



# Preparing for a Written Exam



Preparing for a Written Exam  
Tips for Candidates

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# Preparing for a Written Exam Tips for Candidates

## Introduction

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

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; and
- 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. This guide does not guarantee that you will perform well on your written exam, and 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?

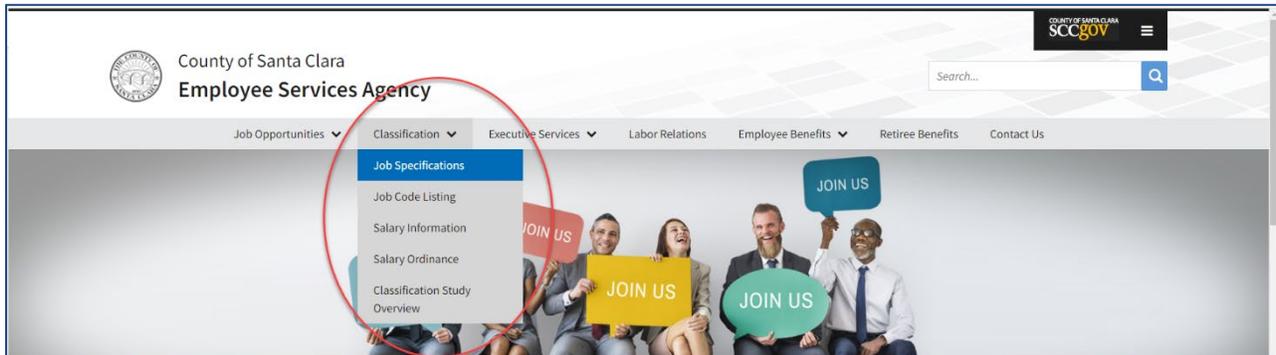
A written exam is administered when it is determined to be the best method to accurately assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the candidate pool for the recruitment being conducted. A written exam is an effective way to objectively test a large pool of qualified candidates.

### How is the exam created?

Written exams are created through a collaborative effort between Human Resources and subject matter experts. The exam is based on the knowledge and abilities listed on the job specification (i.e., job description) that are most important for successful performance on the job.

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To access the job specifications, visit our website at [www.sccjobs.org](http://www.sccjobs.org). Click on the Classification tab, then select Job Specifications.



The County does not provide study guides for exams. However, below is a list of resources that you may use to support your exam preparation.

### How is a written exam administered?

Written exams are administered online or in-person.

#### Online Exams

- Exams that are administered online should be taken in any private location with internet access on your personal computer so long as your computer meets all system requirements for the test. The exam is timed, and all test takers have the same amount of time to take the exam.
- Prior to taking the exam, you will be notified via email to complete a systems check to ensure that your computer meets the requirements for the testing software. If you do not have access to a computer with the required browser and webcam, you may contact the Recruitment Unit at (408) 299-6816.
- Exams that are administered online are recorded and monitored for proctoring purposes. The examination must be taken without interruption. Do not leave the computer while taking the online exam.
- The examination is divided into test sections. Once you move on to the next question, you will not be able to go back to the previous question.

#### In-Person Exams

- Exams that are administered in-person are administered in a group setting. This means that there could be other test takers in the exam room with you. The exam is timed, and all test takers receive the same amount of time to take the exam.

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- The exam room is usually set up like a classroom, with space between each candidate. Before you begin the exam, you must turn off any cell phones and place all personal items under your seat.
- An exam proctor will be in the exam room to check you in, provide instructions, provide you with the time limit, and answer questions about the exam process.

### Exam Materials

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

### Online Exam Materials

You will select each answer by clicking the radio button next to the corresponding answer. You are not provided any test materials but may use a calculator (handheld or computer calculator) and scratch paper, as needed. Please shred and/or appropriately discard of any scratch paper after the online exam.

### In-Person Exam Materials

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

### Exam Confidentiality

Written 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

Tentative test dates for all written exams are posted on the advertised job bulletin.

