Preparing for a Written Exam

Santa Clara County

Human Resources

Preparing for a Written Exam
Tips for Candidates

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Introduction

Congratulations on your invitation to the written exam with Santa Clara County!

This tip sheet will help you:
- understand the purpose of written exams
- learn how to prepare for written exams
- become familiar with the written exam administration procedure
- provide some resources you may use to prepare

Who Should Use This Guide?

This tip sheet is for anyone that will take a County of Santa Clara written exam for employment. It may be especially useful for people who have never taken a written exam or for candidates who have not taken a written exam recently.

Disclaimer

This guide provides general information about the County of Santa Clara's written exams. Reading the tips and the following guidelines will not guarantee that you will perform well on your written exam. You may need to prepare in a different way than the way we describe in this guide. By using this guide, you acknowledge that you understand and agree with this disclaimer.

Pursuant to the Americans with Disability Act of 1991, candidates with disabilities who believe they need reasonable accommodation should follow the directions on the written exam notice.

General Information about Written Exams

Why do we conduct written exams?

A written exam is an effective way to objectively test a large number of candidates.

How is the exam created?

The written exam is created in conjunction with the job expert(s). The exam is based on the knowledge, skills and abilities listed on the job specification that are most important for successful performance on the job.

To find the job specifications visit our website: www.sccjobs.org. Click on the Classification & Compensation tab, and then select Job Specifications. You will see a search page where you can enter the job title to view the job specification.

The County does not provide study guides for most exams. However, there are numerous resources available, (many that are free) to assist with your career development needs. This tip sheet provides a handful of strategies and websites to guide you as you: take a multiple choice test, brush up on key skills such as math, reading or writing, ace interview questions and more.

How is the written exam administered?

Most written exams are in a group setting. This means there will probably be other test takers in the exam room with you. We will time the exam. All test takers will receive the same amount of time to take the exam.

The exam room is usually set up like a classroom with space between each candidate. Before you enter the exam room, please turn off any cell phones. Place any personal items under your seat.

An exam proctor will be in the exam room to check you in, to provide instructions for filling out the exam forms, to provide general instructions, tell you the time limit and to answer questions about the exam process.

The exam proctor will also oversee the room to help keep the distractions like noise to a minimum.

Exam Materials

Typically the written exam is a multiple choice exam. This means that you will have a set of possible answer choices for each question and you will have to select the ONE that you decide is the best response to the question.

You will record your answer on the scantron answer sheet where you fill in the bubble for your corresponding answer. You will be provided with scratch paper so you can work out problems. The proctor will collect all the test materials at the end of the exam. Please do not write in the exam booklets. You CANNOT make any notes on the exam questions or problems.

Exam Confidentiality

Many of the questions on the written exam are from an outside contract and the contract requires that all exam content must remain confidential. Please DO NOT

discuss the exam content with anyone except an approved representative in Human Resources.

Written Examination Preparation

Well before the Exam Day

You should begin to prepare for the written exam as soon as possible. Studying and making plans for the exam day should take place over a significant period of time (for example, a few weeks) rather than all at once on the night before the exam.

Written Exam Notice

Approximately ten days before the written exam date you receive a self-scheduling email notice. This notice provides instructions on how to schedule for the exam. Approximately two days prior to the exam we send a confirmation email notice which confirms the date, time, and location of your written test. Make sure to make plans for transportation and allow adequate time for the exam.

- Transportation – If you will be driving, a test drive to the facility before your actual exam day can help you discover the best route and parking locations and costs, if necessary. If you will be taking public transportation, visit the Valley Transportation Authority website (www.vta.org) to help plan your trip.

- Schedule – Most exams last about two hours with added time (for example, one hour) for checking-in and providing instructions. You should plan your other activities for the exam day accordingly.

The exam confirmation letter will also describe any items (for example, calculators or acceptable forms of photo identification) that you must bring with you to the exam.

The Night before the Exam Day

- Allow for enough sleep the night before the test date. Proper rest will help you maintain your focus while taking the test.

- Plan what you will wear to the test. Choose comfortable, layered clothing so you will be prepared for any room temperature. If your written test notice

indicated the *possibility* of interviews after the test, you should dress accordingly.

- Ensure that you have your transportation plan and written exam confirmation notice – with the materials it says to bring – ready for the next day.

On the Exam Day

- Eat a light meal before the exam. The written exam administration will usually last for several hours, and hunger can be a distraction.

- Bring the required materials that you gathered the night before to the exam facility.

- Leave at a time to arrive 15 minutes early that will allow you to walk from the parking location/public transportation stop, use the rest room, and get a drink of water **before** your scheduled exam time.

During the Exam

Some mistakes are caused by nervousness rather than lack of preparation. The following suggestions may help you reduce the effect of nervousness on your test performance.

- Before you begin, look over the test and decide how you will approach it. Unless otherwise instructed, you can answer questions in whatever order you prefer (for example, you could start with the questions in the last section instead of the questions in the first section).

