



## **HOW TO PREPARE GUIDE**

# **BUYER, ASSOCIATE 10951 WRITTEN EXAMINATION**

State Personnel Department  
64 North Union Street  
P.O. Box 304100  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-4100

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A written, multiple-choice examination is being given in order to establish a register for the classification of Buyer, Associate. The purpose of this guide is to help you prepare for the written exam. Since all the material you will need to take the exam will be provided at the test administration, you will not be allowed to bring this booklet to the exam with you.

## **II. JOB PREVIEW**

Buyer, Associate positions are with the Finance Department and Department of Mental Health located in Montgomery, Alabama. The Buyer, Associate job involves moderately difficult purchasing of materials, supplies, equipment, and services. Employees in this class are responsible for purchasing commodities and services for the state. Responsibilities include reviewing requisitions, preparing bid invitations, analyzing bids, and preparing purchase orders within an assigned area.

## **III. THE EXAMINATION**

The examination for this classification is a written, multiple-choice exam. The exam is designed to measure specific knowledges and abilities. The test is divided into four sections with each section measuring a different knowledge or ability. Applicants are presented with a test question and four possible responses to that question. Applicants then select the BEST possible response to the question. You will have 3 hours to respond to the items.

## **IV. HOW THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION WAS DEVELOPED**

A study of the Buyer, Associate classification was conducted prior to developing the examination. A number of employees who work in this job and their supervisors participated in this study. The study showed that the following knowledges and abilities are associated with the above duties. These knowledges and abilities are needed on the first day of work before training:

- **Knowledge of mathematics such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, percentages, decimals, and statistics to include evaluating alternatives (i.e., feasibility of replacing parts, repairing, rebuilding, leasing, purchasing), and predicting life of an item as needed to purchase needed products and make the most efficient and cost-effective decisions concerning purchasing products.**
- Ability to communicate orally in situations such as interviews, instructional situations, and briefings as needed to discuss and mediate problems concerning products or departmental procedures with vendors or user agencies, answer questions concerning products, exchange information, resolve conflicts, and improve employee performance.

- Ability to identify and make appropriate decisions to include prioritizing tasks and recognizing necessary changes as needed to implement changes, deal with conflict, and effect personnel techniques.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with persons such as co-workers, vendors, state agencies, and the general public as needed to promote group dynamics, improve performance, enhance morale, and exchange information.
- **Ability to plan/organize to include managing time, prioritizing tasks, and planning strategically as needed to meet deadlines, allocate resources, and achieve departmental goals and objectives.**
- **Ability to compose correspondence such as letters, memoranda, brochures, and pamphlets to include clarity, content, conciseness, grammar, and spelling as needed to exchange information and elicit support.**
- Ability to take criticism for unpopular decisions, judgments, and evaluations as needed to evaluate bid policies and eligibility without being unduly influenced by the potential reaction of affected persons.
- Ability to use persuasion and tact when dealing with elected officials, department administrators, and related professionals as needed to gain cooperation and achieve departmental goals.
- Ability to be flexible as needed to meet deadlines, implement changes, and achieve departmental goals and objectives.
- **Ability to read and comprehend narrative information such as bid laws and regulations, proposals, and product information as needed to make revisions, implement programs, interpret rules, ensure compliance with regulations, enforce written agreements, exchange information, and achieve departmental goals.**

The examination for Buyer, Associate will measure the four knowledges and abilities above that appear in **bold print**. The remaining knowledges and abilities must be demonstrated during the probationary period if you are hired into the Buyer, Associate position.

## V. WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU COME TO TAKE THE EXAMINATION

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the exam and for getting to the testing place on time and with the proper things that you will need to take the test.

