



Guide to Calm and Effective Preparation for NYS Exams for Teacher Certification

Educating All Students (EAS) Exam

Content Specialty Test (CST)

Introduction

*Know the test,
Know yourself,
Know your resources*



My goal in creating each Watson Guide is to offer advice that leads to calm, effective endeavor. I've worked with many students as they prepared for exams of one sort or another, and I've worked with many writers to help them improve their craft.

I wish you all the best as you work towards your goals.

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Know the Test, Know Yourself, & Know Your Resources

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

This first step doesn't need to be the first thing you do; if you are anxious to get started on actual test review, jump to 2. But READ this step now before you move on to what might seem like more practical things. It is CRUCIAL that you do it - that's why I am putting it here as the first item on your list.

1. Locate the **certification resources** that are available through your institution. Find out who your certification officer is (you could look at your institution's website, or maybe more easily find out by asking an education professor or a secretary in an education department), stop in at the Certification office (which may be called something else), say hello to the secretary, and pick up any flyers/brochures the office might have about the exams. The people in this office should be good people to ask, if you don't already know, if there is someone on campus who offers workshops, etc. If the Certification office has a website, bookmark it and put it on your calendar to check back every month.

KNOW THE TESTS

CREATE YOUR OWN STUDY GUIDES

If you follow these directions you'll be downloading files from the web and printing parts of those files out to work with, therefore:

1. Gather these items:

- ⇒ Something to write with
- ⇒ A stack of index cards
- ⇒ Either: a) A 3-ring binder for each test you need to take and a hole punch *OR*
b) Pocket-folders for each test you need to take and a stapler

Which you choose, a or b, depends on how you like to work. Either is fine.



2. Create a folder or folders on your computer to use to store the information you download.

(What to download? that's coming up.) I don't mind opening folders to get to the folders inside, so I have a folder on my desktop titled NYSTCE and inside that folder I have other folders for each guide. Create the folder system that will work for you.

Remember:

If you have ANY doubt about which test you need to take, contact the *certification officer* at your institution. If you don't know who that is, go back to Step 1.

If you haven't taken any of the exams yet for Initial Certification, you'll be downloading at least two exam guides:

EAS and CST

EAS = Educating All Students

CST* = Content Specialty Test

(* For those taking a Multi-subject CST, it is actually 3 separate exams: 2 exams unique to the certification area, and one exam that currently is used for all multi-subject certifications. The areas for multi-subject certification are: Birth through Grade 2, Grade 1-6, Grade 5-9, and Grade 7-12.

Therefore, if you are seeking multi-subject certification in one of these four areas, you will take three exams for your CST. If you are seeking certification in an additional certification area, you will also take the two multi-subject exams unique to that additional area. This is a simplified overview - you should seek the help of your certification officer to be sure of which exams you need to take for your desired certification areas.)

3. Locate the NYS website that has the links to downloadable guides.

Here's an address that works right now: http://www.nystce.nesinc.com/NY_viewSG_opener.asp

If that doesn't get you to a NYSTCE page with links to each exam guide, try this search string:

"NYSTCE study guides" Look for nystce in the address.

4. On that page, locate the link to the guides for the exams you have not yet taken. You'll notice that the EAS (Educating All Students) is near the top of the page: *This is the exam everyone seeking initial certification in NYS needs to take.* That's why it's near the top of the page.



Besides the EAS exam, you will also need to take the content specialty test (CST) for your certification area.

(Note: If you have a concentration as part of your *elementary-level* program, you DO NOT have to take the exam for that area *unless you hope to be certified* specifically in that area - check with your certification officer if you have questions.)

5. Download all the descriptions of content/skills for the exams you will need to take.

Revised exams (such as the EAS): you'll see "Test Frameworks" at the top left corner (an Adobe file) and beneath that, Introduction and Sample questions.

Unrevised exam, you'll see the raised arm of the Statue of Liberty on the cover.

6. Print out what you need.

Q. What will you need?

A. For the newer exams you might consider just printing out the Test Frameworks.

I recommend that students do print them out for the EAS and for each CST exam, even though the frameworks run to several pages. The frameworks offer a listing of what is on the exam - *the material (or content) you will be tested on*.

One of the most frequent things I hear students say about the exams is that “You never know what is going to be on them – it could be anything.” That is simply not true: the test frameworks tell you all the possible content that will be covered. You don’t know in advance what parts of that whole will be covered, but that is a long way from “anything.” Solution? Study it all.

Besides content, an advantage of getting to know the frameworks is that they are written in the language of NYS educators, and that is the language you need to be comfortable with. By “comfortable” I mean that you need to be able to read that language with understanding and to use it correctly in your own writing. For everyone seeking NYS certification, whether you are hoping to work in NYS or not - for instance Canadians and others who are seeking NYS certification in order to earn their Canadian or other certification - you will want, for purposes of the exams at least, to understand, and speak (write in) the language of NYS educators.



7. Getting started with the guides you created:

EAS and CST: Start by taking a look at the overview of what content is on the exam.

Where to find that overview?

Revised Exams: Look for a chart on the first page of the pdf guide (after the cover). Titled "Test Design," it lists the content and what you'll need to do to prove that you know that content.

Older CST Exams: Look for a pie chart on page 6.

What to look for?

