

NEW YORK STATE
TEACHER
CERTIFICATION
EXAMINATIONS™



**PREPARATION
GUIDE**

**Assessment of
Teaching Assistant
Skills (ATAS)
(95)**

The University of the State of New York • NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT • Office of Teaching Initiatives, Albany, New York 12234

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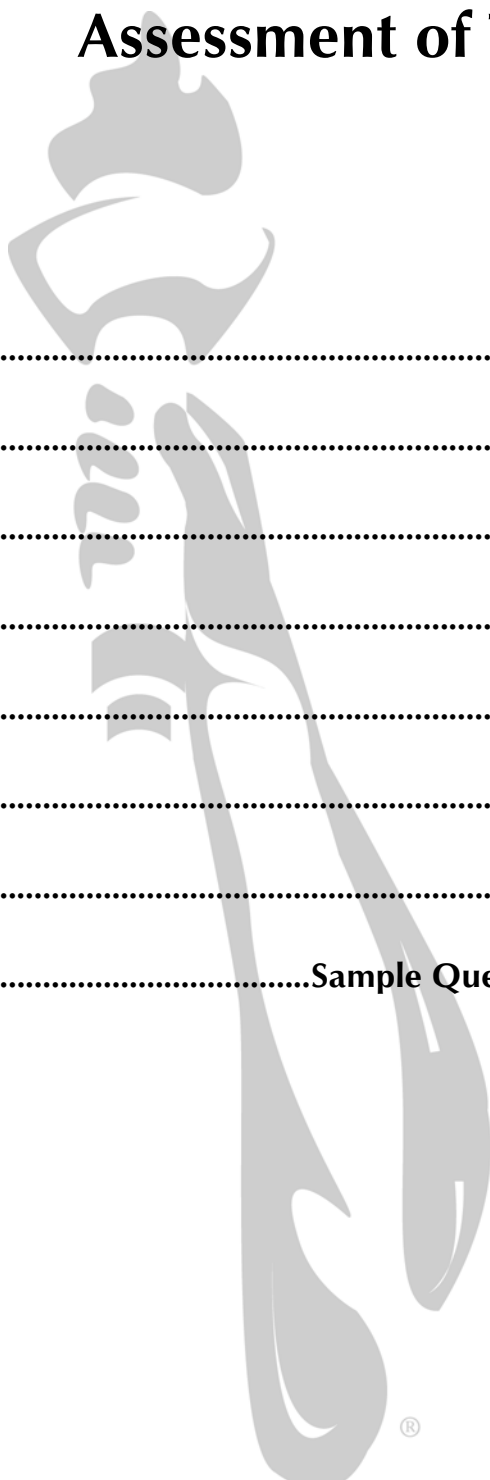
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PREPARATION GUIDE Assessment of Teaching Assistant Skills (ATAS) (95)

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■ INTRODUCTION

Purpose of This Preparation Guide

This preparation guide is designed to help familiarize candidates with the content and format of a test for the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations (NYSTCE®) program. Educators may also find the information in this guide useful as they discuss the test with candidates.

This preparation guide illustrates some of the types of questions that appear on a test; however, the set of sample questions provided in this preparation guide does not necessarily define the content or difficulty of an entire actual test. All test components (e.g., directions, question content and formats) may differ from those presented here. The NYSTCE program is subject to change at the sole discretion of the New York State Education Department.

Organization of This Preparation Guide

Contained in the beginning sections of this preparation guide are general information about the NYSTCE program and how the tests were developed, a description of the organization of test content, and strategies for taking the test.

Following these general information sections, specific information about the test described in this guide is presented. The test objectives appear on the pages following the test-specific overview. The objectives define the content of the test.

Next, information about the questions on the ATAS is presented, including sample test directions. Sample questions are also presented, with the correct responses indicated and explanations of why the responses are correct.

For Further Information

If you have questions after reading this preparation guide, you may wish to consult the NYSTCE Registration Bulletin. You can view or print the registration bulletin online at www.nystce.nesinc.com.

■ GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE NYSTCE

How Were the NYSTCE Tests Developed?

The New York State Teacher Certification Examinations are criterion referenced and objective based. A criterion-referenced test is designed to measure a candidate's knowledge and skills in relation to an established standard rather than in relation to the performance of other candidates. The explicit purpose of these tests is to help identify for certification those candidates who have demonstrated the appropriate level of knowledge and skills that are important for performing the responsibilities of an educator in New York State public schools.

Each test is designed to measure areas of knowledge called subareas. Within each subarea, statements of important knowledge and skills, called objectives, define the content of the test. The test objectives were developed for the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations in conjunction with committees of New York State educators.

Test questions matched to the objectives were developed using, in part, textbooks, New York State learning standards and curriculum guides, and certification standards. The test questions were developed in consultation with a committee of New York State educators and other content and assessment specialists.

An individual's performance on a test is evaluated against an established standard. The passing score for each test is established by the New York State Commissioner of Education based on the professional judgments and recommendations of New York State educators. Examinees who do not pass a test may retake it at any of the subsequently scheduled test administrations.

Organization of Content

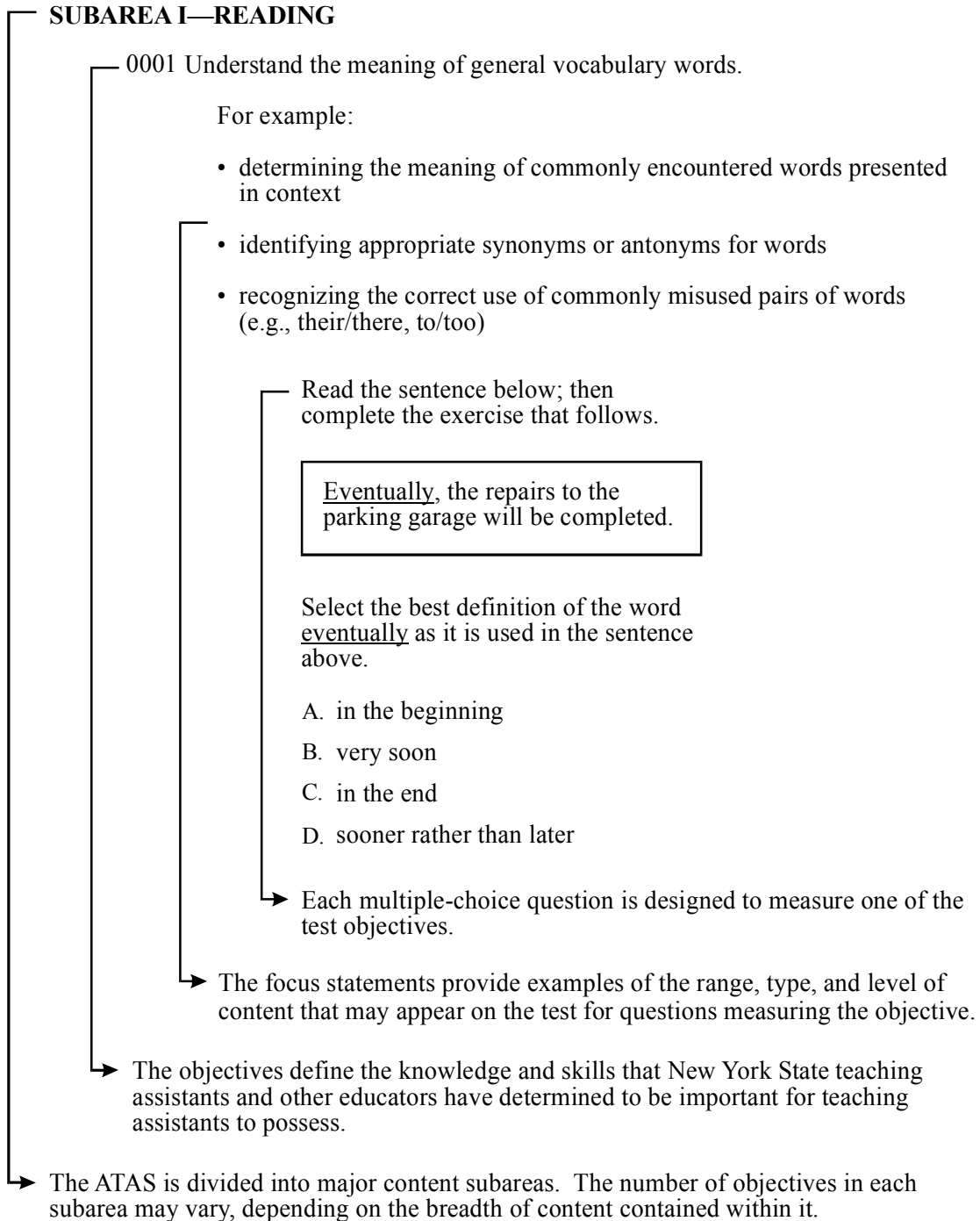
The content covered by each test is organized into **subareas**. These subareas define the major content domains of the test.

