



**County of Ventura
COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE
Human Resources Department**

Preparing for a Written Examination

The following information will help you better understand the written examination process. It will explain the purpose and function of the written examination and will provide general information to help you practice and prepare.

Purpose of the written examination process:

A written examination is an extension of the application process. Examinations test an applicant to determine if the applicant has the specific knowledge, skill and ability required by the classification. Accordingly, each examination component has been linked to successful performance in the classification by extensive job studies. Pass points on the examination have been set at a level to assure that each individual who passes the examination process has satisfactorily met the minimum requirements of the classification and can perform the duties of the classification satisfactorily.

Function of a written examination:

The basic function of a written examination is to identify the most qualified applicants by assessing an applicant's ability to perform the essential functions of the classification. A monitor is present to ensure that the test is administered and scored in a standardized way.

Preparing for a written examination:

Although you may not know exactly what will be asked of you, how prepared you are for the examination is up to you. Adequate preparation will assist you in identifying the types of review necessary prior to the examination and will help you feel more confident in general.

- Read the job announcement carefully. The job announcement will identify the examination you will be required to take and pass, as well as the weight your examination score will have in determining your final rank on the employment list.
- Read the classification specification (class spec). It will include a description of the classification and a list of the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required. This will help you to identify the subject areas that are likely to be represented in the written examination and the difficulty level of the questions.
- Read your 'Invitation to Test' letter carefully. The letter will not only identify where and when the examination is being held, but the name of the examination, any materials you need to provide on or before the test date and the content areas (areas of assessment) on the examination.
- If you require special testing arrangements, such as a reader or interpreter, you must contact Human Resources prior to the examination date and complete the necessary written request. The County will attempt to meet reasonable accommodation requests whenever possible.

General information for a written examination:

The difficulty level of the examination questions depends on the level of the job and the specific duties of the position. Examination questions for entry-level positions typically focus more on general skill and ability areas than on job-specific knowledge areas that you would likely have to acquire through job experience. Examination questions for journey-level, specialized or entry-level positions with unique duties typically focus more on situational questions and specific knowledge that is related to the position as identified on the class spec. Though not all inclusive, here are some examples of areas on which you may be assessed:

- Customer Service Skills: Phone etiquette and situational questions.
- Understanding Oral Information: Remembering and applying orally communicated information/directions.
- Interpersonal Communication Skills: Situational questions.
- Bookkeeping Practices/Accounting Problems: Vocabulary, situational questions and data calculations.
- Office Skills: Alphabetizing, filing, following procedures and numbering systems.
- Mathematical/Statistical Ability: Data calculations and vocabulary.
- Written Communication Skills: Vocabulary, grammar, identifying words with similar/different meaning, spelling and proper correspondence format.
- Reasoning/Analytical Ability: Data calculations, analyzing written material and applying procedures/policies.
- Reading and Understanding Written Materials: Applying written information and procedures and vocabulary.

On the day of the examination:

- Get plenty of sleep the night before and eat a good breakfast/lunch.
- If you are not sure where the examination site is, take a drive to the site before the examination date.
- On the day of the examination, you should allocate adequate time based on your invitation letter to spend at the examination site. Most examinations allow up to two hours for the examination, which does not include signing in, receiving the booklets and hearing the instructions.
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before your scheduled examination to allow time for traffic, parking and check-in.
- Have proper identification (driving license, photo identification, etc.) as indicated on your invitation letter, as well as anything else you have been advised to bring.
- Typical dress for an examination is business casual, with the exception of examinations which include a physical component. Wear comfortable clothes; jeans and a clean shirt are perfectly acceptable. While you will not be assessed on your attire, very casual dress, such as wearing shorts and flip-flops is not appropriate. You will want to minimize the use of cologne/perfume, as some applicants will be distracted or even allergic.
- Do not bring family or friends to the examination site.
- After entering the examination site, take a seat in the assigned area. You will receive further instructions from the proctor. Now is a good time to take one last look at any notes you have made in preparation for the examination.
- Turn off any portable audio or video devices (cell phones, pagers, etc.) prior to the start of the examination, and place them out of visual sight. Additionally, you should refrain from making or receiving phone calls while you are waiting for the examination, as this could disturb other applicants who are also waiting.

During the examination

- The examination itself can last anywhere from 90 minutes to 3 hours, or as indicated on your invitation letter. Applicants are given the same amount of time for the examination; however some applicants may not use all of their allotted time. Whether or not you use all of the allotted time is not a reflection on your examination skills or how well you scored. If the examination instructions allow, applicants are encouraged to use the entire allotted time period to complete the examination and review their answers.

After the examination:

- Because the examination process is competitive, all examination content must remain confidential. You will not be able to take notes during the examination and you must not

discuss any of the content of the examination with anyone. If you are found to have discussed content related to the examination, you will not only put yourself at a disadvantage by helping other applicants to score higher than you, but you may also be disqualified from participating in this and any future examination.

- You will receive written notification of your examination results within 2-3 weeks of your examination date.

Tips for taking written examinations:

- Practice answering questions in the identified areas. Sample examinations may be available on the World Wide Web or at your local library in the form of study guides and/or Civil Service Examinations. Applicants often find it helpful to simulate the environment they will face at the written examination when reviewing these practice examinations.
- Read each question carefully and make sure you understand exactly what is being asked. Examination proctors cannot interpret questions for you, but they can make a note of issues on the examination and will report those concerns.
- Always read all the possible choices before selecting your answer.
- Pay particular attention to key words, directional words, and multiple parts of questions.
- Do not spend too much time on any one question. You have a limited amount of time for the examination and/or a specific section. Monitor how much time you have left as you answer the questions and make sure that you answer each of the questions on the examination if you are in danger of running out of time.
- The majority of examinations offered by the County of Ventura do not have a penalty for guessing. Unless the proctor has specifically advised you that there is a penalty, do not leave an answer blank. If you are not sure of the answer to a problem, eliminate the answers you believe are wrong and mark the choice that is your best response.
- Remember that each question is a fresh start. Let the previous questions go. If you absolutely must revisit a previous question, do so only at the end of the examination. Otherwise, you risk focusing on one question at the expense of the rest of the examination.
- There are no trick questions.
- Interpret words according to their generally accepted meanings.
- Check carefully that you are answering each question in the appropriate section on the answer sheet. You may wish to compare the item number and answer number after every 10th question to make sure you do not get off track.
- Relax and work steadily.