written and oral tests are designed to find out how people would do the state’s job.

Evaluation of training and experience is a detailed look at applications and resumes.

Performance tests are tasks that measure certain skills, like typing or entering data at computer terminals.

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 all use some kind of formal rating scale or system that is as fair and objective as possible. Each candidate for an examination answers the same questions or does the same task. In any test, all candidates receive a score (rating) based on the same factors. This helps make sure that everyone has a fair and equal chance to get a job and it helps New York State find the people best suited to the available jobs. This is the “why” behind examinations.

How Examinations Are Developed

Before there is an examination for any job, the Department of Civil Service takes a good look at the job to find out what tasks and duties it involves. Civil Service staff may do any or all of these:

- ask employees and their supervisors to fill out questionnaires
- ask employees to make lists of the tasks they do during a day, week or month
- observe employees while they are working
- interview employees
- interview supervisors and program directors

After getting a clear picture of the job, Civil Service staff meet with agency staff where the job exists. They decide what type of examination would measure how well candidates are suited to the job. An examination may have more than one part. For example, there may be a written part to cover some aspects of the job and an oral part to cover others. Each part of an examination is called a test.

Once the examination is planned, experts in the job field help develop test questions and rating scales.

What Examination Announcements Tell You

Announcements are published for all civil service examinations. You can find out what examinations are coming up by checking with the Department of Civil Services, the New York State Labor Department, local libraries or placement offices.

When you pick up an announcement, you should read it carefully.

Find out what jobs are available.

The announcement will tell you the job title, typical job duties and where the jobs are. Here is an example from an announcement for Compensation Claims Clerk:

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 with the State Insurance Fund. 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. Here are the minimum qualifications for Compensation Claims Clerks:

Minimum Qualifications: *On or before the date of the written test, candidates must meet the following requirements:*