Subareas typically consist of several **objectives**. Objectives provide specific information about the knowledge and skills that are assessed by the test.

Each objective is elaborated on by **focus statements**. The focus statements provide examples of the range, type, and level of content that may appear on the tests.

Test questions are designed to measure specific test objectives. The number of objectives within a given subarea generally determines the number of questions that will address the content of that subarea on the test. In other words, the subareas that consist of more objectives will receive more emphasis on the test and contribute more to a candidate's test score than the subareas that consist of fewer objectives.

The following example illustrates the relationship of test questions to subareas, objectives, and focus statements.



■ TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

Be On Time.

Arrive at the test center on time so that you are rested and ready to begin the test when instructed to do so.

Follow Directions.

At the beginning of the test session and throughout the test, follow all directions carefully. This includes the oral directions that will be read by the test administrators and any written directions in the test booklet. The test booklet will contain general directions for the test as a whole and specific directions for individual test questions or groups of test questions. If you do not understand something about the directions, do not hesitate to raise your hand and ask your test administrator.

Pace Yourself.

The test schedule is designed to allow sufficient time for completion of the test. Each test session is four hours in length. The tests are designed to allow you to allocate your time within the session as you need. However, you will be required to return your materials at the end of the four-hour session.

Since the allocation of your time during the test session is largely yours to determine, planning your own pace for taking the test is very important. Do not spend a lot of time with a test question that you cannot answer promptly; skip that question and move on. If you skip a question, be sure to skip the corresponding row of answer choices on your answer sheet. Mark the question in your test booklet so that you can return to it later, but be careful to appropriately record on the answer sheet the answers to the remaining questions.

You may find that you need less time than the four hours allotted in a test session, but you should be prepared to stay for the entire time period. Do not make any other commitments for this time period that may cause you to rush through the test.

Read Carefully.

Read the directions and the questions carefully. Read all response options. Remember that multiple-choice test questions call for the "best answer"; do not choose the first answer that seems reasonable. Read and evaluate all choices to find the best answer. Read the questions closely so that you understand what they ask. For example, it would be a waste of time to perform a long computation when the question calls for an approximation.

Read the test questions, but don't read into them. The questions are designed to be straightforward, not tricky.

Mark Answers Carefully.

Your answers for all multiple-choice questions will be scored electronically; therefore, the answer you select must be clearly marked and the only answer marked. If you change your mind about an answer, erase the old answer completely. Do not make any stray marks on the answer sheet; these may be misinterpreted by the scoring machine.

IF YOU SKIP A QUESTION, BE SURE TO SKIP THE CORRESPONDING ROW OF ANSWER CHOICES ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET.