Notice that for the EAS exam

That while 5 areas of knowledge (competencies) are listed, for 3 of them you will answer what NYS calls “selected response” questions – you might recognize these as “multiple choice” questions - *and* write a response. NYS calls the written response a “constructed response.” One of these three areas is "Diverse Student Populations." For 2 areas you will only be tested through selected response. One of these two areas is "School-Home Relationships."

Notice that for the older CST exams

You will see subareas listed. For all of these subareas you will answer multiple choice questions. For one subarea you will also write one response. The subareas are organized so that the last one on the list is the one you for which you will need to write a response. If you want to read the task for the written response and see the samples, you will find that information at the end of the pdf.

Notice that for the Multi-subject CST, Part three,

You will only answer selected response questions.

Also – each grade level for those seeking Multi-subject certification (for example, B-2, 1-6), uses the same MS CST Part 3. You just need to pass it once.

This kind of noticing is what you should be doing as you look over the guides.

8. Using questions as a learning tool:

It helps to look over the guides with *questions* in mind. Here are two good ones to keep in mind as you review the study guides:

What Do I Need to Know?
How Am I Supposed to Prove I Know It?

For those of you will go on to prepare your own students for exams (and if you teach in NYS, that will be most of you), these questions are good ones to ask of any test *your* students will take. (Except of course you'll be wondering – what do they need to know, how are they supposed to prove it?)

The NYSTCE Frameworks hold the answer to the question of *what* you need to know.

To *prove* what you know, you'll a) answer multiple choice questions - called "selected response" and b) *write an answer that addresses a specific task - called "constructed response."

(* There's always an exception, and here it is: the MS CST Part 3 has only selected response questions – all others require a written response as well.)

As you look over what will be tested

Notice that the EAS and CST exams will require that you have taken course work* and worked hard** to learn the content.

* Don't expect your course work to have covered all test content. College-level work is not geared to 'teach-to-the-test.' For instance, check out the math you'll need to prove you know on the MS-CST Part 2: That's high school level math. Many colleges are going to expect you to either already know that math or expect you to work on your own to master it. If math is a weak point for you at this point, expect to work very hard *over time* to master the material.

** The EAS practice questions might look deceptively simple - Don't be lulled into thinking any of these exams will be easy for someone who has not worked hard to acquire the vocabulary and knowledge of the profession.



KNOW YOURSELF

Get that stack of Index Cards. Get something to write with. Settle down with either your EAS notebook (or folder) or a CST notebook (or folder).

When you find a word you need to study, create an index card: the word on one side, and definition and sample sentence on the other side of the card

Turn to the Frameworks. Read one description of what you need to know. Do you know every word in the description? Can you easily use each word in your own writing? Which seem to be key words? Can you spell all these key words*?

Develop a system of annotating (marking up) your guide. Perhaps you'll use a solid underline for key terms. Perhaps you'll put a wavy line under words you are not certain about - or you might circle them.

For any words you don't know, start an index card. For any word that you recognize but can't easily define, start an index card.

Start an Index Card = word on one side of the card, the definition on the other side

On approach: You might work for 10 minutes and just record the words you need to study, one to a card, and then work on getting down definitions.

For any word you can't spell - start a list of spelling words, add it to it. And make a point of studying them. Trust me, when you are composing your written response on a certification exam, you'll want to know how to spell words such as: consonant, strategy, knowledge, alternative, procedure . . . and it will be nice to know if NYS spells it "research based" or "research-based."

If spelling isn't your strength, you don't need to despair, but you should be working on key words in the profession. And once you get to know the EAS and CST exams really well, you'll have a better idea of which words you are likely to use in your written responses.

A little bit of reading these descriptions goes a long way - I strongly suggest you work for 10 - 15 minutes a couple of times a day to do this activity, rather than trying to plow through a big chunk of it in a half hour. The idea is to be giving these descriptions some thought - and questions are a great trigger for thought. Make up your own questions that will keep you engaged and curious.

9. Here's a starter kit of questions to help you tap into your prior knowledge:

What does this remind me of?

A class or classes I have taken (and write the name of the class down in the margin)?

Books or videos I have used or seen that covered this topic or concept?

An activity I did in a class or placement?

How familiar are these concepts?

How familiar are these words (in their professional context)?

Be sure to jot down notes - it will help you stay engaged

Be sure to move slowly - thought requires time

Be sure to quit reviewing the descriptions well before you are so bored
you don't know whether you are going to fall asleep or run screaming from the room

10. One more message from the author of this guide:

This guide is meant to help you get a *start* on your preparations for the exams.

It is no substitute for visiting your certification office or for talking with faculty about the exams and when to take them and what your campus offers to support you as you prepare. - not just for the exams, but for the profession.

Some students get caught up in the wasted time of complaining about the exams. If you can effectively advocate for better testing practices, do it. But as you prepare yourself for *whatever* is the current professional exam, keep in mind:

Every bit of work you do analyzing these teacher certification exams in order to prepare to pass them can be time you spend reinforcing the teacherly practice of asking yourself - when you have your own classroom and are testing your own students - just **what** you are assessing and **how** are you going to assess it. Your work as a student – every struggle, every triumph – can help you develop as a teacher.

Do you have questions? Comments? Suggestions? I would love to hear from you. Stop in at my website at AWatsonGuide.com and send me a message - Eudora