Approximately two days prior to the exam, you will receive a confirmation email notice, which confirms the date, time, how the exam will be administered, and the location of the exam. If travelling to a testing site, make sure to plan ahead for

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transportation and allow adequate time to arrive prior to the start of 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](http://www.vta.org)) to help plan your trip.
- Schedule – Most exams do not exceed two hours; however, this time may vary depending on the exam. You should plan your exam day accordingly.

The exam confirmation email will also describe any items you must bring with you to the in-person 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 indicates 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 exam day.

### On the Exam Day

- Eat a light meal before the exam. The written exam administration may last for several hours, and hunger can be a distraction.
- Bring the required materials that you gathered the night before to the exam.
- Arrive 15 minutes early, which will allow you to walk from the parking location or public transportation stop, use the restroom, and/or get a drink of water **before** your scheduled in-person 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.

## Preparing for a Written Exam Tips for Candidates

### General Tips

- Read the directions carefully so you know how to answer the questions. There may be different directions for different sections of the test.
- 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 the 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.
- Your first response is usually correct, but if you change your answer to any question, be sure to erase it *completely* from your answer sheet.
- 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 that all of the statements are true, choose "All of the above," or if all of the statements are false, choose "None of the above."
- Read all the instructions prior to starting the exam.
- Review your answer choices before starting the next section. You will not be able to go back once you submit a section.

### Online Tips

- Read all the instructions before opening your test exam browser.
- Review your answer choices before moving on to the next section. You will NOT be able to go back to previous sections.
- You may use calculators (handheld or computer application) for math sections.

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### **In-Person Tips**

- 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 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 the other question after you have completed the rest of the test.
- 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 minute to transfer answers marked on the scratch paper to your answer sheet.
- Periodically check to make sure that your answer sheet responses match 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 answer for number 15 on the answer sheet. This is especially important if you skip any questions to come back to later.
- If you cannot answer a question within a minute or so, come back to it later.
- Review your answers after you have completed the test if time allows. Make sure that you have answered all the questions.
- 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.

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

### **Exam Resources**

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

## Preparing for a Written Exam Tips for Candidates

### **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, from video demonstrations to online tests.

### **Good Prospects**

<http://goodprospects.goodwill.org/>

Good Prospects provides career advice, online mentors, and a place where you can “join” conversations from different career paths, such as Health Care, Office & Clerical, Green Jobs, Education & Social Services, and Information Technology, to name just 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.

### **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 responses short, 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.

### **Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE)**

<https://www.metroed.net/domain/61>

Silicon Valley Adult Education (SVAE) provides adult education classes for free or at a very low-cost. Courses range from basic skills in math, reading, writing, ESL, and Citizenship, to Career Technical (Vocational) certificate programs. Check out the website to learn more.

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### **Other Resources**

#### **Jobs**

[www.sccjobs.org](http://www.sccjobs.org) or [www.governmentjobs.com/careers/santaclara](http://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/santaclara)

Interested in being notified when a particular job with the County of Santa Clara becomes available? Then click [here](#), or from the main website listed above, hover over the “Job Opportunities” tab and click “Job Interest Notification.” Simply select the job categories that interest you to receive email notifications each time a recruitment opens.

#### **Job Application Tips**

[Job Application Tips](#) - general job application tips posted on LinkedIn.

#### **Job Specifications**

[Job Specifications](#) - list of the County’s job specifications.

#### **Job Search Tool Kit**

[Job Search Tool Kit](#) - job search resources, including a list of frequently asked questions.

### **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 exam score about two weeks following your exam date.

If the written exam is the only exam process for the recruitment, and if you pass the exam, you will be placed on the eligible list in rank order of your score. Your notice will include your rank on the list. Per Merit System Rule A25-184, the County of Santa Clara follows the “rule of ten,” meaning the top ten scoring candidates are referred to the department for a hiring interview for one vacancy. Four additional names are referred for each additional vacancy in an open-competitive (i.e., open to everyone) recruitment, and one additional name is referred for each additional vacancy in a promotional (i.e., open only to current County employees) recruitment. 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 to fill temporary assignments as well.

### **Contact Us**

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