



**New York State  
Department of Civil Service**

*Committed to Innovation, Quality and Excellence*

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*A Guide to the Written Test*

**for the**

**Senior Stenographer/Senior Typist Series**  
**(including equivalent Secretary Titles)**

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George E. Pataki  
*Governor*

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*Commissioner*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The New York State Department of Civil Service has developed this Guide to familiarize you with the Senior Stenographer/Senior Typist Series written test (including equivalent Secretary titles). It provides a general description of the subject areas to be tested and the different types of questions you will likely see on the test. The Examination Announcement will specify the exact subject areas to be included on the test you will be taking.

The Senior Stenographer/Senior Typist Series written test has an overall time allowance of 3 ½ hours. The test is divided into five separate subject areas and the questions evaluate the following abilities:

1. **SPELLING:** These questions test for the ability to spell words that are used in written business communications.
2. **GRAMMAR, USAGE, PUNCTUATION:** The grammar and usage questions test for the ability to apply the basic rules of grammar and usage. The punctuation questions test for a knowledge of the correct placement of punctuation marks in sentences.
3. **KEYBOARDING PRACTICES:** These questions test for a knowledge of preferred practices in such areas as letter format, capitalization, hyphenation, plurals, possessives, word division, word and figure style for numbers, and common proofreading marks. In addition, you will be given a passage to proofread and asked questions about how to correct the errors in the passage.
4. **OFFICE RECORD KEEPING:** These questions evaluate your ability to perform common office record keeping tasks. The test consists of two or more “sets” of questions, each set concerning a different problem. Typical record keeping problems might involve the organization or collation of data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completion of a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages and percents.
5. **OFFICE PRACTICES:** These questions test for a knowledge of generally agreed-upon practices governing the handling of situations which stenographers, typists, and secretaries encounter in their work, as well as a knowledge of efficient and effective methods used to accomplish office tasks. The questions will cover such topics as planning work flow; setting priorities; dealing effectively with staff, visitors, and callers; filing and retrieving information; safeguarding confidentiality; using office equipment; and making procedural decisions and recommendations which contribute to a well-managed office.

**The information concerning which of these subject areas will be included in the examination you will be taking will appear on the announcement for that examination. All examinations will include the first three subject areas. Some examinations may consist of only those three areas and others may include all five. Others may exclude either Office Record Keeping or Office Practices.**

Any secretarial manual or handbook should help you to prepare for the first three subject areas. There are rules in these areas which would be useful for you to review. There is nothing specific to study for Office Record Keeping. You need to be able to follow written directions and to know when to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. You will be allowed to use a calculator. The Office Practices questions can be answered on the basis of your relevant office work experience and/or education you must have to take an examination in this series.

The remainder of this guide explains how you are tested in each of these subject areas. A **TEST TASK** is provided for each subject. This is an explanation of how a question is presented and how to correctly answer it. Be sure to read each one carefully.

You will also be given at least one **SAMPLE QUESTION** for each subject area. It will be of the type that you will see on the actual test. The **SOLUTION** and correct answer are provided after each question. You should study the question and its solution until you understand how it works.

## **SUBJECT AREA 1**

**SPELLING:** These questions test for the ability to spell words that are used in written business communications.

**TEST TASK:** This test will consist of 15 questions. For each question you will be given three sentences marked A, B, and C, and a fourth choice – “None contains a misspelled word” – [marked D]. One of the three sentences may contain a misspelled word. The words to focus on are words that are commonly misspelled. All the focus words are words that can be found in business correspondence. You must determine whether any of the sentences contains a misspelled word. If none of the sentences contains a misspelled word, you must choose D as the answer.

**SAMPLE QUESTION:**

Which one, if any, of the following sentences contains a misspelled word?

- A. The discussion of budgetary issues took up most of the time.
- B. This is not a frequently occurring situation.
- C. They are unable to give us a definate answer.
- D. None contains a misspelled word.

