



**Department of
Civil Service**

A Guide to the Written Test

for the

Secretary 1 and 2 Series

Includes the following examinations:

37-923 Secretary 1

38-024 Secretary 1 (Spanish Language)

37-924 Secretary 2

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction: The New York State Department of Civil Service has developed this Test Guide to familiarize you with the written tests for the **Secretary 1** and **Secretary 2** Examination Series. The information presented in this Test Guide may help you in preparing to take an examination in this examination series.

What is an examination series: An examination series is a group of examinations that are held on the same date and that use the same test booklet(s). An examination series may contain just a few examinations or several hundred. The examinations in an examination series are usually in related occupational areas.

Determining the Subject Areas in your examination(s): To determine the subject areas that are included on your examination, you should refer to the examination announcement for the particular examination you are taking. On the announcement, the subject areas are listed under the heading: "Subjects of Examination."

Using the Candidate Directions provided at the test site: At the test site, you will be given a set of Candidate Directions. Read the directions very carefully so that you correctly identify the sets of questions you need to answer for the examinations you are taking. Any set of questions that is part of more than one of your examinations only needs to be answered once. You will get credit for those questions on all your examinations in which they appear.

Test question format: All the test questions used in the Secretary 1 and 2 examination series are multiple-choice questions.

Subject area information: This Test Guide provides a detailed description of the subject areas in this examination series. This includes an explanation of how questions will be presented and how to correctly answer them.

Sample questions: This Test Guide provides at least one sample question for each of the subject areas in this examination series. The sample questions are similar to what will be presented in the test booklet. This Test Guide provides the solution and correct/best answer for each sample question presented. You should study these carefully in order to understand how the correct or best answers were determined.

Test Security: Please read the brief discussion on Test Security provided at the end of this Test Guide. It provides an explanation of the test taker's obligations and responsibilities.

Tips for Taking the Test: Page 15 of this Test Guide provides some tips on how to prepare for and take a NYS Civil Service test.

LIST OF SUBJECT AREAS

1. **GRAMMAR, USAGE, PUNCTUATION, AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE:** 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. Each question contains four sentences. You must choose the one sentence that contains a grammatical, usage, or punctuation error (the sentence which is INCORRECT). The sentence structure questions test for the ability to recognize sentences that are CORRECTLY constructed.
2. **OFFICE PRACTICES:** These questions test for a knowledge of generally agreed-upon practices governing the handling of situations which typists, stenographers, secretaries, and office assistants encounter in their work, as well as a knowledge of efficient and effective methods used to accomplish office tasks. The questions 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.
3. **OFFICE RECORD KEEPING:** These questions test your 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 the organization or collation of data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completion of a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages and percents. **You should bring with you a hand-held battery- or solar-powered calculator for use on this test.** You will **not** be permitted to use the **calculator** function of your **cell phone**.
4. **PREPARING WRITTEN MATERIAL:** These questions test for the ability to present information clearly and accurately, and to organize paragraphs logically and comprehensibly. For some questions, you will be given information in two or three sentences followed by four restatements of the information. You must then choose the best version. For other questions, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order. You must then choose, from four suggestions, the best order for the sentences.

SUBJECT AREA 1

GRAMMAR, USAGE, PUNCTUATION, and SENTENCE STRUCTURE: 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. Each question contains four sentences. You must choose the one sentence that contains a grammatical, usage, or punctuation error (the sentence which is INCORRECT). The sentence structure questions test for the ability to recognize sentences that are CORRECTLY constructed.

TEST TASK: This subject area will consist of 15 questions. For each of the grammar, usage, and punctuation questions, 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. For each of the sentence structure questions you will be given four sentences, only one of which is correctly constructed. You must determine which one of the four sentences is correctly constructed.

Grammar questions will include four sentences, one of which will contain an error in grammar. 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.

Usage questions will include four sentences, one of which 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.

