



## DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

### **Study Guide** **Professional Series Written Examination**

- The Professional Series exam is required for the following classifications: Family Service Worker, Human Resources Analyst, Human Resources Specialist, Juvenile Probation Counselor I, Juvenile Probation Counselor II, Library Technician I, Library Technician II, Library Technician III, Planner I, Program Analyst, Program Specialist, Purchasing Analyst I, Purchasing Analyst II, Retirement Analyst, Senior Human Resources Analyst, Senior Human Resources Specialist, Senior Juvenile Probation Counselor, Senior Program Specialist, and Senior Retirement Analyst.
- This booklet contains **SAMPLE QUESTIONS ONLY**. Studying this booklet will not necessarily improve your exam score.

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**PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THIS EXAM PREPARATION GUIDE**

This guide was developed to help you prepare to take the written exam for the Professional Series. It contains general exam-taking advice and also provides specific information related to the exam content. This information includes the subject areas covered by the exam, the kinds of questions to expect, strategies for approaching the questions, and sample questions. Though this information cannot guarantee a higher exam score, it can give you direction for your exam preparation that will assist you in doing your best.

## **PREPARING TO TAKE THE EXAM**

### **Before the Day of the Exam**

- Review this guide to get familiar with the content of the exam. Knowing about the topics and kinds of questions that will be in the exam will ensure that you will not be surprised by the content of the exam or the manner in which it is presented. This can improve your ability to demonstrate your job potential.
- Make sure that you know where the exam will be administered and all of the relevant details, such as where to park, where to report for the exam, and what identification is required.

### **On the Day of the Exam**

- Make sure that you are well rested and have eaten. These things will help your concentration during the exam.
- Plan your day to allow plenty of time to get yourself prepared and get to the exam site. Allow enough time to cope with weather, traffic, parking, etc. Hurrying creates anxiety, so do not put yourself in the position of having to hurry.
- Listen carefully to all instructions from the exam administrator. Make sure that you understand the instructions and carry them out correctly. Ask questions at the proper time before the exam begins if you are unsure of any aspect of what you should do during the exam.

## GENERAL EXAM TAKING TIPS

- Use your time carefully. The time limit should provide you with more than enough time if you move through the exam steadily and do not spend too much time on any one question.
- Read the questions and answer choices carefully. Read all of the answer choices before you select an answer.
- If you come to a question that is especially difficult, skip that question and come back to it later if you have time.
- Answer every question. Scores are based on the number of correct answers. You will receive no credit if you leave an answer space blank. It is to your advantage to use your best judgment to make a choice among the answer choices provided.

## PROFESSIONAL SERIES WRITTEN EXAM

The written exam for the Professional Series is based upon a job study that identified the most important knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the job successfully. These areas include:

- your knowledge of concepts related to oral and written communication skills.
- your ability to read, interpret, and apply written information.
- your ability to understand and solve problems.

All of the exam questions are presented in a multiple-choice format. Each question is identified by a question number that is followed by a question statement. After the question statement, there are between two and four answer choices. You should read all of the answer choices and then choose the best answer. **Each question has only one correct answer.**

## EXAM SECTION 1: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

This exam section contains forty (40) questions that evaluate your knowledge and ability in communicating oral and written information. Some questions will be based on review and editing of written sentences and paragraphs and will evaluate your understanding of proper grammar, word usage, punctuation and paragraph organization. Other questions will ask about effective oral communication approaches and techniques.

Examples of these types of questions are shown below. The sample questions are followed by brief explanations of the correct answers.

**Instructions:** Determine whether the sentences below are grammatically correct or incorrect. Read each sentence and then use the answer key below to choose your answer.

### KEY

**A** = The sentence is grammatically **correct**.

**B** = The sentence is grammatically **incorrect**.

The kinds of errors you will find include incomplete sentences, incorrect word usage, inappropriate word forms, and subject-verb disagreements. There are no intentional errors in spelling, punctuation, or capitalization.

1. The management conference room is a convenient sight for the training session.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #1 is response choice "B". This is because it contains an instance of incorrect word usage and, therefore, is grammatically incorrect. The word "sight" is used where the context requires the word "site", a place where a particular event could take place. Typically, detection of this kind of grammatical error simply requires that you attend to the content of what you are reading. Hasty, careless reading can allow you to scan past this kind of grammar mistake.

2. The last step in the evaluation process, including a written analysis of impacts and outcome.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #2 is response choice "B", because it is an incomplete sentence. It does not contain a verb, just a well described subject. The idea or point that the writer started to convey is unfinished. The reader is left without information about what happened or what is true with regard to the "last step in the evaluation process". Detection of this kind of grammatical error requires that you maintain focus on the meaning of what you are reading. Read with the intent to understand the information that is being communicated. Sentences like #2 are just a fragment of a complete sentence and do not convey meaningful information. This is detected by careful reading.