1. **Be well rested.** Get a good night's sleep for several nights in a row before the written examination.
2. **Get there early.** Allow plenty of time to get to the examination site. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to get there before time for the examination to begin.
3. **Do not bring this booklet or any study materials with you to the exam location.** This includes notes and any manuals and source documents that you may have used to prepare for the examination. All test materials needed for the examination will be provided.
4. **Do not bring cell phones to the testing site.** Cell phones are not permitted in the testing room.
5. **Dress comfortably.** The total time provided for completion of this exam will be 3 hours.
6. **You should read and study this booklet.** You should practice the kinds of things that this booklet suggests that you practice.
7. **You must bring the test scheduling card/letter that you received from the State of Alabama Personnel Department.** This card lists the examination title, location of exam, and date, day, and time of examination.
8. **You must also bring picture identification to the exam location.** This may be your valid driver license, a military identification card, or a passport. You only need one valid form of identification.
9. **You must bring two sharpened #2 lead pencils.** You may also want to bring a highlighter and a calculator. Small solar powered or battery operated calculators that perform basic functions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, square roots, or percentages are allowed. Calculators that plug-in, utilize tape, have word processing, spelling, thesauruses, or other storage and retrieval capabilities (except basic memory functions) are not allowed. *Calculators that are a feature on a cell phone are not permitted.* Calculators are subject to inspection by exam monitors. Applicants may not borrow or share calculators at the exam site.

### TEST TAKING TIPS

- ✓ **Listen** to the test monitors and follow their instructions carefully.
- ✓ If you are not sure of an answer, **go with your first choice.**
- ✓ Work through the test **without spending too much time on any one item.**
- ✓ If you cannot decide on the best answer to a question, **skip it and go back to it later.**

- ✓ Use your watch or the clock in the room to **keep track of your time** during the test.
- ✓ It is to your advantage to **answer as many questions as possible**, even if you must guess.
- ✓ **Mark your answers on the answer sheet and NOT in the test booklet.** Only answers clearly marked on the answer sheet can be given credit.
- ✓ If you have a question at any time before or during the exam, **ask the monitor for assistance.** Please note that test monitors can answer questions concerning exam administration issues only. They **will not** be able to interpret exam questions for you.

## VI. HOW TO PREPARE USING THIS GUIDE

The questions contained in the guide are a representation of questions that will be on the actual examination. Familiarize yourself with the sample questions that begin on page 10. You would be well-advised to read the instructions and answer each question carefully. Like the examination questions (all of which are multiple-choice), the sample items are presented in the following categories:

Section I. Mathematics

Section II. Written Communication

Section III. Reading Comprehension

Section IV. Planning/Organizing

The sample items are representative of each type of item that will appear on the exam. They are not necessarily based on the same information as the actual exam. All questions will be multiple-choice.

In addition, please review the General Instructions to Candidates Taking Written Examinations provided at the exam site on the day of the test.

## VII. BANDED SCORING

When the written exam for Buyer, Associate is graded, the scores will be grouped into bands. When you receive notification of how you performed on the exam, you will not be given a numerical score (i.e., 67 out of 80, 93 out of 100). Rather, you will be informed into which band (i.e., 1, 3, 6, 10) your score fell. The following information is provided to help you understand the banding procedure.

### What is banding?

Banding is one way to reduce the impact of fluctuations in test scores that do not provide meaningful information about differences in the ability to perform the job. One important purpose of testing is to identify the differences in test scores that reflect real differences among candidates.

Banded scoring is a statistical procedure for grouping raw test scores that statistically are not meaningfully different from one another. In banded scoring, bands are set objectively and statistically. They are not manipulated arbitrarily.

### **Misconceptions about banding.**

There are many misconceptions about banding and the use of banded scores. Some of the most common misconceptions are listed below. Each misconception is followed by a clarification.

**Misconception:** *Each band should have the same number of people.*

Bands are not forced to be a certain size. The people in a band are similar to each other in that statistically there is no meaningful difference in their scores. Sometimes Band 1 may be very large, and at other times it may be small. Scores on the exam determine the size of the bands.

