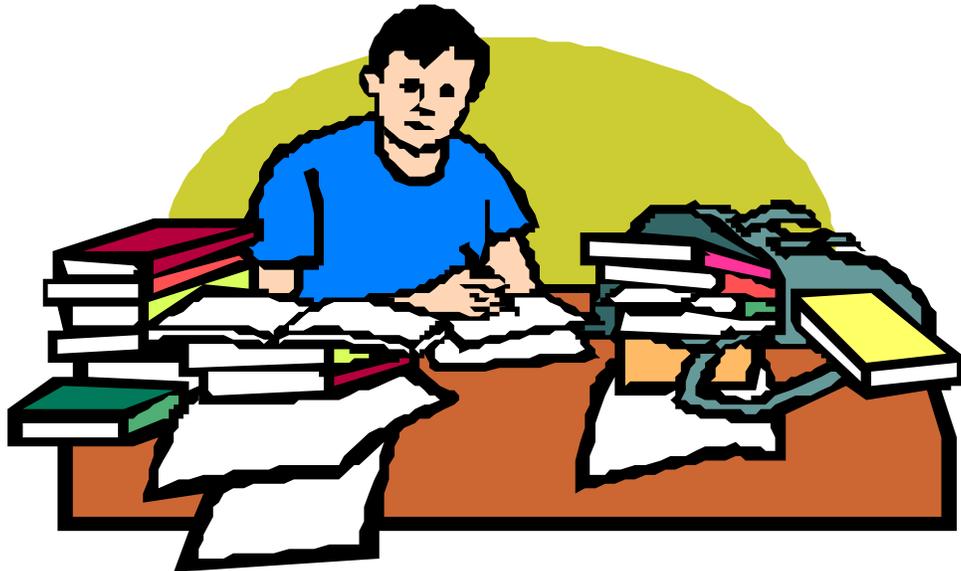


PUBLIC INFORMATION SPECIALIST - 11042



HOW TO PREPARE BOOKLET

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I. INTRODUCTION

A written examination is being given in order to establish a register for the classification of Public Information Specialist (11042). The purpose of this booklet is to help you prepare for the written exam. Since all the material you will need to take the exam will be provided at test administration, you will not be allowed to bring this booklet to the exam with you.

II. THE JOB

Public Information Specialist positions are with various departments and are located statewide. This is advanced public relations and informational work in a state agency. Employees in this class supervise activities and personnel in conducting public relations and informational programs for a small state department, a single major activity in a comprehensive public affairs program, or a specialized program in a major organizational unit of a larger state agency. Other employees serve in a non-supervisory capacity either as a generalist responsible for several facets of a comprehensive public affairs program or as the only public affairs specialist in a moderate-sized state department. Responsibilities in some agencies are primarily writing and editing informational materials while the work in other agencies includes informational and public relations activities. Work in some positions involves planning and implementing public informational projects, including data gathering and verifying; planning, writing, and editing departmental magazines and other materials for media dissemination; and advising departmental officials about public informational activities.

III. THE EXAMINATION

The examination for this classification is a multiple-choice exam. A multiple-choice exam is designed to measure specific knowledges and abilities. The test is divided into four sections with each section measuring different knowledges and abilities. Applicants are presented with a test question and four possible responses to that question. Applicants then select the BEST possible response to the question. Here are some points to remember when taking the examination:

- Some people get nervous when they take tests. There is nothing wrong with that. However, it is not good to be so nervous that you cannot concentrate. You need to keep your mind on the test questions and not on your feelings. To improve your ability to do this, you will find ideas in this booklet on how to study and prepare for the written exam. The more prepared you are, the more comfortable and less nervous you will feel during the exam.
- You will be given **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 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.
- While reading passages, you may want to take a few notes. Make your notes brief. You may also want to underline or highlight important information as you read.
- Don't give up. Many people give up too easily on tests. If the question or problem seems hard, they do not even try. Mark an answer on your answer sheet even if it is a guess. You will not be

penalized 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.

IV. HOW THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION WAS DEVELOPED

A study of the Public Information Specialist classification was conducted before developing the examination. Employees who work in this position and their supervisors participated in this study to determine the job duties performed by Public Information Specialists as well as the knowledges and abilities Public Information Specialists must possess in order to effectively perform the job duties of the position.

