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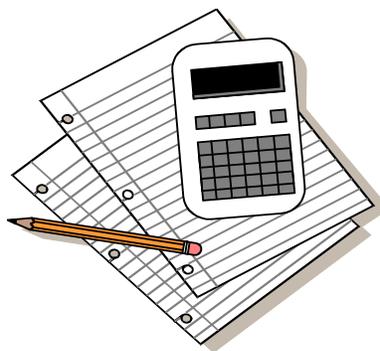
HOW TO PREPARE GUIDE

FOR THE

BUYER, ASSOCIATE

10951

WRITTEN EXAMINATION



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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these instructions is to help you prepare for the written, multiple-choice examination being given for the Buyer, Associate classification with the State of Alabama. In order to be eligible to be hired as a Buyer, Associate with the State of Alabama, you must complete this examination.

It is very important that you sit down in a quiet place and review the material in this book. You should also set aside time to practice doing the things that are suggested in this booklet to prepare for the Qualifying Exam. Please remember that the material in this booklet is designed to help you prepare for the exam. You will not need the material in this booklet at the time you actually take the exam. Therefore, you will not be allowed to bring this booklet into the exam session. Later in this booklet, we will instruct you on what you are **allowed** to bring to the exam session and what you **must** bring to the exam session.

II. JOB PREVIEW

Buyer, Associate positions are available in the Finance Department and Mental Health Department located in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Buyer, Associate job involves moderately difficult purchasing of materials, supplies, equipment, and services. Employees in this class are responsible for purchasing commodities and services for the state. Responsibilities include reviewing requisitions, preparing bid invitations, analyzing bids, and preparing purchase orders within an assigned area.

III. PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

A. General Information on “What To Do Before The Exam”

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the exam and for getting to the testing place on time and with the proper things that you will need to take the test.

1. Be well rested. Get a good night’s sleep for several nights in a row before the written examination.
2. Allow plenty of time to get to the examination site. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to get there at least 20 minutes before time for the examination to begin.
3. Do not bring cell phones to the testing site. Pagers should only be brought if it is absolutely necessary. All pagers must be set to vibration mode.
4. Come dressed comfortably. The total time provided for completion of this exam will be 3 hours.

5. You should read and study this booklet. You should practice the kinds of things that this booklet suggests that you practice.
6. Do **not** bring this or any other booklets, reading or study materials to the exam. You **will not** be permitted to bring them in. All materials needed to complete the exam will be given to you at the exam.
7. You **must** bring the EXAM NOTIFICATION LETTER or NOTIFICATION POSTCARD that you received from the State of Alabama Personnel Department to the examination site.
8. To protect your own interests, you will also be asked to bring PICTURE IDENTIFICATION to the examination site. This may be a valid driver's license, a military identification card, a student identification card, or some other form of PICTURE IDENTIFICATION. You only need one form of PICTURE IDENTIFICATION.
9. You **will not be allowed** to enter the examination site or take the exam without your NOTIFICATION LETTER/POSTCARD **and** PICTURE IDENTIFICATION.
10. Bring several number 2 pencils with erasers to the exam. It is also recommended that you bring a highlighter pen and a calculator. You may bring a calculator to use for the examination. Small solar powered or battery operated calculators that perform basic functions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, square roots, or percentages are allowed. Calculators that plug-in, utilize tape, have word processing, spelling, thesauruses, or other storage and retrieval capabilities (except basic memory functions) are not allowed. ***Calculators that are a feature on a cell phone are not permitted.*** Calculators are subject to inspection by exam monitors. Applicants may not borrow or share calculators at the exam site.

B. General Information on “What To Do During The Exam”

1. Some people are nervous when they take tests. There is nothing wrong with that. Whenever you are going to do something important, it is good to feel a bit keyed up. It is nature's way of getting you warmed up and ready, like an actress or actor about to go on stage for a performance.
2. However, it is not good to be so nervous that all you can think about is how nervous you are. You need to keep your mind on the test questions, and not on your feelings. To improve your ability to do that, you will find ideas in this booklet on how to study and prepare for the written examination. **The more prepared you are, the more comfortable and less nervous you will feel during the exam.**
3. In an exam like this one, some questions are easy and some are hard. Don't give up. Keep your mind on the test, and try to answer every question. Mark an answer on your answer sheet even if it is a guess. **There is no penalty for guessing.** On the other hand, do not

spend too much time on any one question just because it is hard. This may not leave you enough time to answer questions that you know.