The punctuation questions will include errors in the use of commas, semicolons, colons, question marks, and quotation marks.

The sentence structure questions will include 4 sentences, 3 of which are incorrectly constructed, and one that is correctly constructed.

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 Choice 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

SUBJECT AREA 1 (CONTINUED)

the subject of this sentence, so "are" should be the verb.) **Since sentence B is grammatically INCORRECT as presented, B is 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 2

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 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 15 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 correct answer to this sample question is Choice 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 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.*

SUBJECT AREA 3

OFFICE RECORD KEEPING: *These questions test your 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 the organization or collation of data from several sources; scheduling; maintaining a record system using running balances; or completion of a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages and percents. **You should bring with you a hand-held battery- or solar-powered calculator for use on this test.** You will not be permitted to use the **calculator** function of your **cell phone**.*

TEST TASKS: The test consists of two or more "sets" of questions. Each set involves a different type of problem. Some examples of typical record keeping problems are:

- the organization or collation of data from several sources
- scheduling
- maintaining a record system using running balances
- completion of a table summarizing data using totals, subtotals, averages and percents.

NOTE: Only one type of problem set is presented in this test guide for this subject area. The actual test may or may not have a set of this type. It will certainly have at least one set involving a different type of problem.

On the following pages are two tables, three sample questions based on the tables, and the solutions to the questions. Please look at the tables, and read both the questions and the solutions carefully.

- After each of the sample questions are four choices: for most questions, three choices are numbers and one choice is the statement, "none of the above." For these questions, once you have completed your computations, select either the choice which is the same as your answer, or, if no choice matches your answer, select "none of the above."
- Some questions have numbers for all four choices. If none of the choices matches your calculation, you have made an error, and you should recheck your work.

There will be a total of 15 questions in this subject area on the test.

DIRECTIONS FOR SAMPLE QUESTIONS: Base your answers to the next three sample questions on the table, "Summary Report of Business Expenses for 2009." Complete as much of the report as you need to answer the sample questions. Use the information given in the summary report itself and in the table, "Report of Business Expenses, 3rd and 4th Quarters." Both tables are shown on the following page.

SUBJECT AREA 3 (CONTINUED)

REPORT OF BUSINESS EXPENSES 3rd AND 4th QUARTERS (26 weeks)				
	3rd Quarter		4th Quarter	
	2009	2008	2009	2008
Payroll Expenses	\$55,900	\$47,800	\$72,700	\$65,100
Rental Expenses	22,500	18,900	22,500	18,900
Equipment Expenses				
New Equipment	705	375	5,575	675
Maintenance/Repair	2,860	3,000	3,140	3,400
Utility Expenses				
Electricity	4,850	4,630	4,590	4,450
Heat	130	270	440	410
Employee Benefit Expenses	18,450	15,850	24,100	21,550
Employee contributions*	*2,500	*2,200	*3,350	*3,040
Total Net Business Expenses*		\$88,625		\$111,445
*NOTE: Employee Contributions are subtracted from business expenses to obtain Total Net Business Expenses.				

SUMMARY REPORT OF BUSINESS EXPENSES FOR 2009							
	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	1st Half	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	2nd Half	Total for Year
Payroll Expenses	\$81,800	\$69,300	\$151,100			R	
Rental Expenses	22,500	22,500	45,000				
Equipment Expenses	5,235	3,545	8,780				S
Utility Expenses	6,675	5,125	11,800				
Employee Benefit Expenses	26,900	22,900	49,800				
Employee contributions*	*3,750	*3,200	*6,950				
Total Net Business Expenses* for 2009	139,360	120,170	259,530				
Total Net Business Expenses* for 2008			\$231,780			\$200,070	
% Change **			V				
*NOTE: Employee Contributions are subtracted from business expenses to obtain Total Net Business Expenses.							
**NOTE: % Change is the % of increase in Total Net Business Expenses from 2008 to 2009.							

