Study Guide for the Special Education: Core Knowledge Tests

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Study Guide for the Praxis Special Education: Core Knowledge Tests
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Chapter 1
Introduction to the Special Education: Core Knowledge Tests and Suggestions for Using this Study Guide
Special Education 0352, 0351, 0353

Introduction to the Special Education: Core Knowledge Tests

The Special Education: Core Knowledge tests are designed for prospective K–12 special education teachers. The tests are designed to reflect current standards for knowledge, skills, and abilities in special education. Educational Testing Service (ETS) works in collaboration with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), along with teacher educators, higher education content specialists, and accomplished practicing teachers in the field of special education to keep the tests updated and representative of current standards.

There are three different Special Education: Core Knowledge tests covered in this guide:

- Special Education: Application of Core Principles Across Categories of Disability (0352)
- Special Education: Knowledge-Based Core Principles (0351)
- Special Education Core Principles: Content Knowledge (0353)

The Special Education: Application of Core Principles Across Categories of Disability test (0352) consists of 50 multiple-choice questions and covers five major areas, in the following proportions:

- Curriculum (20%)
- Instruction (20%)
- Assessment (20%)
- Managing the Learning Environment (20%)
- Professional Roles/Issues/Literature (20%)

Test takers have one hour to complete the test.

The Special Education: Knowledge-Based Core Principles test (0351) consists of 60 multiple-choice questions and covers three major areas, in the following proportions:

- Understanding Exceptionalities (25%)
- Legal and Societal Issues (13%)
- Delivery of Services to Students with Disabilities (62%)

Test takers have one hour to complete the test.

The Special Education Core Principles: Content Knowledge test (0353) consists of 60 multiple-choice questions and covers three major areas, in the following proportions:

- Understanding Exceptionalities (25–30%)
- Legal and Societal Issues (15–20%)
- Delivery of Services to Students with Disabilities (50–60%)
Test takers have one hour to complete the test.

None of the tests are intended to assess teaching skills but rather to demonstrate the candidate’s fundamental knowledge in the major areas of special education.

**Suggestions for Using the “Study Topics” Chapter of this Study Guide**

The *Special Education: Core Knowledge* test you will take is different from a final exam or other tests you may have taken in that it is comprehensive—that is, it covers material you may have learned in several courses during more than one year. It requires you to synthesize information you have learned from many sources and to understand the subject as a whole.

This test is also very different from the SAT® or other assessments of your reading, writing, and mathematical skills. You may have heard it said that you can’t study for the SAT—that is, you should have learned these skills throughout your school years, and you can’t learn reading or reasoning skills shortly before you take the exam. You can *practice* taking the SAT and skills tests like it to become more adept at applying the skills to the particular format of the test. The *Special Education: Core Knowledge* tests, on the other hand, assess a domain you can review for and can prepare to be tested on. Therefore, you should review for and prepare for your test, not merely practice with the question formats. A thorough review of the material covered on the test will significantly increase your likelihood of success. Moreover, studying for your licensing exam is a great opportunity to reflect on your field and develop a deeper understanding of it before you begin to teach the subject matter to others. As you prepare to take the test, you may find it particularly helpful to think about how you would apply the study topics and sample exercises to your own experience that you obtained in schools during your teacher preparation program. Your student teaching experience will be especially relevant to your thinking about the materials in the study guide.

We recommend the following approach for using the “Study Topics” chapters to prepare for the test.

**Become familiar with the test content.** Learn what will be assessed in the test, covered in chapter 3.

**Assess how well you know the content in each subject area.** It is quite likely that you will need to study in most or all of the areas. After you learn what the test contains, you should assess your knowledge in each area. How well do you know the material? In which areas do you need to learn more before you take the test?
**CHAPTER 1**

**Develop a study plan.** Assess what you need to study and create a realistic plan for studying. You can develop your study plan in any way that works best for you. A “Study Plan” form is included in Appendix A at the end of the book as a possible way to structure your planning. Remember that this is a licensure test and covers a great deal of material. Plan to review carefully. You will need to allow time to find the books and other materials, time to read the material and take notes, and time to go over your notes.