The study showed that the following knowledges and abilities are associated with the job duties of the position. Public Information Specialists must possess the following knowledges and abilities on their first day of work before training:

Knowledges

- **Knowledge of the AP Stylebook Manual and other style manuals to include rules of journalistic style, rules for upper/lower case lettering, punctuation, and abbreviations as needed to comply with manual specifications in written documents.**
- **Knowledge of layout and design principles to include composition, color usage, photo cropping, type selection, image/graphic usage, and chart selection as needed to design and create effective publications such as visual aids, displays, exhibits, newsletters, magazines, annual reports, pamphlets, web sites, billboards, and other items.**
- **Knowledge of editing principles such as clear and concise writing, accuracy, and practices to include the use of references such as dictionaries, thesauruses, the AP Stylebook Manual, and other journalistic guides as needed to review and revise publications such as featured articles, public service announcements, news articles, editorials, and news releases.**
- **Knowledge of the English language to include grammar, spelling, and punctuation as needed to generate general correspondence and compose and edit reports and publications.**
- Knowledge of business etiquette, behavior, communication, and presentation to include appropriate dress/appearance, manners, and discretionary speech as needed to promote a positive image for the department with others such as constituents and politicians.
- **Knowledge of the components of a news release to include lead statement, contact person/phone number, release time/date, and formatting as needed to write news releases.**
- Knowledge of basic computer functions such as word processing and internet usage as needed to enter data, generate general correspondence, and research information.
- **Knowledge of face-to-face interview techniques to include maintaining appropriate eye contact, awareness of fidgeting, appropriate verbal communication, avoiding use of jargon, etc. as needed to participate in and prepare others for interviews.**

Abilities

- Ability to communicate orally in one-on-one situations such as interviews, instructional situations, briefings, and problem solving as needed to instruct, provide information, persuade, answer questions, elicit constructive input, participate in interviews, and achieve desired outcome of meeting.
- Ability to communicate orally in group situations to include press conferences as well as and meetings with staff, representatives of other state/federal agencies, committees, and legislative officials as needed to instruct, provide information, persuade, answer questions, elicit constructive input, participate in interviews or press conferences, and achieve desired outcome of meeting
- **Ability to communicate in writing to include appropriate clarity, style, content, conciseness, grammar, and spelling as needed to exchange information and compose/edit reports, news releases, speeches, and publications.**
- **Ability to proofread and edit documents such as news releases, newsletters, brochures, speeches, and reports as needed to ensure accuracy, effectiveness, and appropriateness of content and format.**
- **Ability to read and comprehend non-technical and technical information such as reports, major news publications, correspondence, numerical data, media relations guidelines, laws, regulations, and legislation related to agency programs/operations as needed to locate and extract information, interpret legislation for others, prepare releases, and comply with regulations.**
- **Ability to manage multiple projects to include prioritizing tasks and planning strategically as needed to meet deadlines, allocate resources, and achieve departmental goals.**
- Ability to operate a computer to include purpose, capabilities, preventive maintenance, and limitations as needed to document, store, and access information.
- Ability to operate office equipment such as copier, facsimile machine, telephone, and calculator to include purpose, capabilities, and basic mechanics as needed to facilitate work flow.
- Ability to work independently and exercise professional judgment as needed to perform job duties with minimal supervision.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with various persons such as co-workers, representatives from other agencies, media representatives, and the general public as needed to promote communication, exchange information, establish contacts for information, develop effective working relationships with others, and promote a positive image of the agency.
- Ability to be flexible as needed to meet deadlines, implement changes, and achieve departmental goals and objectives.
- Ability to analyze situations to include determining what information needs to be gathered and how to obtain the information as needed to respond to public relations crisis situations or inquiries for information.
- **Ability to review facts in a situation and recognize the potential consequences of the situation or courses of action to be taken in response to the situation as needed to design proactive communication efforts and promote a positive image for the agency.**
- **Ability to calm hostile individuals as needed to respond to the public, constituents, or politicians regarding agency-related concerns.**