You may use any available space in the test booklet for notes, but **your answers must be clearly marked on your answer sheet. ONLY ANSWERS THAT APPEAR ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET WILL BE SCORED.** Answers marked in your test booklet will not be scored.

Guessing

As you read through the response options, try to find the best answer. If you cannot quickly find the best answer, try to eliminate as many of the other options as possible. Then guess among the remaining answer choices. Your score on the test is based on the number of test questions that you have answered correctly. There is no penalty for incorrect answers; therefore, it is better to guess than not to respond at all.

Passages or Other Presented Materials

Some test questions are based on passages or other presented materials (e.g., graphs, charts). You may wish to employ some of the following strategies while you are completing these test questions.

One strategy is to read the passage or other presented material thoroughly and carefully and then answer each question, referring to the passage or presented material only as needed. Another strategy is to read the questions first, gaining an idea of what is sought in them, and then read the passage or presented material with the questions in mind. Yet another strategy is to review the passage or presented material to gain an overview of its content, and then answer each question by referring back to the passage or presented material for the specific answer. Any of these strategies may be appropriate for you. You should not answer the questions on the basis of your own opinions but rather on the basis of the information in the passage or presented material.

Check Accuracy.

Use any remaining time at the end of the test session to check the accuracy of your work. Go back to the test questions that gave you difficulty and verify your work on them. Check the answer sheet, too. Be sure that you have marked your answers accurately and have completely erased changed answers.

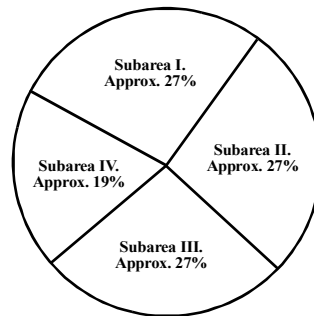
ABOUT THE ATAS

The purpose of the ATAS is to assess knowledge and skills in the following three subareas:

- Subarea I. Reading
- Subarea II. Writing
- Subarea III. Mathematics
- Subarea IV. Instructional Support

The test objectives presented on the following pages define the content that may be assessed by the ATAS. Each test objective is followed by focus statements that provide examples of the range, type, and level of content that may appear on the test for questions measuring that objective.

The test contains approximately 100 multiple-choice test questions. The figure below illustrates the approximate percentage of the test corresponding to each subarea.



The section that follows the test objectives presents sample test questions for you to review as part of your preparation for the test. To demonstrate how each objective may be assessed, a sample question is presented for each objective. The correct response and an explanation of why the response is correct follow each question.

The sample questions are designed to illustrate the nature of the test questions; they should not be used as a diagnostic tool to determine your individual strengths and weaknesses.

■ ATAS OBJECTIVES

Reading
Writing
Mathematics
Instructional Support

SUBAREA I—READING

0001 Understand the meaning of general vocabulary words.

For example:

- determining the meaning of commonly encountered words presented in context
- identifying appropriate synonyms or antonyms for words
- recognizing the correct use of commonly misused pairs of words (e.g., their/there, to/too)

0002 Understand the stated main idea of a reading passage.

For example:

- identifying the stated main idea of a passage
- identifying the topic sentence of a passage
- recognizing introductory and summary statements of a passage
- selecting an accurate restatement of the main idea of a passage

0003 Understand the sequence of ideas in a reading passage.

For example:

- identifying the order of events or steps described in a passage
- organizing a set of instructions into their proper sequence
- identifying cause-and-effect relationships described in a passage

0004 Interpret textual and graphic information.

For example:

- interpreting information from tables, line graphs, bar graphs, and pie charts
- recognizing appropriate representations of written information in graphic or tabular form
- recognizing differences between fact and opinion

SUBAREA II—WRITING

0005 Understand the standard use of verbs.

For example:

- identifying standard subject-verb agreement (e.g., number, person)
- identifying verb tense (e.g., present, past)
- recognizing consistency of verb tense (e.g., verb endings)

0006 Understand the standard use of pronouns and modifiers.

For example:

- identifying agreement (e.g., number, gender, person) between a pronoun and its antecedent
- using possessive pronouns (e.g., its vs. it's), relative pronouns (e.g., that, which), and demonstrative pronouns (e.g., this, that)
- using comparative and superlative modifiers (e.g., good/better/best)

0007 Understand standard sentence structure and punctuation.

For example:

- distinguishing between sentence fragments and complete sentences
- distinguishing between run-on sentences and correctly divided sentences
- identifying correct and incorrect punctuation

0008 Understand the standard use of capitalization and spelling.

For example:

- identifying standard capitalization at the beginning of sentences
- identifying standard capitalization of proper words and titles
- recognizing standard spelling of commonly encountered words presented in context

SUBAREA III—MATHEMATICS

0009 Understand number concepts.

For example:

- identifying the place value of digits (e.g., hundreds, tens, ones, tenths)
- identifying correctly rounded numbers (e.g., to the nearest ten)
- identifying equivalent weights and measures in different units (e.g., feet and inches, quarts and pints, kilograms and grams)
- estimating the solution to a measurement problem (e.g., height, distance, perimeter)

0010 Understand the addition and subtraction of whole numbers.

For example:

- solving problems involving the addition of whole numbers
- solving problems involving the subtraction of whole numbers
- applying principles of addition and subtraction of whole numbers to solve problems encountered in everyday life

0011 Understand multiplication and division of whole numbers.

For example:

- solving problems involving the multiplication of whole numbers
- solving problems involving the division of whole numbers
- applying principles of multiplication and division of whole numbers to solve problems encountered in everyday life

0012 Understand operations involving fractions, decimals, and percents.

For example:

- solving problems involving fractions (e.g., recipes)
- solving problems involving decimals (e.g., money)
- solving problems involving percents (e.g., grades, discounts)
- solving problems involving conversions between fractions, decimals, and percents

SUBAREA IV—INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

0013 Understand classroom instruction related to reading.

For example:

- providing support under the guidance of classroom teachers to match student needs, styles of learning, and background experiences (e.g., drilling, using pictorial or video materials, relating reading materials to real-life contexts)
- helping students use instructional resources (e.g., dictionaries, encyclopedias, multimedia materials) to support reading
- helping students use a variety of approaches to understand what they read (e.g., skimming, questioning to tap prior knowledge, monitoring understanding, reviewing, summarizing)
- gathering information about students' progress as readers to support the teacher's planning, assessment, and instruction

0014 Understand classroom instruction related to writing.

For example:

- understanding drafting, editing, and proofreading written work
- helping students focus their writing
- helping students use instructional resources (e.g., dictionaries, grammar books, library resources, technological resources) to support writing
- gathering information about students' progress as writers to support the teacher's planning, assessment, and instruction

0015 Understand classroom instruction related to mathematics.

For example:

- relating mathematics to everyday situations
- identifying and correcting basic errors in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division
- helping students use instructional resources (e.g., hands-on materials, rulers, money, charts, graphs, technological resources) to support mathematical learning
- gathering information about students' progress in mathematics to support the teacher's planning, assessment, and instruction

■ SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE ATAS

This preparation guide provides sample questions for the test. The questions illustrate the objectives of the test—one sample question for each objective.

Three pieces of information are presented for each test question:

1. the number of the test objective that the sample question illustrates,
2. a sample test question,
3. an indication of the correct response and an explanation of why it is the best available response.

Keep in mind when reviewing the questions and response options that there is one best answer to each question. Remember, too, that each explanation offers one of perhaps many perspectives on why a given response is correct or incorrect in the context of the question; there may be other explanations as well.

On the following page are sample test directions similar to those that candidates see when they take the test.

SAMPLE TEST DIRECTIONS FOR THE ATAS

DIRECTIONS

Each question in this booklet is a multiple-choice question with four answer choices. Read each question carefully and choose the ONE best answer. Record your answer on the answer sheet in the space that corresponds to the question number. Completely fill in the space having the same letter as the answer you have chosen. *Use only a No. 2 lead pencil.*

Sample Question:

What is the capital of New York?