SUBJECT AREA 3 (CONTINUED)

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 this sample question is Choice B.

SOLUTION: *To answer this question correctly you must calculate the value of **R** (the Payroll Expenses for the 2nd half of 2009).*

- *The Payroll Expenses for the 3rd and 4th Quarters are shown in the table, “Report of Business Expenses 3rd and 4th Quarters.” (Be careful to use the amounts for 2009, and not the amounts for 2008).*
- *You must add the Payroll Expenses for the 3rd Quarter of 2009 (\$55,900) to the Payroll Expenses for the 4th Quarter of 2009 (\$72,700).*
- *The result is \$128,600.*

SUBJECT AREA 3 (CONTINUED)

SAMPLE QUESTION 2:

What is the value of **S**?

- A. \$ 8,780
- B. \$15,060
- C. \$16,230
- D. none of the above

The correct answer to this sample question is Choice D.

SOLUTION: *To answer this question correctly you must calculate the value of **S** (the total Equipment Expenses for the year 2009).*

- *You need to understand that Equipment Expenses are expenses for both New Equipment and for Maintenance/Repair.*
- *The Equipment Expenses for the 3rd and 4th Quarters are shown in the table, "Report of Business Expenses 3rd and 4th Quarters." (Again, be careful to use the amounts for 2009, and not the amounts for 2008.)*
- *You must add Equipment Expenses for the 3rd Quarter of 2009 (\$705 + \$2,860) to Equipment Expenses for the 4th Quarter of 2009 (\$5,575 + \$3,140) in order to calculate Equipment Expenses for the 2nd half of 2009.*
- *$\$705 + \$2,860 + \$5,575 + \$3,140 = \$12,280$.*
- *You must then add Equipment Expenses for the 2nd half of 2009 to Equipment Expenses for the 1st half of 2009, in order to calculate Equipment Expenses for the whole year.*
- *Equipment Expenses for the 1st half of 2009 are shown in the table, "Summary Report of Business Expenses for 2009."*
- *$\$12,280 + 8,780 = \$21,060$. This is the value of **S**, the total Equipment Expenses for the year 2009.*

SUBJECT AREA 3 (CONTINUED)

SAMPLE QUESTION 3:

Which one of the following is closest to the value of **V**?

- A. 10%
- B. 11%
- C. 12%
- D. 28%

The correct answer to this sample question is Choice C.

SOLUTION: To answer this question correctly you must calculate the value of **V** (the percent change in Total Net Business Expenses from the 1st half of 2008 to the 1st half of 2009).

- You must first calculate the amount of change in Total Net Business Expenses from the 1st half of 2008 to the 1st half of 2009.
- Subtract the Total Net Business Expenses for the 1st half of 2008 (\$231,780) from the Total Net Business Expenses for the 1st half of 2009 (\$259,530).
- The result is \$27,750.
- You must then calculate the percent change from the 1st half of 2008 to the 1st half of 2009. Since the percent change is from the 1st half of 2008, the basis of the comparison is the Total Net Business Expenses for the 1st half of 2008.
- Divide the amount of the change by the Total Net Business Expenses for the 1st half of 2008.
- $\$27,750 \text{ divided by } \$231,780 = .119726, \text{ or } 11.9726\%$
- This is closest to 12%.

SUBJECT AREA 4

PREPARING WRITTEN MATERIAL: These questions test for the ability to present information clearly and accurately, and to organize paragraphs logically and comprehensibly. For some questions, you will be given information in two or three sentences followed by four restatements of the information. You must then choose the best version. For other questions, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order. You must then choose, from four suggestions, the best order for the sentences.

TEST TASK: There are two separate test tasks in this subject area.

For the first, **Information Presentation**, you will be given information in two or three sentences, followed by four restatements of the information. You must then choose the best version. There will be ten Information Presentation questions on the written test.

