



**Department of
Civil Service**

A Guide to the Written Test

for the

Senior Stenographer / Senior Typist Series
(including equivalent secretarial titles)

INTRODUCTION

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

The written test for the Senior Stenographer / Senior Typist Series has an overall time allowance of 3 ½ hours. The test questions will cover the following five subject areas:

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 knowledge of the correct placement of punctuation marks in sentences.
3. **KEYBOARDING PRACTICES:** These questions test for 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 then be asked questions about how to correct the errors in the passage.
4. **OFFICE RECORD KEEPING:** These questions test for the 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 organizing or collating data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completing a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages, and percents.
5. **OFFICE PRACTICES:** These questions test for knowledge of generally accepted 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.

Information about which of the above subject areas will be covered on the particular examination you will be taking will appear on the announcement for that examination. All examinations in the series will cover the first three subject areas; some may cover all five subject areas; others may exclude *Office Record Keeping* or *Office Practices*.

Any secretarial manual or handbook will provide information to help you prepare for the first three subject areas. There are rules in these areas that would be useful for you to review. There is no specific study material for *Office Record Keeping*. You will have to follow written directions and 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 the education you must have to take an examination in this series.

The remainder of this test guide explains how you will be tested in each of the subject areas listed above. A **TEST TASK** is provided for each subject area. This is an explanation of how the question will be presented and how to correctly answer it. Read each explanation carefully. This test guide also provides at least one **SAMPLE QUESTION** for each subject area. The sample question is similar to the type of questions that will be presented on the actual test. This test guide provides the **SOLUTION** and correct answer to each sample question. You should study each sample question and solution in order to understand how the correct answer was determined.

SUBJECT AREA 1

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

TEST TASK: This subject area will consist of 15 questions. For each question, you will be given three sentences (A, B, and C). **One** of the three sentences **may** contain a misspelled word. The misspelled words are words that are commonly found in business correspondence. You should focus on words that are commonly misspelled. For this test task, you must determine whether any of the three sentences contains a misspelled word. If one does, you should choose the letter of the sentence (A, B, or C) which contains the misspelled word. If none of the three sentences contains a misspelled word, you should choose D, "None contains a misspelled word."

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 correct answer to the Sample Question is C.

SOLUTION:

- A. *Although the word "budgetary" is sometimes misspelled as "budgetery" (this type of ending is sometimes "ary" and sometimes "ery", in sentence A, it is spelled correctly. There is no misspelled word in sentence A.*
- 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. In sentence B, the final consonant is doubled in "occurring." There is no misspelled word in sentence B.*
- C. *The word "definate" is a misspelling in sentence C. The correct spelling is "definite." **Sentence C contains a misspelled word, so it is the correct answer to the question "Which one of the following sentences contains a misspelled word?"***
- D. *Since sentence C contains a misspelled word, choice D is not the correct answer to the Sample Question.*

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 knowledge of the correct placement of punctuation marks in sentences.

TEST TASK: This subject area 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 grammar errors you see in these questions may be errors in the agreement of subject and verb; or errors 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 incorrectly used words are words that sound alike, but have different meanings: for example, the words "incidence" (*frequency*) and "incidents" (*occurrences*) sound alike but have different meanings, and may be used incorrectly; similarly, the words "anyway" and "any way" sound alike but have different meanings, and may be used incorrectly.

Four of the 15 questions will be punctuation questions. Some of the punctuation errors you see in these questions may be 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 correct answer to this sample question is B.

SOLUTION:

Sentence A 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 sentence A is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.

Sentence B 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 sentence B is grammatically INCORRECT as presented, B the correct answer to the sample question.**

Sentence C 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 sentence C is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.

Sentence D 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 sentence D is grammatically CORRECT as presented, it is not the answer to the sample question.

SUBJECT AREA 3

KEYBOARDING PRACTICES:

These questions test for 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 subject area will consist of 15 questions. The format of these questions will vary. 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 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 2010-2012, the caseload increased 10 percent.

The correct answer to sample question 1 is D

SOLUTION TO SAMPLE QUESTION 1:

- A. *When a prefix is added to a word that begins with a capital letter, a hyphen must be used. In choice A, the use of the hyphen is required, so A is not the answer to Sample Question 1.*
- B. *In choice B, "200" and "page" together, as one thought, describe "report." Those two elements are kept together with the hyphen. In choice B, the use of the hyphen is required, so B is not the answer to Sample Question 1.*
- C. *In choice C, "self" and "addressed" together, as one thought, describe "envelope." The hyphen is used to form the unit. In choice C, the use of the hyphen is required, so C is not the answer to Sample Question 1.*
- 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 numerical expressions which begin with "from." It should read: "From 2010 to 2012." **Since a hyphen should NOT be used in choice D, D is the correct answer to Sample Question 1.***

SUBJECT AREA 3 (continued)

KEYBOARDING PRACTICES cont.