4. You will have 3 hours to complete the exam. Use your time efficiently. The exam is not a test of how quickly you can answer questions. However, it does not allow you all the time you might like to have. In the parts of the test that require reading, try to keep a steady pace. Try to finish as much of the test as you can.
5. An examination monitor will be at your test site when you report. The monitor will check your Picture Identification and Exam Notification Letter/Postcard, and then will provide you with test materials. You **must** follow the instructions of the monitor at all times.
6. The examination monitor will provide you with instructions concerning restroom availability during the test administration. It is important to remember that the time that you take to use the rest room is time away from working on the examination. So, we recommend that you use the restroom before the examination, if possible.
7. You are not to open any examination booklets or instructions or begin working on the exam until you are instructed by the monitor to do so.
8. Candidates making any disturbances or caught cheating may be disqualified from the exam.
9. Test monitors can answer questions concerning exam administration issues only. They **will not** be able to interpret exam questions for you.
10. You should always check to make sure that your answers to questions are marked in the location on the answer sheet that matches the number of the question you are answering.
11. If you have time remaining after you have completed the test, it is always a good idea to review your responses on the more difficult questions. Once you have finished, notify the monitor for instructions.
12. In summary, there are two things you can do that will make you feel more comfortable taking the exam: 1) follow the guidelines presented in this booklet on how to prepare for the exam and 2) become familiar with what kinds of questions will be used in the exam.

IV. EXAM INFORMATION

A. General Exam Information

A study of the Buyer, Associate classification was conducted prior to developing the examination. A number of employees who work in this field and their supervisors participated in this study. The study showed that the following knowledges and abilities are associated with the above duties. These knowledges and abilities are needed on the first day of work before training:

- **Knowledge of mathematics such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, percentages, decimals, and statistics to include evaluating alternatives (i.e., feasibility of replacing parts, repairing, rebuilding, leasing, purchasing), and predicting life of an item as needed to purchase needed products and make the most efficient and cost-effective decisions concerning purchasing products.**
- Ability to communicate orally in situations such as interviews, instructional situations, and briefings as needed to discuss and mediate problems concerning products or departmental procedures with vendors or user agencies, answer questions concerning products, exchange information, resolve conflicts, and improve employee performance.
- Ability to identify and make appropriate decisions to include prioritizing tasks and recognizing necessary changes as needed to implement changes, deal with conflict, and effect personnel techniques.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with persons such as co-workers, vendors, state agencies, and the general public as needed to promote group dynamics, improve performance, enhance morale, and exchange information.
- **Ability to plan/organize to include managing time, prioritizing tasks, and planning strategically as needed to meet deadlines, allocate resources, and achieve departmental goals and objectives.**
- **Ability to compose correspondence such as letters, memoranda, brochures, and pamphlets to include clarity, content, conciseness, grammar, and spelling as needed to exchange information and elicit support.**
- Ability to take criticism for unpopular decisions, judgments, and evaluations as needed to evaluate bid policies and eligibility without being unduly influenced by the potential reaction of affected persons.
- Ability to use persuasion and tact when dealing with elected officials, department administrators, and related professionals as needed to gain cooperation and achieve departmental goals.
- Ability to be flexible as needed to meet deadlines, implement changes, and achieve departmental goals and objectives.

- **Ability to read and comprehend narrative information such as bid laws and regulations, proposals, and product information as needed to make revisions, implement programs, interpret rules, ensure compliance with regulations, enforce written agreements, exchange information, and achieve departmental goals.**

The examination for Buyer, Associate will measure the knowledges and abilities above that appear in **bold print**. The remaining knowledges and abilities must be demonstrated during the probationary period if you are hired into the Buyer, Associate position.

V. EXAMINATION DESCRIPTION

The Qualifying Examination will last 3 hours. When you read the word “exam” in the rest of these Instructions and Notes, it is a short way of referring to the entire Qualifying Examination.

