

## How to Take Standardized Tests – A Tip Sheet

### Getting Ready for the Test

1. **Mark it on your calendar.** When you know the test date, put it down on your calendar and figure out the number of days you must study.
2. **Test yourself.** As soon as possible, take a practice test to find out what you know and what you need to study. Take a practice test that's similar to the one you'll be taking.
3. **Work on your weak areas.** Review the domains where you tested the lowest. If certain types of questions give you problems, focus on understanding them better. Create a ranking of your problem areas so you can work through them.
4. **Make a daily study commitment.** Block off some time each day to study, ideally at the same time each day. Use the materials on the reference list from which all the test items were derived.
5. **Understand the test format.** Becoming comfortable with the style of questions will help you to do better, even if the questions are different from the ones you study.
6. **Take more periodic practice tests to check your progress.** Change your study schedule if needed.
7. **If you have a disability of any kind, remember to inform your certification board of this ahead of time so accommodations can be arranged.**
8. **Bring identification to the testing site and get there early.** Remember to bring a driver's license or another form of a picture identification to the testing site. You will not be admitted without this. Nor will you be admitted if you are late.
9. **Get a good night's sleep and eat well before the test.** Studies show that you need good nutrition and a good night's sleep to concentrate and perform your best.

### Become Familiar with Test-taking Techniques.

Going into a test with a good knowledge of basic test-taking techniques will help a learner to do his best. Much has been written on good techniques; here is a sampling of the most often repeated advice:

#### **Listen to and read all directions very carefully.**

One of the most critical rules for adult learners is to listen carefully to the test directions: How much time is available? How will the test be scored? Does the

test administrator have any special instructions? Knowing available time allows adult learners to apportion their time so that they don't need to rush to finish at the end. Knowing about scoring also helps with time use. Concerning special instructions, adult learners must remember to listen carefully: the instructions might include information about whether or not materials can be brought in or a snack or water can be brought in, and so on.

### **Use your time wisely.**

Since the test is made up of multiple-choice questions, work on the questions in order and don't spend too much time on any one question. Skipping around the test and doing a question here and there is not a good strategy because valuable time is wasted and might lead to errors.

### **Understand a question before answering it.**

With multiple-choice questions, adult learners must read the questions carefully prior to answering. One of the most common mistakes is not answering the question that is actually being asked. Negative words in the "question stem" can be especially confusing. When in doubt, adult learners should eliminate choices that they know to be wrong, and then choose an answer, at random if necessary, from the remaining choices. Their partial knowledge will be rewarded with such a test-taking strategy.

### **Review the choices.**

Here are a few additional tips for multiple-choice questions: (1) Read the question stem, try to think of an answer, and then look for it among the available answer choices. If that doesn't work, at least eliminate the choices that appear to be wrong prior to guessing an answer. (2) If the answer choices are numbers or dates, middle choices are often correct. Note also that more general answers among the answer choices are more likely to be correct.

### **Answer easy questions first.**

Doing this can jog your memory about useful facts. You may also come across information that can help you with other questions.

**Answer every question.** Unless there is a penalty for wrong answers, it is best to answer every question. On the IC&RC exams, there is no penalty for wrong answers, learners would be wise to answer all questions, so when time is about to run out, consider trying to guess at any remaining answers.

### **Identify key words.**

This helps you focus on the main idea of challenging questions.

### **Rephrase difficult questions.**

To understand questions better, you may want to rephrase them in your own words before answering. Be careful not to change the meaning.

**Review your work.**

It's important to remember to review your answers. We all tend to breathe a sigh of relief when the last question has been completed, but adult learners who leave a test with time still available are missing an opportunity to improve their scores. The test is not over until the time is up, or at least until every answer has been checked.

**Stay as calm as you can.**

Above all, adult learners should stay calm and simply do the best job they can with the time available. Staying calm will make you more efficient while you are answering. Use a few deep breathing exercises to help you do this.

Prepared by Sandra Puerini Del Sesto, M.Ed, ACPS,