*The answer is C.*

**SOLUTION:**

- (A) *“Budgetary” is sometimes misspelled as “budgetery” (this type of ending is sometimes “ary” and sometimes “ery”). Here it is spelled correctly. There is no misspelled word in this choice.*
- (B) *The final consonant in words such as “occur” must be doubled before “ing” and other suffixes are added. Not doubling the final consonant in such cases is a mistake. The final consonant is doubled in “occurring.” There is no misspelled word in this choice.*
- (C) *“Definate” is misspelled. The correct spelling is “definite.” This choice answers the question, “Which one of the following sentences contains a misspelled word?” correctly. This choice contains a misspelled word.*
- (D) *One of the three previous sentences contains a misspelled word (Choice C). Choice D is therefore not the answer.*

## **SUBJECT AREA 2**

**GRAMMAR, USAGE, PUNCTUATION:** The grammar and usage questions test for the ability to apply the basic rules of grammar and usage. The punctuation questions test for a knowledge of the correct placement of punctuation marks in sentences.

**TEST TASK:** This test will consist of 15 questions. For each question, you will be given four sentences, one of which will contain a grammar, usage, or punctuation error. You must determine which sentence contains the error.

Nine of the 15 questions will be grammar questions. Some of the kinds of grammar errors you will see in these questions are errors in the agreement of subject and verb and in the use of verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. Two of the 15 questions will be usage questions. One of the four sentences will contain an incorrectly used word. Some of the words that are used incorrectly are words that sound or look like another word, for example “incidence” (frequency) and “incidents” (occurrences) and words that are sometimes used as one and sometimes as two words, such as “anyway” and “any way.” There will be four punctuation questions. The kinds of errors you will see in these questions are errors in the use of commas, semicolons, colons, question marks, and quotation marks.

### **SAMPLE QUESTION:**

Which one of the following is grammatically INCORRECT?

- A. Only one of the software packages suits our needs.
- B. Are their information correct?
- C. The number of applications has increased this year.
- D. Enclosed are copies for every committee member.

*The answer is B.*

### **SOLUTION:**

- (A) *This sentence is grammatically CORRECT as presented. The subject of this sentence is "one" and the verb used is "suits." It is grammatically correct to say "Only one... suits our needs." (A common error is to think that "packages" is the subject of this sentence, so "suit" should be the verb.) Since choice A is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.*
- (B) *This sentence is grammatically INCORRECT as presented. The subject of this sentence is "information" and the verb used is "are." It is grammatically incorrect to say "information are." It is correct to say "information is." (A common error is to think that the use of "their" in this sentence means that "they" is the subject of this sentence, so "are" should be the verb.) Since choice B is grammatically INCORRECT as presented, it IS the answer to the sample question.*
- (C) *This sentence is grammatically CORRECT as presented. The subject of this sentence is "number" and the verb used is "has increased" It is grammatically correct to say "The number... has increased." (A common error is to think that "applications" is the subject of this sentence, so "have increased" should be the verb.) Since choice C is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.*
- (D) *This sentence is grammatically CORRECT as presented. The subject of the sentence is "copies" and the verb used is "are." It is grammatically correct to say "copies are." (A common error is to think that the verb should be "is" simply because "Enclosed is" is the more usual phrase since only one enclosure is the more usual circumstance.) Since choice D is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.*

## **SUBJECT AREA 3**

**KEYBOARDING PRACTICES:** These questions test for a knowledge of preferred practices in such areas as letter format, capitalization, hyphenation, plurals, possessives, word division, word and figure style for numbers, and common proofreading marks. In addition, you will be given a passage to proofread and asked questions about how to correct the errors in the passage.

**TEST TASK:** This test will consist of 15 questions. The format of these questions varies. For each of the first 10 questions, you will be given four sentences, or phrases, or words. For some of the questions, you must determine which one of the choices is CORRECT; for the others, which one is INCORRECT. For the last five questions, you will be asked to identify or asked how to correct errors in the proofreading passage provided. Each question will consist of four suggestions from which you must choose the best.

### **SAMPLE QUESTIONS:**

#### **Question 1**

In which one of the following sentences should the hyphen NOT be used?

- A. The results of the audit will be released in mid-July.
- B. We could not have produced the 200-page report with temporary help.
- C. They have been asked to provide self-addressed envelopes.
- D. From 1994-1996, the caseload increased 10 percent.