You will find examples of exam items below. Please review these items in order to familiarize yourself with the kinds of items you will be asked and the format of the exam.

A. Sample Test Items

The examination for Buyer, Associate will measure the knowledges and abilities above that appear in **bold print**. The following are examples of how your knowledge and abilities will be measured.

EXAMPLE 1:

You have received 200 bid applications. 112 of these applicants are in-state, and the rest are out-of-state. 37 in-state applicants and 28 out-of-state applicants qualify for bid invitations.

What percentage of in-state applicants qualified for bid invitations?

- (A) 14%
- (B) 18%
- (C) 25%
- (D) 33%

Answer (D) is correct. According to the information provided, there were 112 total in-state applicants, 37 of which qualified for bid invitations. 37 is 33% of 112.

EXAMPLE 2:

You are given a short paragraph. Read the paragraph and then select from the four options the statement that best summarizes the main idea of the paragraph.

To produce effective business letters, a correspondent should always formulate in his or her mind, or on paper, a simple but definite plan of what to say and how to say it.

According to the passage, which statement is true?

- (A) Some preparation for writing a letter is necessary.
- (B) There should be no direct dictation.
- (C) More attention should be given to the proper form than to content.
- (D) You do not need preparation in writing a letter.

Answer (A) is correct. The passage indicates that effective business letters require a correspondent to formulate a plan of what to say and how to say it.

EXAMPLE 3:

The sentences in the following paragraph may or may not be in the proper order. Choose the answer that lists the sentences in the most logical order.

- 1. I have a son named John.
- 2. He will start tomorrow.
- 3. That means he is old enough to start school.
- 4. He is five years old.

- (A) 1-2-3-4
- (B) 2-4-3-1
- (C) 1-4-3-2
- (D) 4-3-2-1

Answer (C) is correct. This represents the most logical order of the four sentences.

EXAMPLE 4:

Read the situation and answer the following questions based on the information provided.

Your supervisor will be out of the office today. You arrived at work at 8:00 AM. You have an appointment today at 11:00 AM with your doctor who has advised you that the appointment should not be rescheduled. You need to leave by 10:30 AM and will not return to the office. Michelle Thomas, an Administrative Support Assistant I, is the only other employee in the office today. However, she does not type. Your supervisor left a note listing the following tasks that must be completed today:

1. Type the Anderson report (2 hours to complete).
2. Sort and distribute mail (30 minutes to complete).
3. Call Miriam Houston about the Anderson report (10 minutes to complete).
4. Post the new dividend rates by 12 PM today (20 minutes to complete).
5. Set up the conference room for the next day's 8:00 am meeting (20 minutes to complete).
6. File dividend reports (2 hours to complete).

Which of the following tasks would you be forced to perform yourself?

- (A) File dividend reports
- (B) Set up the conference room
- (C) Type the Anderson report
- (D) Sort and distribute the day's mail

The correct answer is (C). Since Ms. Thomas cannot type, you must type the Anderson report.

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR TAKING THIS EXAM

A. Effective Note Taking

Why Take Notes?

There are several good reasons to take notes:

- Taking notes can help you remember; notes you take in your own words are easier to understand and remember.
- Writing down notes may actually make ideas you did not fully understand clearer.

Taking Effective Notes

The following are some rules and suggestions for taking effective notes:

- Make your notes brief. Pick out the important points.
- Do not use a sentence when you can use a phrase. Do not use a phrase when you can use a word.
- Use abbreviations whenever possible.
- Put most notes in your own words. However, copy the following exactly as they are presented:
 - a. Definitions
 - b. Specific Facts
 - c. Specific Rules and Procedures

B. Strategies For Taking The Exam

By following the suggestions listed below, you can do your best:

- **Read the questions carefully.**

Be sure you know what the question asks and what the choices say before you try to answer the question. On every test, people choose wrong answers simply because they failed to pay attention to part of the question or failed to read all of the answer.

- **Choose the answer that is generally best.**

To keep questions short, they cannot have a lot of detail. You should give the answer that would be considered to be generally the best.

