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Chapter 1

Previewing the Praxis

For decades, teacher candidates have been taking assessments to meet certification requirements. Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators is the latest version of these tests that measures core skills in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics for potential teacher candidates. This chapter gives you an overview of what you need to know about the exam.

Why Take the Praxis?

If you want to become a teacher, you may face the Praxis at some point on the road to certification. You may need to take it to get into a teaching program at college, or you may take it to get your teaching license before starting a second career. If you're lucky, you may take it only once, but you might need to take it two or more times before you're fully qualified to work in a classroom.

Colleges and universities use the Praxis Core testing series to determine whether teaching program candidates meet the minimum requirements to enter into the field of teaching. Most colleges and universities won't allow admission into their teacher preparation programs until candidates complete this basic skills exam. Undergraduate students generally take the Praxis early in their college careers. Educational Testing Service (ETS), the company that creates and administers the Praxis tests, may allow some students to skip taking certain parts of the Praxis if they have high scores on college entrance exams, such as the ACT.

Most states also use the Praxis as a certification test to show that you've mastered the skills that you need to be a highly competent teacher. In many cases, teaching licenses are directly tied to this test. Age doesn't get you out of this standardized test.



TIP

Almost every state in the country uses some form of the Praxis. Contact your state department of education for specific licensure details.

Breaking Down the Praxis

The updated Praxis Core evaluates the core academic abilities of prospective educators in the areas of reading, writing, and math. Previously, this test was called the Praxis I Pre-Professional Skills Test, but ETS decided to make a change to reflect the requirement to get potential teachers up to the level needed to meet ever-changing standards, mainly because of the application of Common Core. ETS breaks down the exam into the following three parts:

- » **The reading test:** Poses multiple-choice questions based on reading passages and statements.
- » **The writing test:** Divided into two sections. The multiple-choice section tests grammar usage, sentence correction, revision in context, and research skills. The test also requires you to write two essays based on information presented; one is an argumentative essay, and the other is an explanation of a topic.
- » **The mathematics test:** Measures multiple mathematics topics up to the advanced high-school level. The format of the test has numeric entry questions and multiple-choice questions that may require you to select one or more choices. (You have access to an on-screen calculator, so you don't have to sweat the simple stuff.)

The following sections give you more details about the subtests and the question types so that you don't encounter any (or too many) surprises when you sit down to take the test.

Knowing what topics the Praxis covers

Just like most other standardized tests, the Praxis includes long reading passages, complicated math problems, and detailed essay topics. You get a set number of questions about certain topics to answer in a given amount of time. Check out Table 1-1 for the breakdown.

TABLE 1-1 Breakdown of the Praxis

Test Subject	Number of Questions	Time
Reading	56 questions	85 minutes
Writing	40 questions and 2 essays	100 minutes
Mathematics	56 questions	90 minutes

Each subject is broken down further into specific concepts.

The Reading test requires you to display proficiency in certain areas:

- » **Key ideas and details:** Closely read text, make logical inferences, connect specific details, address author differences, and determine uncertain matters. (Includes 17 to 22 questions.)
- » **Craft, structure, and language skills:** Interpret words and phrases, recognize the tone of word choices, analyze text structure, assess points of view, apply language knowledge to determine fact or opinion, determine word meanings, and understand a range of words and word nuances. (Includes 14 to 19 questions.)
- » **Integration of knowledge and ideas:** Analyze diverse media content, evaluate arguments in texts, and analyze how two or more texts address similar themes. (Includes 17 to 22 questions.)

The Writing test requires you to understand these concepts:

- » **Text types, purposes, and production:** Produce one argumentative and one informative/explanatory essay. This section also requires you to edit and revise text passages. (Includes 6 to 12 multiple-choice questions and two essays.)
- » **Language and research skills:** Demonstrate command of English grammar, usage, capitalization, and punctuation. This section also requires you to apply and recognize research skills. (Includes 28 to 34 multiple-choice questions.)