- **Ability to interview others to include designing appropriate questions, communicating questions clearly, using follow-up questions, and documenting responses as needed to gather information to respond to requests or write external public relations documents.**
- Ability to maintain confidentiality of information as needed to write news releases, speeches, or publications or respond to inquiries from others regarding agency-related issues or activities without disclosing inappropriate information.
- Ability to remain calm under pressure as needed to respond to public relations crisis situations.
- Ability to tactfully present information to others, regardless of their potential reactions, as needed to accurately communicate with others, disagree with incorrect assumptions/ideas of others, and participate in press conferences.
- **Ability to assimilate and organize facts and information from various sources and present them in an appropriate manner as needed to communicate orally and in writing.**
- Ability to be creative to include generating creative ideas for newsletters and other documents, thinking outside the box, designing publications, etc. as needed to communicate information effectively, keep constituency current, and build interest in agency services, activities, mission, and objectives.
- Ability to work on a team to include leading and/or participating as needed to perform job duties, ensure appropriate release of information, complete group projects, meet deadlines, and ensure appropriate assignment of specific duties.

The examination for the Public Information Specialist will measure the **fourteen** knowledges and abilities that appear above in **bold print**. The remaining abilities and knowledges cannot be measured by a written test and must be demonstrated during the probationary period if you are hired as a Public Information Specialist.

V. WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU COME TO TAKE THE EXAMINATION

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the examination and for getting to the exam location on the correct day, on time, and with the proper materials that you will need to take the examination.

- **Get there early.** Give yourself plenty of extra time to get to the test center and to park. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to get there before the scheduled exam time.
- **Do not bring this booklet or any study materials with you to the exam location.** This includes notes and any manuals and source documents that you may have used to prepare for the examination.
- **You must bring the test schedule card** that you received from the State of Alabama Personnel Department. This card lists the examination title, location of exam, and date, day, and time of examination.

- **You must bring two sharpened #2 lead pencils.** You may also bring a highlighter pen to use during the reading comprehension part of the test if you wish.
- **You must also bring picture identification to the exam location.** This may be your driver license, a military identification card, or a passport.
- **Do not bring a calculator to the exam location.** This examination does not measure your knowledge of math. As such, calculators may not be used on this test.

Test Taking Tips

- **Listen** to the test monitors and follow their instructions carefully.
- If you are not sure of an answer, **go with your first choice.**
- Work through the test **without spending too much time on any one item.**
- If you cannot decide on the best answer to a question, **skip it and go back to it later.**
- Use your watch or the clock in the room to **keep track of your time** during the test.
- It is to your advantage to **answer as many questions as possible**, even if you must guess.
- **Mark your answers on the answer sheet and NOT in the test booklet.** Only answers clearly marked on the answer sheet can be given credit.
- If you have a question at **any time before or during the exam, ask the monitor for assistance.**

VI. HOW TO PREPARE USING THIS GUIDE

This Pretest Booklet can be used as resource material. The questions contained in the booklet are representative of the types of questions that will be on the actual examination. Familiarize yourself with the sample questions that begin below. The answers to each question are provided on page 11. You would be well advised to read the instructions and answer each question carefully. Like the examination questions, the sample items are presented in the following categories:

Section I. Project Management

Section II. Reading Comprehension

Section III. Interview/Communication Techniques

Section IV. Written Communication

VII. SAMPLE TEST QUESTIONS

Section I. Project Management

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the situation and then answer **question 1**. Base your response on the situation only. Do not base your response on previous experience. Select the **MOST APPROPRIATE** choice.

Assume you are a Public Information Specialist working in Montgomery. Your supervisor is out of the office today. You arrive at work at 7:55 a.m. You have an appointment today at 11:00 a.m. with your family doctor who has advised you that the appointment should not be rescheduled. You need to leave by 10:30 a.m. and will be unable to return to the office later today. Sue Beck, a clerical aide and office receptionist, 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 done today.

- Type the Zicker report (2 hours to complete).
 - Respond to e-mails (30 minutes to complete).
 - Call Virginia Hall about incomplete paperwork (10 minutes to complete).
 - Set up the conference room for the next day's 8:00 a.m. meeting (20 minutes to complete).
 - File completed articles (2 hours to complete).
1. Which of the following schedules shown below would be the most appropriate use of your time today?
- A. file completed articles and set up the conference room
 - B. set up the conference room, respond to e-mails, and call Virginia Hall
 - C. type the Zicker report and call Virginia Hall
 - D. respond to e-mails and type the Zicker report

Section II. Reading Comprehension

INSTRUCTIONS: Questions 2 and 3 are based on the following reading selections and should be answered only on the basis of the information in that selection.