- **For “Reading Comprehension” questions, decide something about each question.**

1. You may decide you know the answer. Mark your answer on the answer Sheet. Spend no more time on that question.
2. You may decide you are fairly sure of the answer, but may want to think more about it. Mark your answer sheet and make a note of it in the test booklet so it will be easier to find later.
3. You may decide one or two answers are definitely not the best. Eliminate the answers you know are wrong then direct your attention to those choices that are potentially correct.
4. You may decide that figuring out the answer is possible, but will take you a lot of time. Don’t mark any answer. Note the question in your test booklet so you can find it when you are ready to come back to it. Make sure you finish the test in enough time to come back to answer the question.
5. You may decide you don’t know the answer and that all you can do is make a guess. Make the guess. Mark the answer sheet to show your answer. Don’t spend any more time on that question. There is no penalty for guessing.

- **Don’t change answers unless you have a good reason.**

When people change their answers, they more often change from a right answer to a wrong one rather than from a wrong answer to a right one. The reason seems to be that they start thinking about some specific case, which results in choosing an answer on the basis of facts that are not given in the question. Or, people think about what some part of a question says and forget about what the rest of the question said.

- **Use your time efficiently.**

You may not have all of the time you might like to complete the test. In the parts of the test that require reading, read at a normal pace so that you can finish the test and have time to go back and work on the questions you saved until last.

- **Don’t give up.**

Many people give up too easily on test questions. If the question looks too hard, they don’t even try. Look for the specific information needed to answer the question. However, do not spend too much time on any one question just because it is hard. Doing that may not leave you enough time to give the answers that you know.

C. Study Suggestions

You may find some of the following ideas helpful in preparing for the exam:

- Do not prepare for the exam in a single session.
- Study in a quiet place. Do not study when you are doing something else.
- Make up your own tests and take them.
- Pretend that you are in a real testing situation and try not to talk to anyone else while you are taking the sample tests.
- Practice following instructions. Read sections of how-to books or instruction manuals you may have at home and practice taking notes or highlighting important aspects of the sections.
- Study the Sample Test Items in this How to Prepare Booklet.
- Study whatever material you believe will assist you in learning each of the duties, and knowledges and abilities required for the Buyer, Associate position as listed in Section IV of this booklet.

VII. EXAM ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

What To Bring To The Examination

- Do **NOT** bring this Booklet to the exam location. You will not be permitted to bring it in the testing room.
- Do **NOT** bring any of your study materials to the exam. This includes notes, manuals, and other study materials.
- Remember to bring to the exam the NOTIFICATION LETTER or NOTIFICATION POSTCARD that you received from the State of Alabama Personnel Department. You will **not be allowed** to take the exam without your NOTIFICATION LETTER/POSTCARD.
- To protect your own interests, you will also be asked to bring a PICTURE IDENTIFICATION to the exam location. This might be a valid driver's license, a military identification card, a student identification card, or some form of picture identification. You only need to have one form of PICTURE IDENTIFICATION.
- Bring several number 2 pencils with erasers to the exam. It is also recommended that you bring a highlighter pen and a calculator.

- Remember, you will **not be allowed** to enter the exam location or take the exam without your NOTIFICATION LETTER/POSTCARD **and** PICTURE IDENTIFICATION.

VIII. BANDED SCORING

When the written exam for Buyer, Associate is graded, the scores will be grouped into bands. When you receive notification of how you did on the exam, you will not be given a numerical score (e.g., you will not receive a score of 95 out of 100.). Rather, you will be informed into which band your score fell. The following is information to help you understand the banding procedure.

What is banding?

Banding is one way to reduce the impact of fluctuations in test scores that do not provide meaningful information about differences in the ability to do the job. One important purpose of testing is to identify the differences in test scores that reflect real differences among candidates. Banded scoring is a statistical procedure for grouping raw test scores that statistically are not meaningfully different from one another. In banded scoring, bands are set objectively and mathematically. They are not manipulated arbitrarily.

Misconceptions about banding

There are many misconceptions about banding and the use of banded scores. Some of the most common misconceptions are listed below. Each misconception is followed by a clarification.

- **Misconception: Each band should have the same number of people.**

The people in a band are similar to each other in that statistically there is no meaningful difference in their scores. Sometimes Band 1 may be very large and at other times it may be small. We do not force bands to be a certain size. The size of the bands is based on the scores people make.