- Be sure to enter all of the required information about yourself before starting the test.

- Manage your time. Have a general idea of how much time you need to answer each question. If you find that you are spending too much time on a question, move on to the next question and return to it after you have completed the rest of the test.

- Read the directions carefully so you know how to answer the questions. There may be different directions for different sections of the test.

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- Read each question slowly and carefully. Reading too fast may cause you to miss or add words that lead you to choose an incorrect answer.

- Read each question completely. Do not assume that you know what a question is asking after reading the first few words.

- As you read each question, think about the correct answer before looking at the choices. However, make sure to read *all* the answer choices before marking your answer on the answer sheet.

- Eliminate answers you know are incorrect.

- If you cannot answer a question within a minute or so, come back to it later.

- Mark your answers on your answer sheet as you take the test. Your score will *only* be based on what you mark on your answer sheet. Given the time constraints, you should avoid waiting until the last few minutes to transfer answers marked on the test booklet or scratch paper to your answer sheet.

- Periodically check to make sure that your answer sheet responses match to the question you are answering on the test. For example, if you are answering question 15 on the test, make sure that you are marking the space for number 15 on the answer sheet. This is especially important if you skip any questions to come back to later.

- Your first response is usually correct, try to avoid changing your answers. If you change your answer to any question, be sure to erase it *completely* from your answer sheet.

- Do not let early finishers distract you. Everyone has a different test-taking pace and we do not award special points for completing the test first.

- Review your answers after you have completed the test, if time allows. Make sure that you have answered all the questions.

- Responses that use words, such as "always" or "never" are less likely to be correct than ones that use words like "usually" or "probably."

- For "All of the above" and "None of the above" choices, if you are certain one of the statements is true, choose "All of the above" or if one of the statements is false, choose "None of the above".

- For an answer with "All of the above", if you see two correct statements, this may be the answer.

- The longest response is usually the correct answer; it tends have the most information.

None of these tips are foolproof, but they can be helpful if you're stuck.

Retrieved from: http://www.uwec.edu/Geography/Ivogeler/multiple.htm , http://www.testtakingtips.com/test/multiple.htm and http://dhrdcap.co.la.ca.us/olt/support_info/docs/WrittenTestPrepGuide20091021.pdf

Resources

The following are resources that may be helpful in your exam preparation. The County does not endorse any of these outside entities.

Khan Academy

http://www.khanacademy.org/

Khan Academy is a great website where you can learn just about anything for free. For example, want to brush up on your math skills. Just type "Basic Arithmetic" in the search field.

The site offers a variety of ways to learn which include video demonstrations to online tests.

Good Prospect

http://goodprospects.goodwill.org/

Good Prospects website provides career advice, online mentors and a place where you can "join" conversations from different careers paths such as: Health Care, Office & Clerical, Green Jobs, Education & Social Services, and Information Technology to name a few. You'll also find videos on topics like "Resume Writing & Interview Skills" and "Seven Habits for Job Search Success". Create an online profile to benefit from all the services on this site.

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STAR Interviewing Technique

STAR is a powerful technique to use during an oral exam or hiring interview to keep your responses focused and to the point. The STAR approach guides you to frame your answers in a story format. A good rule of thumb is to keep your response shorts, generally between 2-3 minutes for each answer.

S –Situation – briefly set the scene by describing your example, (who, what, where)
T –Task – explain the task or the problem you had to complete
A – Action – describe what you did and the skills used to solve the task
R – Result – close by explaining the positive results that happened

As you prepare for your next interview, think about what questions you may be asked and then practice by creating a STAR response for each question.

Metropolitan Adult Education Program (MAEP)

http://maep.metroed.net/index.html

What is MAEP?
The Metropolitan Adult Education Program (MAEP) provides adult education classes for free or at a very low-cost. Courses range from basic skills in math, reading, writing, ESL Citizenship to Career Technical (Vocational) certificate programs. Check out the website to learn more.

County of Santa Clara – Jobs

www.sccjobs.org or www.sccgov.org/sites/esa/employment
Interested in being notified when a particular job with the County of Santa Clara becomes available? Then login to the website listed above and from the Quick Links on the right side of the page select "Job Interest Notification". Simply select the job categories that interest you to receive email notifications each time a recruitment opens.

After the Exam

What happens once you have taken the exam?

Depending on the number of candidates and the number of exam dates you will receive an email with your score on the exam in about two weeks from your exam date.

If the written exam is the only exam process for the recruitment, if you pass the exam you will be placed on the eligible list in order of your score. Your notice will include your rank on the list. The County of Santa Clara follows the "rule of seven" meaning the top seven scoring candidates are referred to the department for a hiring interview for one vacancy. One additional name is referred for each additional vacancy. If your name is referred to the department for a hiring interview you will receive a separate email notification with instructions on contacting the department.   The eligible list established can be used the fill temporary assignments as well.

Contact Us

If you have questions about the email notice, you can contact Recruitment Support at (408) 299-6816.

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