2. “Persons in the employ of a public agency generally come into contact with many people outside of working hours. In these contacts, the government employee represents to the public the quality, competence, and stature of public employees as a group.”

Of the following statements, the one that is the most valid implication of this quotation is that

- A. the responsibilities of a public employee cease after office hours.
 - B. government employees who come into contact with the public during working hours should be more efficient than those who have no contact with the public.
 - C. public employees, by their behavior during social activities, can raise the prestige of public employment.
 - D. public employees, because they work so diligently serving the public, tend to party more than employees in the private sector.
3. If, for any reason, the person being interviewed is unwilling to talk, the effectiveness of the entire procedure is jeopardized. It is too much to expect persons to always tell the truth, but even that is of secondary importance because, if a person talks enough, he is bound to reveal himself sooner or later.

According to this statement, which of the following is most nearly correct?

- A. Interviewers should watch for signs of insincerity during interviews.
- B. The effectiveness of an interview is related to how much the person being interviewed talks.
- C. Few persons can conceal their shortcomings successfully during interviews.
- D. A person being interviewed will feel that his chances are jeopardized if he is not allowed to talk freely.

Section III. Interview/Communication Techniques

INSTRUCTIONS: For questions 4 and 5, read each question related to interview/communication techniques, and select the most appropriate answer from the choices provided.

4. An interviewer will conduct interviews most successfully if he/she customarily
- A. allows the person being interviewed to lead the conversation.
 - B. identifies markedly with the person being interviewed.
 - C. modifies procedures to meet the needs of each individual being interviewed.
 - D. acquires speed and skill in asking questions.

5. In asking questions, a good general principle for an interviewer to follow is to avoid asking
- A. indirect rather than direct questions.
 - B. two or three questions in rapid succession.
 - C. impersonal questions.
 - D. questions which require more than a brief answer.

Section IV. Written Communication

INSTRUCTIONS: For **questions 6 and 7**, read each question and select the most appropriate answer from the choices provided.

6. Which of the following questions is the *most important* thing to ask yourself before writing a document?
- A. What is the purpose of the document?
 - B. Should I present the information orally instead?
 - C. How many paragraphs should I write?
 - D. Who is my audience?
7. If unfamiliar terms are used several times in an article, an explanation of the term should ordinarily be given in
- A. a note at the end of the article.
 - B. the text, the first time the term occurs.
 - C. the text, each time the term occurs.
 - D. Explanations are not needed for unfamiliar terms. The reader can further research any areas he/she has questions about.

INSTRUCTIONS: For **questions 8 and 9**, read each sentence and decide which of the four in the group represents the best English usage for business letters and reports.

8.
 - A. I was told “if your late again you will be fired.”
 - B. My boss said “If you’re late again, you will be fired”.
 - C. I was told that if I was late again, I would be fired.
 - D. My boss told me, “If your late again you will be fired”.
9.
 - A. The number of calls we received is greater after lunch.
 - B. The numbers of calls we receive is greatest after lunch.
 - C. The numbers of calls we received is greater after lunch.
 - D. The number of calls we receive is greatest after lunch.

Answers to Sample Questions

Section I. Project Management

1. D

Section II. Reading Comprehension

2. C

3. B

Section III. Interview/Communication Techniques

4. C

5. B

Section IV. Written Communication

6. A

7. B

8. C

9. D

VIII. BANDED SCORING

When the written exam for Public Information Specialist 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., 90-100) 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: 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. EXAM CONTACT

The contact person for the Public Information Specialist examination is Julie Carden, 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.

X. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How are vacancies filled for the Public Information Specialist?

The top ten applicants on each register are sent to the requesting agency for consideration. Since the banded scoring process is used, all of the scores within a band are considered tied. **Therefore, all names within a band are certified out to an agency, which may include more than 10 names.** The names of people not selected stay on the register to be considered for future jobs. Employees are usually hired at the minimum of the pay range.

How long will I remain eligible for appointment?

Your name will remain on the employment register for two years from the date you were placed on the register. You will be notified by mail when to reapply.

When will I receive my 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 within four to 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.

What if I need to request 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.

What if I need to reschedule the written examination?

If there is a conflict in your schedule, and you are unable to attend the written exam at the time and date for which you have been scheduled, you must resubmit your Application for Examination. The State Personnel Department will schedule you for the next available administration of this written test.

XI. 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.