**Instructions:** For the next sample question, you are to organize the sentences to form a logical and cohesive paragraph. Read the four numbered sentences and then select the answer choice that represents the most appropriate and effective ordering of the sentences.

3. Which arrangement of the four sentences below produces the best organized paragraph?
1. The resulting harmony and high employee morale within the organization carries over into its public relations with its external stakeholders.
  2. There is, however, good reason for careful attention to internal communication.
  3. Effective, positive communications with those inside the organization eliminates misunderstandings and makes for fewer disgruntled employees.
  4. In the area of communication, primary attention is usually focused on an organization's relations with the public.
- A. 3, 1, 4, 2  
B. 2, 1, 3, 4  
C. 4, 3, 1, 2  
D. 4, 2, 3, 1

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #3 is response choice "D". The combined theme of the sentences is an organization's potential communication audiences and goals. Therefore, sentence 4, the statement about the typical external focus of many organizations' communication efforts, is the most appropriate and effective sentence with which to introduce the topic. Sentence 2 logically develops the theme by offering internal communication as an additional desirable

emphasis, and sentence 3 explains the beneficial outcomes of effective internal communication. Finally, sentence 1 provides the closing statement that links internal communication back to the external focus at the beginning of the paragraph and points to the relationship between the two. **Instructions:** For sample questions #4 and #5 that follow, select from among the response choices the word that best fits in the blank in each sentence.

4. The project delays persisted \_\_\_\_\_ the first six months of the fiscal year.
- A. threw
  - B. through

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #4 is response choice "B". The context of the sentence indicates that the missing word is referring to a continuation in time to some end point. This is a definition of the word "through". The word "threw" is the past tense of the verb, "throw", which means to have tossed, projected, directed, or cast in a particular direction.

5. The members of the governing board indicated that \_\_\_\_\_ not going to consider the staffing issues until after budget adoption.
- A. their
  - B. there
  - C. they're

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #5 is response choice "C". The context of the sentence indicates that the missing word is referring to a person or persons who will not be taking a particular action until some point in the future. Only choice "C", "they're", meets these requirements. The other choices are the plural possessive pronoun "their" and the adverb "there" and they would make the sentence nonsensical.

**Instructions:** Determine whether the sentence below has correct or incorrect punctuation. Read the sentence and then use the answer key below to choose your answer.

**KEY**

**A** = The sentence contains **correct** punctuation.

**B** = The sentence contains **incorrect** punctuation.

The kinds of errors you will find include omission of punctuation marks and misuse of commas and apostrophes. There are no intentional errors in spelling or grammar.

6. The public contact part of this department's workload has doubled, new positions are to be added.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #4 is response choice "B". There is a punctuation error. A comma has been used between the words "doubled" and "new". This comma should have been a period because it separates two complete sentences that are communicating two specific, different ideas.

7. Which of the following types of questions tends to naturally build rapport by encouraging people to express their opinions and share information?
- A. Yes-no questions.
  - B. Direct questions.
  - C. Open-ended questions.
  - D. General information questions.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #7 is response choice "C". The goal is to create relationships based on common understandings that come from enabling people to comfortably talk about themselves. Open-ended questions encourage people to engage in conversations that include narratives, descriptions, and experiences that allow insights into their values, opinions, and views of the world. The other questions types that are provided as response choices in the sample question, by their nature, will elicit short or narrowly focused responses that can do little to create rapport.

## **EXAM SECTION 2: READING COMPREHENSION**

This exam section contains twenty-five (25) questions that assess your skill in understanding, interpreting, and applying information provided in written form, such as policies, procedures, or correspondence. A good strategy to use for this type of question is to read through the entire reading passage, then read each of the questions, and finally refer back to the passage as you answer each question. When reading each question, determine what information the question is specifically looking for by giving careful consideration to each of the words used to convey meaning. For example, does the question ask about a cause or effect? Does it ask you to identify something that is strongest or weakest? It is important that you select your answer based solely on the information provided. The exam questions are designed to assess your ability to correctly interpret what is provided, not to assess your knowledge of the subject area addressed by the reading passage.

**Instructions:** Use the information below to answer the two (2) question that follow.

### **Sick Leave Credits and Usage**

Sick leave credits shall be earned by regular employees based on the equivalent of full-time service from the date of appointment. Sick leave credit shall accrue on the basis of four and six-tenths hours per biweekly pay period of service, and may be accumulated without limitation.