- **Misconception: Band numbers have no meaning. I don't have a score.**

Think of a band as a group of tied scores. Think of a band as a group of scores that statistically are not meaningfully different. In school, two students with average grades of 94.5 and 94.3 would both be grouped into a band called "A" because the teacher cannot be sure that .2 of a point is a real difference in achievement. Think of scores on achievement tests children take in school. The fine print on the tests always cautions you not to focus on the numerical score but rather on the comparative score which uses some grouping technique such as percentiles, stanines, standard deviations, grade levels, etc. These grouping techniques are considered forms of banding.

- **Misconception:** **Band numbers are the same as letter grades.**

Band 1 does not equate to an “A,” Band 2 to a “B,” etc. In school a predetermined numerical score (e.g., 92-100) equals an A. In banding, scores are banded only in relation to one another. Unlike grade school bands, the width of bands is not set in advance. You compete against your peers only. Your scores are set in relation to your peers only.

- **Misconception:** **A band score on one test has the same value as a band score on another test.**

Banded scores are test specific and cannot be compared to banded scores on other tests.

- **Misconception:** **People who have been on the job longest should be in the top bands.**

Time spent in a job may not be the same as skill in doing the job. The people with the strongest skills (or who did best on the exam) should be in the top bands. Some of these people will have been in the job longer than others. Years of service do not always equal proficiency.

- **Misconception:** **A standing in Band 4 or below automatically indicates failure or ineligibility for jobs.**

This statement is false. A band score of 4 or lower is not automatically equated with failure. The true test of your employment opportunities is whether or not you can be certified and considered for a job vacancy.

- **Misconception:** **Banding replaced the “Rule of 10.”**

Banding did not replace the “Rule of 10.” The “Rule of 10” determines the number of bands to be certified. In the past, tied scores referred to an actual numerical score (e.g., two candidates with a score of 98.98 were considered tied) while now all of the scores within a band are considered tied.

- **Misconception:** **People in a band do not differ.**

When several people are placed in the same band, it does not mean that those people do not differ. Instead, it means that their scores on the exam do not differ enough to be separate scores.

IX. STATE PERSONNEL TERMINOLOGY

The following are terms that are used by State Personnel regarding test scores and employment that results from those scores. This section is provided to help you understand State Personnel terminology and procedures.

Register: A register is a list of all individuals who have successfully completed the selection procedure for a State Merit System job. The register is a complete list of individuals who are eligible for employment in a certain job classification.

Certification: A certification is a list of the top ten individuals on an employment register. These are the individuals who are immediately appointable to positions. A register that uses Banded Scoring may produce a certification with more than ten names. If Band 1 contains 15 names, then all 15 individuals will be on the Certification. Likewise, if Band 1 contains 3 people and Band 2 contains 25 people, then all individuals in both Bands 1 and 2 would be on the certification. Since individuals within a Band are considered to be tied, the certification cannot split up a Band. Certifications may be state-wide or specific to a county within the state.

Test Failure: Some multiple-choice tests administered by the state use a Pass/Fail point to identify individuals who failed the test.

Subject Matter Experts: Individuals who have detailed first-hand knowledge of a job. These individuals assist State Personnel in conducting thorough job studies and in many cases assist in developing specific exam components.

X. GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EXAM

You should contact the State Personnel Department if you have questions about the examination administration as you prepare to take the exam. Exam administrators are not allowed to divulge specific information about the content of the exam.

Reasonable Accommodations

If you would like to request special testing accommodation or have any questions concerning the test site or testing conditions, please contact the State Personnel Department at (334)242-3389.

Test Results

Four to six weeks after completing the exam, you will receive a Notice of Examination Results postcard in the mail. This postcard will identify your score, or Band placement, for the written exam. If you have not received your score after six weeks, you should call the State Personnel Department.

In addition to your Band placement, you may also obtain your standing, or rank on the register, online at www.personnel.alabama.gov. From the home page, you should click on “Applicants” and then “Register Standings,” and follow the instructions. For security purposes, you must now create an online profile in order to access your standing.

XI. EXAM CONTACT

The contact person for the Buyer, Associate examination is Crystal Crump, a Personnel Analyst with the State Personnel Department. If you have questions about the contents of this document, please call her at (334) 242-3389.