The Mathematics test evaluates your understanding and ability in a number of areas:

- » **Number and quantity:** Order among integers, representations of numbers in more than one way, place value, whole-number properties, equivalent computational procedures, ratios, proportions, and percentages. (Includes approximately 20 questions.)
- » **Algebra:** Handling equations and inequalities, recognizing various ways to solve a problem, determining the relationship between verbal and symbolic expressions, and interpreting graphs. (Includes about 11 questions.)
- » **Geometry:** The characteristics and properties of geometric shapes, the Pythagorean theorem, transformation, and use of symmetry to analyze mathematical situations. The test assumes that you have a knowledge of basic U.S. and metric systems of measurement. (Includes approximately 7 questions.)
- » **Data interpretation, statistics, and probability:** Read and interpret visual displays of quantitative information; understand the correspondence between data and graph; make inferences from a given data display; determine mean, median, and mode; and assign a probability to an outcome. (Includes around 18 questions.)

The good news about the math test is that you have access to an on-screen, four-function calculator, which reduces the chance that you'll select a wrong answer choice based on a simple arithmetic error.

Seeing what types of questions you can expect

The Praxis Core gives you multiple types of questions. Taking all of the practice tests offered in this book can give you a consistent idea of what you'll see on the actual test. Before you get to the practice tests, this section gives you a list of question types you'll encounter in the different subtests.

The reading test has four categories of text analysis:

- » **Reading Category 1:** Questions deal with paired passages of about 150 to 200 words combined with four to seven questions, such as "Unlike the author of Passage 2, the author of Passage 1 mentions . . ." or "Which of the following statements best describes the relationship between the two passages?"
- » **Reading Category 2:** Questions deal with lengthy paragraphs of about 175 to 200 words combined with four to seven questions that may ask, "Which of the following best describes the organization of the passage?" or "The author would be *most* likely to agree with which of the following statements?"
- » **Reading Category 3:** Questions deal with abbreviated passages of 75 to 100 words, asking two or three questions, such as "The passage is primarily concerned with . . ." or "Which of the following is an unstated assumption made by the author of the passage?"
- » **Reading Category 4:** Short statements followed by a single question.

The writing test has four categories of multiple-choice questions and two essays:

- » **Multiple-choice writing questions:** Straightforward questions covering sentence correction, revision in context, usage, and research skills.
- » **Essays:** The argumentative and informative/explanatory essay sections test your skills to write a detailed essay in a very short period of time. See Chapter 11 for more on the essay questions.

The mathematics test has several question categories:

- » **Numeric entry:** These types of questions require you to input an integer or decimal into a single box or a fraction into two separate boxes.
- » **Multiple-choice questions:** Each question has five possible answers, with one or more correct choices. Be aware that a test question may tell you to select all answer choices that apply without telling you how many of the choices are correct.

Understanding How the Test Is Scored

The Praxis Core exam is divided into three tests: reading, writing, and mathematics. Take careful note of the fact that the *exam* is made up of the three *tests*. Each test is scored separately, and most states that require passing scores for the exam require that the exam-takers pass each of the three tests that compose the exam. Some states consider an exam to have a passing score when the exam's composite (overall) score is high enough. Professional educators, who apply ETS standards, score a given test by taking the raw score and adjusting it to a scale that ranges from 100 to 200 points.

Your *raw score* is the number of questions you answer correctly. You don't lose any points for answering a question incorrectly. If you answer every single question incorrectly, you end up with a raw score of 0 (which translates to an adjusted score of 100), the exact same score you get if you don't answer any questions at all. So you have nothing to lose by guessing if you don't know the answer to a question.

Your score for each test involves taking your raw score and comparing it to the number of questions on the test. This comparison, along with the level of rigor involved in the particular test you take, determines your *final score*, the number that exists in the range from 100 to 200. Your final score determines whether you pass the test. **Note:** When you take the practice tests in the book or online, you can't convert your raw score to a final score. You pass the test in most states by answering at least 60 percent of the questions correctly, which gives you a benchmark to measure yourself against while you go through the practice tests.



TIP

If you fail the Praxis the first time you take it (or if you've already failed it), you can look at your scores for each content category to see where you did well and where you struggled. Use those scores to direct your studies in anticipation of taking the test again.

Each state that requires passing the exam has its own minimum scores for each of the tests that make up the exam, except for states in which a high enough composite score qualifies as passing. What constitutes a passing score in one state may not be a passing score in another state. Contact your state department of education for the actual cut scores.