**Misconception:** *Band numbers have no meaning. I don't have a score.*

Band numbers do have meaning. Think of a band as a group of tied scores. Consider that in school two students with average grades of 94.5 and 94.3 would both be grouped into the same band. Just because one student made a 94.5 and one student made a 94.3, the teacher cannot be sure that 0.2 of a point means that the student who scored 94.5 is smarter or is a better student. The scores are so close to each other that they are basically the same.

For example, think of the achievement tests that children take in school. The fine print on these tests always informs you not to focus on the numerical score but rather on the comparative score, which uses some type of grouping technique such as percentiles, standard deviations, grade levels, etc. These grouping techniques are considered forms of banding. Banding compares your performance on the test to the other test takers' performance and groups your score with others that are statistically the same.

**Misconception:** *Band numbers are the same as letter grades.*

Band numbers are not the same as letter grades. Band 1 does not equate to an "A," Band 2 to a "B," and so on. In school, a predetermined numerical range of scores (i.e., 90-100, 80-90, 70-80) equals an alphabetical value (i.e., A, B, C). This grading system is a form of banding. In this case, unlike grade school, the width of bands is not set in advance. Scores are banded only in relation to one another, so you compete against other test takers. The scores of all test takers determine the width of the bands, and your score is set in relation to the scores of your peers.

**Misconception:** *A banded score on one test has the same value as a banded score on another test.*

Banded scores are test-specific and cannot be compared from test to test. Consider that a test taker scored 88 on one test, and the highest score of all test takers was 89. It is likely for this exam that the test taker who scored 88 would be in Band 1. However, if the same person scored the same grade on another test, and the highest score of all test takers was 100, the person may be in Band 2 or Band 3. Candidates' scores vary on each test, and since candidate scores determine the width of bands and into which band test takers fall, the value of a banded score varies from test to test.

**Misconception:** *People with the most seniority who have been on the job longest should be in the top bands.*

People with the most experience do not always fall into the top bands. Time spent in a job may not be the same as possessing a knowledge, skill, or ability needed to perform the job. The people with the strongest knowledges, skills, and abilities (or who did best on the exam) will be in the top bands. Some of the people in the top bands will have been in similar jobs for a long period of time, and others will have been in similar jobs for a short period of time. Years of service do not always equal proficiency. Candidates with seniority or experience do not automatically perform best on the test. Regardless of seniority, candidates who display the appropriate knowledges, skills, and abilities perform best on the test.

**Misconception:** *A standing in Band 4 or below automatically indicates failure or ineligibility for jobs.*

A band number of 4 or lower is not automatically equated with failure. For one test, there may only be 4 bands, and for another test, there may be 14 bands. So, your success on the test based on your position in a band varies from test to test. Your standing in a band does not indicate whether or not you pass or fail the test. The true test of success in your employment opportunities is whether or not you can be certified and considered for a job vacancy.

**Misconception:** *Banding replaced the “Rule of 10.”*

Banding did not replace the “Rule of 10.” The “Rule of 10” determines the number of bands to be certified. In the past, tied scores referred to an actual numerical score (e.g., two candidates with a score of 98.98 were considered tied) while now all of the scores within a band are considered tied.

**Misconception:** *People in a band do not differ.*

When several people are placed in the same band, it does not mean that those people do not differ at all. Instead, it means that their scores on the exam do not differ enough to be separate scores.

## VIII. GENERAL QUESTIONS

### **Are there any vacancies for the Buyer, Associate?**

You may contact the Department of Finance or the Department of Mental Health to receive information on current or future vacancies.

### **How are vacancies filled for the Buyer, Associate?**

The top ten applicants on the register are sent to the hiring authority for consideration. Since the banded scoring process is used, all of the scores within a band are considered tied. Therefore, all names within a band are certified out to the agency, which may include more than 10 names. The names of people not selected stay on the register to be considered for future jobs. Persons are usually hired at the minimum of the pay range.



### **What is a register?**

A register is a list of all individuals who have successfully completed the selection procedure for a State Merit System job. The register is a complete list of individuals who are eligible for employment in a certain job classification.