**Identify study materials.** Most of the material covered by the test is contained in standard introductory textbooks. If you do not own introductory texts that cover all the areas, you may want to borrow one or more from friends or from a library. You may also want to obtain a copy of your state’s standards for special education. (One way to find these standards quickly is to go to the Web site for your state’s Department of Education.) The textbooks used in classrooms may also prove useful to you, since they also present the material you need to know. Use standard school and college introductory textbooks and other reliable, professionally prepared materials. Don’t rely heavily on information provided by friends or from searching the World Wide Web. Neither of these sources is as uniformly reliable as textbooks.

**Work through your study plan.** You may want to work alone, or you may find it more helpful to work with a group or with a mentor. Work through the topics and questions provided in chapter 3. Be able to define and discuss the topics in your own words rather than memorizing definitions from books. If you are working with a group or mentor, you can also try informal quizzes and questioning techniques.

**Proceed to the practice questions.** Once you have completed your review, you are ready to benefit from the “Practice Questions” portion of this guide.

**Suggestions for using the “Practice Questions” and “Right Answers and Explanations for the Practice Questions” Chapters**

**Read chapter 4 (“Don’t Be Defeated by Multiple-Choice Questions”).** This chapter will sharpen your skills in reading and answering questions. Succeeding on multiple-choice questions requires careful focus on the question, an eye for detail, and patient sifting of the answer choices.

**Answer the practice questions in chapter 5.** Make your own test-taking conditions as similar to actual testing conditions as you can. Work on the practice questions in a quiet place without distractions. Remember that the practice questions are only examples of the way the topics are covered in the test. The test you take will have different questions.

**Score the practice questions.** Go through the detailed answers in chapter 6 (“Right Answers and Explanations”) and mark the questions you answered correctly and the ones you missed. Look over the explanations of the questions you missed and see whether you understand them.
Decide whether you need more review. After you have looked at your results, decide whether you need to brush up on certain subject areas before taking the actual test. Go back to your textbooks and reference materials to see whether the topics are covered there. You might also want to go over your questions with a friend or teacher who is familiar with the subjects.

Assess your readiness. Do you feel confident about your level of understanding in each of the areas? If not, where do you need more work? If you feel ready, complete the checklist in chapter 7 (“Are You Ready?”) to double-check that you’ve thought through the details. If you need more information about registration or the testing situation itself, use the resources in Appendix B: “For More Information.”
Chapter 2
Background Information on The Praxis Series™ Assessments
What are The Praxis Series™ Subject Assessments?

The Praxis Series™ Subject Assessments are designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to assess your knowledge of the subject area you plan to teach, and they are a part of the licensing procedure in many states. This study guide covers an assessment that tests your knowledge of the actual content you hope to be licensed to teach. Your state has adopted The Praxis Series tests because it wants to be certain that you have achieved a specified level of mastery of your subject area before it grants you a license to teach in a classroom.

The Praxis Series tests are part of a national testing program, meaning that the test covered in this study guide is used in more than one state. The advantage of taking Praxis tests is that if you want to move to another state that uses The Praxis Series tests, you can transfer your scores to that state. Passing scores are set by states, however, so if you are planning to apply for licensure in another state, you may find that passing scores are different. You can find passing scores for all states that use The Praxis Series tests in the Understanding Your Praxis Scores pamphlet, available either in your college’s School of Education or by calling (609) 771-7395. This information is also available at www.ets.org/praxis.

What is licensure?

Licensure in any area—medicine, law, architecture, accounting, cosmetology—is an assurance to the public that the person holding the license has demonstrated a certain level of competence. The phrase used in licensure is that the person holding the license will do no harm. In the case of teacher licensing, a license tells the public that the person holding the license can be trusted to educate children competently and professionally.

Because a license makes such a serious claim about its holder, licensure tests are usually quite demanding. In some fields licensure tests have more than one part and last for more than one day. Candidates for licensure in all fields plan intensive study as part of their professional preparation: some join study groups, others study alone. But preparing to take a licensure test is, in all cases, a professional activity. Because it assesses your entire body of knowledge or skill for the field you want to enter, preparing for a licensure exam takes planning, discipline, and sustained effort. Studying thoroughly is highly recommended.