- A. Buffalo
- B. New York City
- C. Albany
- D. Rochester

The correct answer to this question is C. You would indicate that on the answer sheet as follows:

1. (A) (B) ● (D)

You should answer all questions. Even if you are unsure of an answer, it is better to guess than not to answer a question at all. You may use the margins of the test booklet for scratch paper, but you will be scored only on the responses on your answer sheet.

FOR TEST SECURITY REASONS, YOU MAY NOT TAKE NOTES OR REMOVE ANY OF THE TEST MATERIALS FROM THE ROOM.

The words "End of Test" indicate that you have completed the test. You may go back and review your answers, but be sure you have answered all questions before raising your hand for dismissal. Your test materials must be returned to a test administrator when you finish the test.

If you have any questions, please ask them now before you begin the test.



DO NOT GO ON UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.

■ SAMPLE QUESTIONS, CORRECT RESPONSES, AND EXPLANATIONS

Read the passage below; then answer the three questions that follow.

Children can benefit greatly from learning how to play chess. Through studying and playing chess, they strengthen their thinking, learn how to deal with competitive situations, and develop important social skills.

Playing chess requires hard thinking. Players must analyze moves and decide on the best one to play. Then they must live with their decision no matter how good or bad the move.

Players must set goals and fight their way toward achieving them. Usually, the first player to make a bad move

loses the game, but not always. Staying focused on winning the game and overcoming setbacks are valuable experiences for young people.

Chess also helps children improve their social skills. Learning to win graciously is just as important as learning to be a good loser. Both of these skills help children interact successfully with other people.

Chess can be a great deal of fun to play. It can also teach children valuable skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.



Objective 0001

Understand the meaning of general vocabulary words.

1. **Read the sentence below, taken from the fourth paragraph of the passage; then complete the exercise that follows.**

Learning to win graciously is just as important as learning to be a good loser.

Select the best definition of the word graciously as it is used in the sentence above.

- A. quietly
- B. courteously
- C. happily
- D. humorously

Correct Response: B. To be gracious is to behave in a kind and polite manner to others. Thus, of the choices available, "courteously" most closely fits the meaning of the word graciously as it appears in the passage.



Objective 0002

Understand the stated main idea of a reading passage.

2. What is the *topic sentence* of the passage?
- A. Children can benefit greatly from learning how to play chess.
 - B. Through studying and playing chess, they strengthen their thinking, learn how to deal with competitive situations, and develop important social skills.
 - C. Chess can be a great deal of fun to play.
 - D. It can also teach children valuable skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.
-

Correct Response: A. The topic sentence of a passage introduces the central idea that the rest of the passage develops. This passage talks about a variety of ways in which playing chess benefits children, from sharpening their thinking, to learning how to meet goals, to improving their social skills. Therefore, Response A best states the central idea of the passage.



Objective 0003

Understand the sequence of ideas in a reading passage.

3. According to the passage, how do children develop social skills while playing chess?
- A. by staying focused on winning the game and overcoming the setbacks they encounter
 - B. by having fun playing with other children
 - C. by living with the decisions they make during each game
 - D. by learning how to behave appropriately whether they win or lose a game
-