### **Test Results**

Approximately four to six weeks after completing the exam, you will receive a Notice of Examination Results postcard in the mail. This postcard will identify your score, or band placement, for the written exam. If you have not received your score within four to six weeks, you should call the State Personnel Department.

In addition to your Band placement, you may also obtain your standing, or rank on the register, online at [www.personnel.alabama.gov](http://www.personnel.alabama.gov). From the home page, you should click on “My Profile” and follow the instructions. For security purposes, you must now create an online profile in order to access your standing.

### **How long will I remain eligible for appointment?**

If you pass the examination, your name will remain on the employment register for two years. You will be notified by mail when to reapply.

### **Reasonable Accommodations**

If you would like to request special testing accommodations or have any questions concerning the test site or testing conditions, please contact the State Personnel Department at (334) 242-3389.

### **Rescheduling a Written Examination**

If there is a conflict in your schedule, and you are unable to attend the written exam at the time and date for which you have been scheduled, you must resubmit your Application for Examination. The State Personnel Department will schedule you for the next available administration of this written exam.

### **Administrative Questions**

If you have any administrative questions or concerns about the exam or questions about any of the information presented in this booklet, you should contact the State Personnel Department. Exam administrators are not allowed to provide specific information about the content of the exam.

## **IX. SAMPLE TEST QUESTIONS**

### **Section I: Mathematics**

You have received 200 bid applications. 112 of these applicants are in-state, and the rest are out-of-state. 37 in-state applicants and 28 out-of-state applicants qualify for bid invitations.

What percentage of in-state applicants qualified for bid invitations?

- (A) 14%
- (B) 18%
- (C) 25%
- (D) 33%

Answer (D) is correct. According to the information provided, there were 112 total in-state applicants, 37 of which qualified for bid invitations. 37 is 33% of 112.

### **Section II: Written Communication**

The sentences in the following paragraph may or may not be in the proper order. Choose the answer that lists the sentences in the most logical order.

1. I have a son named John.
2. He will start tomorrow.
3. That means he is old enough to start school.
4. He is five years old.

- (A) 1-2-3-4
- (B) 2-4-3-1
- (C) 1-4-3-2
- (D) 4-3-2-1

Answer (C) is correct. This represents the most logical order of the four sentences.

### Section III: Reading Comprehension

You are given a short paragraph. Read the paragraph and then select from the four options the statement that best summarizes the main idea of the paragraph.

To produce effective business letters, a correspondent should always formulate in his or her mind, or on paper, a simple but definite plan of what to say and how to say it.

According to the passage, which statement is true?

- (A) Some preparation for writing a letter is necessary.
- (B) There should be no direct dictation.
- (C) More attention should be given to the proper form than to content.
- (D) You do not need preparation in writing a letter.

Answer (A) is correct. The passage indicates that effective business letters require a correspondent to formulate a plan of what to say and how to say it.

### Section IV: Planning/Organizing

Read the situation and answer the following questions based on the information provided.

Your supervisor will be out of the office today. You arrived at work at 8:00 AM. You have an appointment today at 11:00 AM with your doctor who has advised you that the appointment should not be rescheduled. You need to leave by 10:30 AM and will not return to the office. Michelle Thomas, an Administrative Support Assistant I, is the only other employee in the office today. However, she does not type. Your supervisor left a note listing the following tasks that must be completed today:

1. Type the Anderson report (2 hours to complete).
2. Sort and distribute mail (30 minutes to complete).
3. Call Miriam Houston about the Anderson report (10 minutes to complete).
4. Post the new dividend rates by 12 PM today (20 minutes to complete).
5. Set up the conference room for the next day's 8:00 am meeting (20 minutes to complete).
6. File dividend reports (2 hours to complete).

Which of the following tasks would you be forced to perform yourself?

- (A) File dividend reports
- (B) Set up the conference room
- (C) Type the Anderson report
- (D) Sort and distribute the day's mail

The correct answer is (C). Since Ms. Thomas cannot type, you must type the Anderson report.