Why does my state require The Praxis Series Assessments?

Your state chose The Praxis Series Assessments because the tests assess the breadth and depth of content—called the “domain” of the test—that your state wants its teachers to possess before they begin to teach. The level of content knowledge, reflected in the passing score, is based on recommendations of panels of teachers and teacher educators in each subject area in each state. The state licensing agency and, in some states, the state legislature ratify the passing scores that have been recommended by panels of teachers.
You can find out the passing score required for The Praxis Series Assessments in your state by looking in the pamphlet *Understanding Your Praxis Scores*, which is free from ETS (see previous page). If you look through this pamphlet, you will see that not all states use the same test modules, and even when they do, the passing scores can differ from state to state.

**What kinds of tests are The Praxis Series Subject Assessments?**

Two kinds of tests comprise The Praxis Series Subject Assessments: multiple choice (for which you select your answer from a list of choices) and constructed response (for which you write a response of your own). Multiple-choice tests can survey a wider domain because they can ask more questions in a limited period of time. Constructed-response tests have far fewer questions, but the questions require you to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge in the area covered.

**What do the tests measure?**

The Praxis Series Subject Assessments are tests of content knowledge. They measure your understanding of the subject area you want to teach. The multiple-choice tests measure a broad range of knowledge across your content area. The constructed-response tests measure your ability to explain in depth a few essential topics in your subject area. The content-specific pedagogy tests, most of which are constructed-response, measure your understanding of how to teach certain fundamental concepts in your field. The tests do not measure your actual teaching ability, however. They measure your knowledge of your subject and of how to teach it. The teachers in your field who help us design and write these tests, and the states that require these tests, do so in the belief that knowledge of subject area is the first requirement for licensing. Your teaching ability is a skill that is measured in other ways: observation, videotaped teaching, or portfolios are typically used by states to measure teaching ability. Teaching combines many complex skills, only some of which can be measured by a single test. The Praxis Series Subject Assessments are designed to measure how thoroughly you understand the material in the subject areas in which you want to be licensed to teach.

**How were these tests developed?**

ETS began the development of The Praxis Series Subject Assessments with a survey. For each subject, teachers around the country in various teaching situations were asked to judge which knowledge and skills a beginning teacher in that subject needs to possess. Professors in schools of education who prepare teachers were asked the same questions. These responses were ranked in order of importance and sent out to hundreds of teachers for review. All of the responses to these surveys (called “job analysis surveys”) were analyzed to summarize the judgments of these professionals. From their consensus, we developed the specifications for the multiple-choice and constructed-response tests. Each subject area had a
committee of practicing teachers and teacher educators who wrote these specifications (guidelines). The
specifications were reviewed and eventually approved by teachers. From the test specifications, groups of
teachers and professional test developers created test questions.

When your state adopted The Praxis Series Subject Assessments, local panels of practicing teachers and
teacher educators in each subject area met to examine the tests question by question and evaluate each
question for its relevance to beginning teachers in your state. This is called a “validity study.” A test is
considered “valid” for a job if it measures what people must know and be able to do on that job. For the
test to be adopted in your state, teachers in your state must judge that it is valid.

These teachers and teacher educators also performed a “standard-setting study”; that is, they went
through the tests question by question and decided, through a rigorous process, how many questions a
beginning teacher would be able to answer correctly. From this study emerged a recommended passing
score. The final passing score was approved by your state’s licensing agency.

In other words, throughout the development process, practitioners in the teaching field — teachers
and teacher educators — have determined what the tests would contain. The practitioners in your state
determined which tests would be used for licensure in your subject area and helped decide what score
would be needed to achieve licensure. This is how professional licensure works in most fields: those who
are already licensed oversee the licensing of new practitioners. When you pass The Praxis Series Subject
Assessments, you and the practitioners in your state can be assured that you have the knowledge required
to begin practicing your profession.