SAMPLE QUESTION 2:

Proofread the passage below for typographical, spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. (Typographical errors can include omissions, repetitions, double strikes, or transpositions.) Then, answer the question that follows 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 correct answer to sample question 2 is C.

SOLUTION TO SAMPLE QUESTION 2:

- A. *There is an error in the passage, so choice A, "Make no changes," is not the correct answer to Sample Question 2. For choice A to be correct, there would have to be no error in the passage.*
- B. *Choice B is not the correct answer to Sample Question 2. It would be incorrect to delete 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. **Choice C, "Add an "s" to "color," is the correct answer to Sample Question 2.** *The word "various" in the passage indicates that more than one color is involved, so the plural form of "color" should be used.*
- D. *Choice D is not the correct answer to Sample Question 2. 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 not make the listing in the passage clear.*

SUBJECT AREA 4

OFFICE RECORD KEEPING: These questions test for the 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 organizing or collating data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completing a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages, and percents.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS: Base your answers to the two sample questions which follow, on the “Summary Report of Office Expenses for 2005,” below. Complete as much of the report as needed to answer the sample questions. Base the completion of the report, and your answers to the two sample questions, on the information given in the summary report itself and in the “Report of Office Expenses – 3rd and 4th Quarters,” shown below.

REPORT OF OFFICE EXPENSES 3rd & 4th QUARTERS (26 weeks)				
	3 rd Quarter		4 th Quarter	
	2011	2012	2011	2012
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 2011						
	1 ST Quarter	2 ND Quarter	1 ST Half	3 RD Quarter	4 TH Quarter	2 ND 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				

SUBJECT AREA 4 (continued)

OFFICE RECORD KEEPING cont.

SAMPLE QUESTION 1:

What is the value of R?

- A. \$112,900
- B. \$128,600
- C. \$137,800
- D. none of the above

The correct answer to sample question 1 is B

SOLUTION TO SAMPLE QUESTION 1:

*Payroll Expenses for the second half of 2011 are calculated by locating and adding the figure for 3rd Quarter Payroll Expenses for 2011 (\$55,900) to the figure for 4th Quarter Payroll Expenses for 2011 (\$72,700). These figures are found in the "REPORT OF OFFICE EXPENSES – 3rd & 4th QUARTERS." **The result, \$128,600 (choice B), is the value of R.***

SAMPLE QUESTION 2:

What is the value of S?

- A. \$11,500
- B. \$11,700
- C. \$11,900
- D. \$12,300

The correct answer to sample question 2 is C.

SOLUTION TO SAMPLE QUESTION 2:

*Total Maintenance Expenses for the year 2011 are calculated by first calculating the Maintenance Expenses for the second half of 2011, 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 3rd Quarter of 2011 (\$2,700+\$160) and add this total to the combination of "Cleaning" and "Repairs" for the 4th Quarter of 2011 (\$2,900+\$240). This calculation (\$2,700+\$160+\$2,900+\$240) results in total Maintenance Expenses of \$6,000 for the 2nd Half of 2011. **Finally, this 2nd Half total (\$6,000) is added to Maintenance Expenses for the 1st Half of 2011 (\$5,900) to get a total for the year (the value of S) of \$11,900 (choice C).***

SUBJECT AREA 5

OFFICE PRACTICES: These questions test for knowledge of generally accepted 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: This subject area will consist of 10 questions. 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 is not working properly.

The best answer to this sample question is B.

SOLUTION:

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

- A. *Although giving the newcomer some simple tasks to perform will eventually be part of the orientation, it is not the first thing you should do. Choice A is incorrect.*
- B. *Introducing the newcomer to the other staff in the office is the first thing that should be done for anyone new to the workplace. **Choice B is the correct answer to the Sample Question.***
- 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. Since choice C is not be the first thing a newcomer should be subjected to, choice C is incorrect.*
- D. *Informing the newcomer about any equipment that is not working properly is certainly not the first thing you should do to orient the newcomer to the workplace. It is unlikely that the newcomer would need to use such equipment the first day on the job. Choice D 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 should 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.

Before the test ...

- Study and review this guide to familiarize yourself with what the test will cover.
- Study and review the subject areas to be covered on the test.

On the day of the test ...

- Arrive at the test site on time.
- Bring your Admission Notice, two No. 2 pencils, a photo ID containing your signature, a quiet lunch or snack, and any other **allowed** materials.
- Do **NOT** bring this test guide to the test site.

At the test site ...

- Do **NOT** bring cell phones, beepers, headphones, or any electronic or other communication devices to the test site.
- The use of such devices anywhere on the grounds of the test site (this includes the test room, hallways, restrooms, building, grounds, and parking lots) could result in your disqualification.

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.
- 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 the 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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