A regular employee may use sick leave for personal purposes or family purposes, as provided in this section. Personal reasons may include absence from duty when incapacitated from performing duties because of personal illness, injury, dental work, or pregnancy. Sick leave may also be used for absence from duty to donate blood. Such absence shall be scheduled at the discretion of the appointing authority and shall cover the time needed to donate blood, but shall not exceed four hours in any instance. Such use of sick leave shall be approved only upon submission to the appointing authority of an official blood bank receipt reflecting the donation.

Family reasons for the use of sick leave include attendance upon an eligible family member who is incapacitated because of illness or injury and who requires personal care. Such absence shall be limited to the time reasonably required to make other arrangements for such care. Additional family reasons that are covered by sick leave include transportation of an eligible family member to receive medical treatment or surgery and employee attendance during serious medical treatment or surgery performed on an eligible family member. For the purposes of this subsection, an eligible family member is the employee's spouse, child, parent, or grandparent. Additionally, an eligible family member is any other close relative who resides with the employee.

8. If a regular employee's grandmother, who does not live with the employee, needs to be taken to the doctor, will the employee's resultant absence from duty be covered by sick leave?
  - A. No.
  - B. Yes.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #8 is response choice "B". The reading passage clearly states that grandparents are eligible family members and transportation of such family members for medical treatment is covered by sick leave.

9. According to the reading passage, use of sick leave for absence from duty to donate blood shall be approved:
- A. only for the time reasonably required to donate blood.
  - B. for an eligible family member only if that family member resides with the employee.
  - C. only for regular employees who have an accrued sick leave balance in excess of four hours.
  - D. only when an official blood bank receipt showing the donation is submitted to the appointing authority.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #9 is response choice "D". The question asks about the circumstances under which the use of sick leave to cover an absence to donate blood will be approved. While all of the response choices include some language contained in the reading passage, only choice "D" accurately describes the requirements for approval of sick leave for blood donation. The final sentence of the first paragraph states that "Such use of sick leave shall be approved only upon submission to the appointing authority of an official blood bank receipt reflecting the donation."

### **EXAM SECTION 3: PROBLEM SOLVING ABILITY**

This exam section contains thirty-five (35) questions that evaluate your ability to understand and solve problems found in the workplace. This requires skill in evaluating circumstances, identifying information needs, determining effective approaches to problem solution, making computations, and considering alternatives. Some of the exam questions designed to assess these skills are based on information presented in a chart or table. The key to answering all of the questions in this exam section is to make sure that you thoroughly review and understand the information provided.

In addition, when answering questions that involve computations, always check your arithmetic to be sure that you have not made a careless mistake. For example, be sure that you have put a decimal point in the correct place.

10. Last year, a city department's office supply budget was \$10,500. At the end of that year, the department's office supplies had actually cost \$11,340. Which of the following values is closest to the percentage by which the actual cost of office supplies exceeded the budgeted amount?
- A. 6 percent.
  - B. 7 percent.
  - C. 8 percent.
  - D. 9 percent.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #10 is response choice "C". The amount by which the actual cost exceeded the budgeted cost is \$840 (11,340 - 10,500). Therefore, the percentage by which the actual cost exceeded the budgeted amount is 8 percent ( $840 \div 10,500 = 0.08$ ).

**Instructions:** Use the information in the table below to answer the question that follows. The table reports the data for a random sample of 200 job applicants based on how they found out about an employment opportunity.

**Recruitment Sources and Outcomes**

	Applicants	Took Exam	Passed Exam
Source A: HR Office Walk-ins	58	53	40
Source B: Job Fair	41	37	32
Source C: City Website	87	61	46

11. For which of the recruitment sources was the highest percentage of applicants successful in the exam?
- A. Source A.
  - B. Source B.
  - C. Source C.
  - D. Sources A and C had essentially the same success rates.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #11 is response choice "B". This requires computing, for each group, the percentage of applicants who passed the exam. This is done by dividing the number who passed the exam by the number of applicants in that group. In this case, Source A would be  $40/58$ , which rounds to .69 or 69 percent successful; Source B would be  $32/41$ , which rounds to .78 or 78 percent successful; and Source C would be  $46/87$  which rounds to .53 or 53 percent successful.

The best approach for these types of questions is to first review the entire table to see exactly what information is being shown. Next, carefully read each question and pay special attention to key words, such as *at least*, *at least*, "percent", or "average". This will ensure that you are certain what the question is asking you to determine. Then, consider the mathematical operations necessary to use the information provided to arrive at the answer. In this case, it was necessary to compute percentages. Other problems may require computation of sums, averages, or similar basic arithmetic calculations. The key is to remember that this type of information represents relationships between things and you must accurately determine the relationship that is the subject of the problem and then select the correct approach.

### **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE**

If you feel that you would benefit from more practice, your local library or relevant internet web sites may have reference materials that can be helpful. This is true for all of the subject areas covered by the Professional Series written exam.