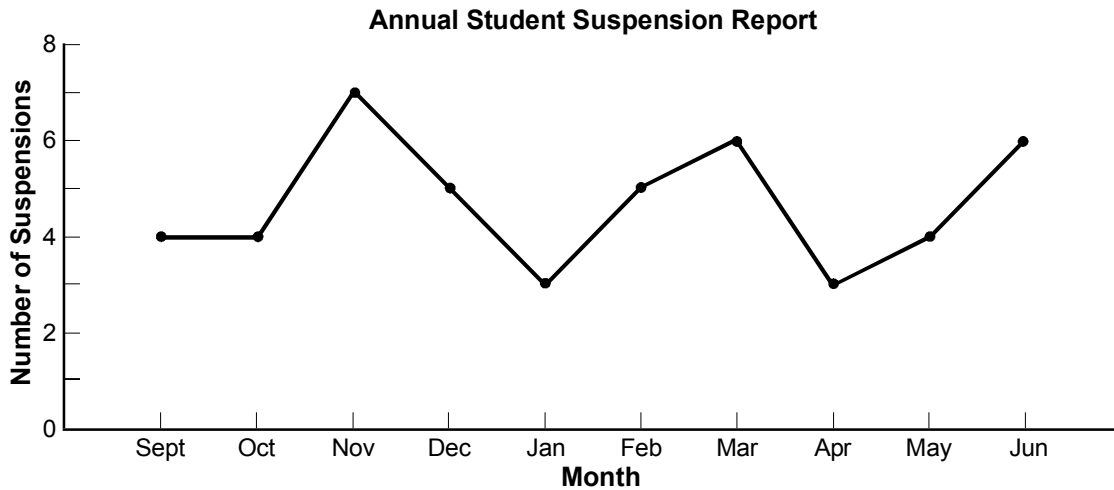
Correct Response: D. In the fourth paragraph of the passage, the author points out that, whether children win or lose at chess, they gain experience in interacting with other people.



Objective 0004

Interpret textual and graphic information.

4. Use the graph below to answer the question that follows.



What was the total number of student suspensions during the three-month period of September, October, and November?

- A. 8
- B. 11
- C. 12
- D. 15

Correct Response: D. The graph indicates that there were four students suspended in the month of September, four more during October, and seven more in November. Thus, the total for the three-month period was 15 student suspensions.



Objective 0005

Understand the standard use of verbs.

5. Which sentence is in the *present* tense?
- A. The grocery bag still stood where he left it.
 - B. Melissa asks for a little more sugar in her tea.
 - C. Conrad reflected on the meaning of the story.
 - D. He came home soon after we arrived.
-

Correct Response: B. When a verb is in the present tense, it expresses action that is taking place right now, rather than in the past or in the future. To express the present tense with a singular noun, an *s* or an *es* is usually added to the verb. Among the alternatives, only Response B contains a verb in the present tense.



Objective 0006

Understand the standard use of pronouns and modifiers.

6. **Choose the best word to complete the sentence below.**

The new principal, _____ speaks four languages, has some exciting ideas to suggest.

- A. that
 - B. whom
 - C. which
 - D. who
-

Correct Response: D. The pronouns "that" and "which" are generally used to refer to a thing or an idea. The pronouns "who" and "whom" are used to refer to a person. Specifically, the pronoun "who" is used when the person being referred to is the subject of a phrase or a sentence, and the pronoun "whom" is used when the person being referred to is the object of a phrase or a sentence. In this sentence, the pronoun "who" refers to "principal," which is the subject of the opening phrase of the sentence.



Objective 0007

Understand standard sentence structure and punctuation.

7. Which of the following is *not* a complete sentence?
- A. Making a lesson plan is necessary.
 - B. First, define the objectives.
 - C. The usual standards for evaluation.
 - D. Nothing is more important.
-

Correct Response: C. A complete sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. Among the alternatives, only Response C does not express a complete thought.



Objective 0008

Understand the standard use of capitalization and spelling.

8. Which word is spelled *incorrectly*?
- A. criticism
 - B. judicial
 - C. scholastic
 - D. recognition
-

Correct Response: A. The word in Response A is not spelled correctly. The correct spelling is *criticism*. The other responses contain no spelling errors.



Objective 0009

Understand number concepts.

9. How many centimeters are in 7 meters?
- A. 10
 - B. 70
 - C. 100
 - D. 700
-

Correct Response: D. There are 100 centimeters in a meter. Therefore, there are 700 centimeters in 7 meters ($100 \times 7 = 700$).



Objective 0010

Understand the addition and subtraction of whole numbers.