*The answer is D*

#### **SOLUTION:**

- (A) *When a prefix is added to a word that begins with a capital letter, a hyphen must be used. For this choice, the use of the hyphen is required.*
- (B) *In this choice, "200" and "page" together, as one thought, describe "report." Those two elements are kept together with the hyphen. In this choice, the use of the hyphen is required.*
- (C) *In this choice, "self" and "addressed" together, as one thought, describe "envelope." The hyphen is used to form the unit. In this choice, the use of the hyphen is required.*
- (D) *One of the rules of hyphenation (look these up in a secretarial reference manual or handbook) says that a hyphen should not be used between the numbers in number expressions which begin with "from." It should read: "From 1994 to 1996." The hyphen should NOT be used. This choice is the correct answer.*

#### **Question 2**

Below is a portion of a letter which you must proofread looking for typographical, spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Typographical errors can include omissions, repetitions, double strikes, or transpositions. The question that follows concerns the possible errors in the passage. [On the actual test, there will be five proofreading questions based on longer passages].

The Water Pollution Control Board, a newly created agency, is in need of business stationery. I am having difficulty choosing among the many varieties described in your brochure. It would be most helpful if a representative of your company could visit me to show me samples of your line. I am particularly interested in seeing samples of 16-, 20-, and 24-pound paper; various color of paper, envelopes, and ink; and letterhead styles.

What, if anything should be done to improve the passage?

- A. Make no changes.
- B. Delete the hyphens after "16" and "20."
- C. Add an "s" to "color."
- D. Change the semicolons to commas.

*The answer is C.*

#### **SOLUTION:**

- (A) *There is an error in this passage, so this is not the answer. For this choice to be correct there would have to be no error in the passage.*
- (B) *It would be incorrect to remove the hyphens after 16 and 20 because they are both linked to "pound," just as 24 is. It would be awkward to repeat "pound" three times, so the suspended hyphens connect 16 and 20 with the "pound" after 24.*
- (C) *This is the correct answer. "Various" indicates that there is more than one color.*
- (D) *It would not be correct to change the semicolons to commas because two of the phrases separated by the semicolons contain commas. The use of commas alone would be confusing.*

## SUBJECT AREA 4

**OFFICE RECORD KEEPING:** These questions evaluate your ability to perform common office record keeping tasks.

**TEST TASK:** You will be presented with two or more “sets” of questions, each set concerning a different problem. Typical record keeping problems might involve the organization or collation of data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completion of a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages, and percents.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

**DIRECTIONS:** Base your answers to the two sample questions on the table, “Summary Report of Office Expenses for 1998.” Complete as much of the report as you need to answer the questions by using information given in the summary report itself and in the “Report of Office Expenses – 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarters” shown below.

REPORT OF OFFICE EXPENSES 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> QUARTERS (26 weeks)				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter		4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter	
	1998	1999	1998	1999
Payroll Expenses	\$55,900	\$47,800	\$72,700	\$65,100
Rental Expenses	22,500	18,900	22,500	18,900
Maintenance Expenses				
Cleaning	2,700	2,800	2,900	3,000
Repairs	160	200	240	400
Equipment Expenses	705	375	25,575	675

EXPENSE ITEM	SUMMARY REPORT OF OFFICE EXPENSES FOR 1998						
	1 <sup>ST</sup> QUARTER	2 <sup>ND</sup> QUARTER	1 <sup>ST</sup> HALF	3 <sup>RD</sup> QUARTER	4 <sup>TH</sup> QUARTER	2 <sup>ND</sup> HALF	TOTAL FOR YEAR \$
Payroll Expenses	\$81,800	\$69,300	\$151,100			R	
Rental Expenses	22,500	22,500	45,000				
Utilities Expenses	6,675	5,125	11,800				
Maintenance Expenses	2,850	3,050	5,900				S
Equipment Expenses	2,385	495	2,880				

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What is the value of R?
  - A. \$112,900
  - B. \$128,600
  - C. \$137,800
  - D. none of the above

*The answer is B.*

**SOLUTION:** Payroll Expenses for the second half of 1998 are calculated by locating and adding the figure for 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Payroll Expenses for 1998 (\$55,900) to the figure for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Payroll Expenses for 1998 (\$72,700). These figures are found in the “REPORT OF OFFICE EXPENSES – 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> QUARTERS.” The result is \$128,600 (choice B).