For the second, **Paragraph Organization**, you will be given paragraphs with their sentences out of order, and then be asked to choose, from among four suggestions, the best order for the sentences. There will be five Paragraph Organization questions on the written test.

INFORMATION PRESENTATION SAMPLE QUESTION:

Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions. His failure to take proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

Which one of the following best presents the information above?

- A. Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions that caused a personal injury accident.
- B. Proper precautions, which Martin Wilson failed to take, caused a personal injury accident.
- C. Martin Wilson's failure to take proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.
- D. Martin Wilson, who failed to take proper precautions, was in a personal injury accident.

The correct answer to this sample question is Choice C.

SOLUTION:

Choice A conveys the incorrect impression that proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

Choice B conveys the incorrect impression that proper precautions caused a personal injury accident.

Choice C best presents the original information: Martin Wilson failed to take proper precautions, and this failure caused a personal injury accident.

Choice D states that Martin Wilson was in a personal injury accident. The original information states that Martin Wilson caused a personal injury accident, but it does not state that Martin Wilson was in a personal injury accident.

SUBJECT AREA 4 (CONTINUED)

PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION SAMPLE QUESTION:

The following question is based upon a group of sentences. The sentences are shown out of sequence, but when correctly arranged, they form a connected, well-organized paragraph. Read the sentences, and then answer the question about the best arrangement of these sentences.

1. Eventually, they piece all of this information together and make a choice.
2. Before actually deciding upon a human services job, people usually think about several possibilities.
3. They imagine themselves in different situations, and in so doing, they probably think about their interests, goals, and abilities.
4. Choosing among occupations in the field of human services is an important decision to make.

Which one of the following is the best arrangement of these sentences?

- A. 2-4-1-3
- B. 2-3-4-1
- C. 4-2-1-3
- D. 4-2-3-1

The correct answer to this sample question is Choice D.

SOLUTION:

Choices A and C present the information in the paragraph out of logical sequence. In both **A** and **C**, sentence 1 comes before sentence 3. The key element in the organization of this paragraph is that sentence 3 contains the information to which sentence 1 refers; therefore, in logical sequence, sentence 3 should come before sentence 1.

Choice B also presents the information in the paragraph out of logical sequence. Choice **B** places sentence 4 in between sentence 1 and sentence 3, thereby interrupting the logical sequence of the information in the paragraph.

Choice D presents the information in the paragraph in the best logical sequence. Sentence 4 introduces the main idea of the paragraph: "choosing an occupation in the field of human services." Sentences 2-3-1 then follow up on this idea by describing, in order, the steps involved in making such a choice. Choice **D** is the best answer to this sample question.

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.
- Candidates who violate test security 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.
- You should not discuss the questions and answers, even in general terms, after you take the test.
- You should be careful that you do not inadvertently violate test security and put yourself at risk.

TIPS FOR TAKING THE TEST

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 *Test 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, 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, including the test room, hallways, restrooms, building, grounds, and parking lots, could result in your disqualification.

During the test:

- Read and follow all instructions 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.

For more information about written tests, go to:

<http://www.cs.ny.gov/testing/statetestguides.cfm>

This webpage contains links to test guides for a variety of examinations and to the two general test guides listed below:

- *A General Guide to Written Tests*
- *How to Take a Written Test*

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN TESTING

It is the policy of the Department of Civil Service, in accordance with the New York State Human Rights Law and the Americans with Disabilities Act, to provide qualified persons with disabilities equal employment opportunity and equal opportunity to participate in and receive the benefits, services, programs, and activities of the Department. It is the policy of the Department to provide such persons reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications as are necessary to provide equal opportunity. Persons with disabilities who require an accommodation to participate in an examination must note this on their application. Further information is available from the Test Administration Unit of the Department of Civil Service. In the Albany area, call 518-457-2487. Outside of the Albany area, call toll free at 1-877-697-5627. For TDD services, call NY Relay at 711 (requires a fee) or 1-800-662-1220.

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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