10. A cashier has \$42 in his cash drawer at the beginning of his shift. During his shift, he collects \$815. How much money is in his drawer at the end of his shift?
- A. \$773
 - B. \$815
 - C. \$839
 - D. \$857
-

Correct Response: D. In order to determine how much money the cashier has in his cash drawer at the end of the day, add the amount of money in the cash drawer at the beginning of the day (\$42) to the amount of money put into the cash drawer during the day (\$815). The result is \$857.



Objective 0011

Understand multiplication and division of whole numbers.

11. What is the *remainder* when 53 is divided by 9?
- A. 6
 - B. 7
 - C. 8
 - D. 9
-

Correct Response: C. The remainder is what is left over when one number is divided by another number. When 53 is divided by 9, the result is 5, with 8 left over.



Objective 0012

Understand operations involving fractions, decimals, and percents.

12. What is 60% written as a fraction?

A. $\frac{2}{5}$

B. $\frac{3}{5}$

C. $\frac{2}{3}$

D. $\frac{5}{6}$

Correct Response: B. Sixty percent means 60 out of 100, or $\frac{60}{100}$. This is the same as $\frac{6}{10}$, which is the same as $\frac{3}{5}$.



Objective 0013

Understand classroom instruction related to reading.

13. A teaching assistant in a second-grade class is taking a small group of students to the school library to find information needed to complete an assignment on whales. Which of the following would be the best way for the teaching assistant to help the students with their project?
- A. Make sure the students remain quiet and behave appropriately while they are in the library.
 - B. Have the students choose information resources on their own, and help them use the resources to complete their assignments.
 - C. Show the students how to find the entry on whales in a dictionary, and transfer that information to their notebooks.
 - D. Find a story about whales, read it aloud to the students, then have them discuss what they learned from the story.
-

Correct Response: B. The goal of this activity is to have students use the school library to gather information to complete an assignment on whales. Response B describes the most effective way for meeting that goal. By allowing the students to select information resources on their own, then showing them how to use those resources effectively, the teaching assistant helps students learn basic research skills while providing the assistance needed to complete their assignments.



Objective 0014

Understand classroom instruction related to writing.

14. Ms. Perrotta, a teaching assistant in a seventh-grade English class, has been asked to supervise a small group of students while they each edit the first drafts of short stories they are writing based on personal experiences. Which of the following pieces of information would be most helpful for Ms. Perrotta to provide to the teacher about the students' work during this session?
- A. what kinds of help the students needed
 - B. which story Ms. Perrotta thinks is the most creative
 - C. which student Ms. Perrotta thinks is the best writer
 - D. how well the students worked together
-

Correct Response: A. The fundamental purpose of the work that the teacher has assigned is to help students learn how to edit their own work, a complex skill that the students will continue to learn and practice over many years. Response A, providing information on the kinds of problems that the students are experiencing as they try to edit their own work, represents the best way of helping the teacher plan the continuing instruction that the students will need.



Objective 0015

Understand classroom instruction related to mathematics.

15. Mr. Barry has just introduced his third-grade class to the concept of division. After several days, most of the students seem to have grasped the concept, but Louisa is still confused. Mr. Barry asks Ms. Salem, his teaching assistant, to help Louisa. Which of the following approaches would best help Louisa understand the basic idea of division?
- A. Show Louisa how to do division problems using a calculator.
 - B. Have Louisa read the section in the textbook on division and ask Ms. Salem if she has any questions.
 - C. Have Louisa separate a large pile of pennies into smaller piles of equal numbers.
 - D. Give Louisa a worksheet with several simple division problems.
-

Correct Response: C. The teacher has asked his teaching assistant to provide extra help to a student who is having difficulty understanding a new mathematical concept. The activity described in Response C is best suited to this goal because it introduces the concept of division in a simple, concrete manner. By using familiar objects in a hands-on activity, Louisa can more easily grasp the fundamental idea of division before applying the concept to specific problems.