2. What is the value of S?
  - A. \$11,500
  - B. \$11,700
  - C. \$11,900
  - D. \$12,300

*The answer is C.*

**SOLUTION:** Total Maintenance Expenses for the year 1998 are calculated by first calculating the Maintenance Expenses for the second half of 1998, similarly to what was done in sample question #1. In this case, however, you must first combine figures from the sub-categories of “Cleaning” and “Repairs” for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter of 1998 (\$2,700 + \$160) and add this total to the combination of “Cleaning” and “Repairs” for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 1998 (\$2,900 + \$240). This calculation (\$2,700 + \$160 + \$2,900 + \$240) results in total Maintenance Expenses of \$6,000 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> HALF of 1998. Finally, this 2<sup>nd</sup> HALF total (\$6,000) is added to Maintenance Expenses for the 1<sup>st</sup> HALF of 1998 (\$5,900) to get a total for the year of \$11,900 (choice C).

## **SUBJECT AREA 5**

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**OFFICE PRACTICES:** These questions test for a knowledge of generally agreed-upon practices governing the handling of situations which stenographers, typists, and secretaries encounter in their work, as well as a knowledge of efficient and effective methods used to accomplish office tasks. The questions will cover such topics as planning work flow; setting priorities; dealing effectively with staff, visitors, and callers; filing and retrieving information; safeguarding confidentiality; using office equipment; and making procedural decisions and recommendations which contribute to a well-managed office.

**TEST TASK:** There will be 10 questions in this test. For each question, you will be presented with a description of a situation and asked what the response should be. You will be given four suggestions, from which you must choose the best.

**SAMPLE QUESTION:**

As the most senior typist in your department, you have been asked to orient a new typist. Which one of the following should you do first?

- A. Give the newcomer some simple tasks to perform, to get him or her comfortable.
- B. Introduce the newcomer to the other staff in the office.
- C. Ask others if there are pointers they can give the newcomer.
- D. Inform the newcomer about any equipment that isn't working properly.

*The answer is B.*

**SOLUTION:** *You must first ask yourself what an orientation is. It is an overview of the job and a familiarization with the office for a new employee. It is also important to keep in mind that the question asks what you should do first.*

- (A) *Although this step will eventually be part of the orientation, it is not the first part. This choice is incorrect.*
- (B) *Introductions are the first thing that should be done for anyone new to a place. This choice is the correct answer.*
- (C) *A new employee needs to be given the overall view before being given "pointers." Being given advice by several people can be overwhelming at any time and much more so to someone in a new situation. This should not be the first thing a new employee is subjected to. This choice is incorrect.*
- (D) *This is not the first impression that should be given to a new employee. Would the employee need to use this "equipment" the first day on the job? Will the equipment not be fixed in a day or two? This is not the very first piece of information a new employee needs. This choice is incorrect.*

## **TEST SECURITY**

The test you will be taking is the property of the New York State Department of Civil Service. Candidates may not remove test material from the test site and may not reproduce, reconstruct, or discuss the test content with others. Unauthorized possession or disclosure of the test material is prohibited by law and punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine. Additionally, candidates may be disqualified from appointment to the positions for which the examination is being held and from being a candidate for any civil service examination for five years. After you take the test other individuals may want to talk with you about the test. You should not discuss the questions and answers, even in general terms. You need to be careful that you do not inadvertently violate test security and put yourself at risk.

## **CONCLUSION**

Your attitude and approach to the test will influence how well you perform. A positive attitude will help you do your best. There are also practical things you should do.

### **Before the test ...**

- Study and review this Guide to become familiar with the test contents.
- Study and review the subject areas that will be covered on the test.

### **On the day of the test ...**

- Arrive at the test site on time.
- Come to the test prepared; bring your admission notice, two No. 2 pencils, your photo ID containing your signature, a quiet lunch or snack and any other necessary materials. Do **NOT** bring this test guide to the test site.

### **During the test ...**

- Read and follow all directions on your admission notice, test booklets, answer sheets, and Candidate Directions.
- Follow the Monitor's instructions.
- Keep track of the time.

### **After the test ...**

- Do **NOT** remove any test materials from the test room and do **NOT** paraphrase, reconstruct or reproduce the test material in any way.
- Do **NOT** discuss the test material with others.

It is the policy of the New York State Department of Civil Service to provide reasonable accommodation to ensure effective communication of information to individuals with disabilities. If you need an auxiliary aid or service to make this information available to you, please contact the New York State Department of Civil Service Public Information Office at (518) 457-9375.

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