



HOW TO PREPARE GUIDE

PERSONNEL ASSISTANT III (10832)

WRITTEN EXAMINATION

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Personnel Assistant III-10832

Written Examination

How to Prepare Guide

INTRODUCTION

A written examination is being given for Personnel Assistant III (PA III). To be placed on the employment register, you must complete the written examination. This guide is provided to acquaint you with the PA III job and to help you prepare for the exam. Read this information very carefully. This guide contains information which you should find very helpful as you prepare for the exam. Please note that specific Study Materials for this examination will be mailed to qualified candidates once they are scheduled for the written examination.

THE JOB

PA III positions are available primarily in Montgomery. The PA III job consists of specialized administrative work in support of a large and complex personnel program or independently administering a small to moderate size personnel program of average scope and complexity.

Work for a PA III may include supervising the maintenance of departmental personnel records; maintaining computer databases and electronic personnel records; compiling personnel statistics; providing advice and interpretations of State Personnel Board Rules and department rules; performing moderately difficult evaluations of applications; and assisting a departmental personnel manager in making personnel decisions. Frequent contact is maintained with agency employees, job applicants, and/or State Personnel in the gathering and transmittal of information.

In addition, work may include supervising a small clerical and technical staff engaged in processing a variety of personnel transactions, working with personnel managers in the development of policies, and interviewing applicants for employment and completing employment examination assignments.

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 eleven (11) 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.

HOW THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION WAS DEVELOPED

A study of the PA III classification was conducted before developing the examination. Employees who work in this position participated in this study to determine what job duties are performed by a PA III and what knowledges and abilities a PA III must possess in order to perform the job duties of the position.

The study showed that the following knowledges and abilities are associated with the job duties of the position. A PA III must possess the knowledges and abilities listed their first day of work before training:

K-02 Knowledge of the uses, functions, and information contained on assigned department's in-house computer systems as needed to perform job duties timely and accurately.

- K-04 Knowledge of filing techniques, principles, and standards such as color code, alphabetic, numerical, chronological, reverse chronological, and categorical as needed to place and retrieve documents and files in the correct order and make files accessible.
- K-07 Knowledge of HRM system NEMP screen as needed to add a new employee's name, social security number, agency code, and organization code.**
- K-08 Knowledge of HRM system LEAVM activity folder screen as needed to obtain an employee's leave usage and accrual.**
- K-11 Knowledge of HRM system EPM activity folder as needed to change or obtain addresses.**
- K-18 Knowledge of HRM EPMQ screen as needed to determine an employee's social security number and employment status.**
- K-20 Knowledge of HRM Transaction Time Catalogue as needed to determine if a batch of documents have been entered and verify the status.**
- K-22 Knowledge of HRM ATLM activity folder as needed to enter leave usage and pay overtime from the current pay period.**
- K-31 Knowledge of HRM TITL screen as needed to obtain classification grade, FLSA status, and EEOC code.**
- K-32 Knowledge of the merit system performance appraisal process to include drafting proper duties and responsibilities, form due dates, mid-appraisal procedures, form distribution, and disciplinary score subtraction as needed to advise supervisors and to process completed appraisals.**
- K-37 Knowledge of banded scoring concepts as needed to explain exam information to applicants.**
- K-45 Knowledge of the physical location of the work areas of the assigned department's employees as needed to deliver mail.
- K-54 Knowledge of departmental rules and regulations to include leave policies, performance appraisals, standards of conduct and other inter-departmental issues as needed to answer questions and facilitate workflow.
- K-56 Knowledge of basic mathematics to include addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as needed to calculate employee leave, separation leave and pay, and payroll.**
- K-57 Knowledge of English to include grammar, syntax, composition, and business writing as needed to prepare correspondence and reports, give presentations, communicate with others, document activities, prepare training materials, and request information.**
- A-01 Ability to proof completed documents for contextual correctness, grammar, and spelling errors as needed to suggest changes and ensure documents are completed in a professional manner.**

- A-03 Ability to operate office equipment such as copier, telephone, calculator, fax machine, and computer to include purpose, capabilities, preventive maintenance, and limitations as needed to document, store, transmit, and access information.
- A-04 Ability to proof copied documents for readability, shade of print, page line-up, and to ensure all pages of original were copied.
- A-05 Ability to count various materials such as test booklets or forms as needed to ensure all material is accounted for.
- A-06 Ability to communicate orally with persons such as co-workers and subordinates as needed to exchange information, resolve conflicts, and improve employee performance.
- A-07 Ability to remain calm and maintain appropriate demeanor as needed to communicate information with disgruntled persons and perform duties effectively.
- A-08 Ability to use word processing software as needed to create unique forms, tables, or questionnaires.
- A-10 Ability to compare data on computer-generated printouts to similar data on source documents as needed to ensure information was accurately entered and prepare reports.**
- A-11 Ability to retrieve and file documents in numeric and/or alphabetic order as needed to ensure documents and files in the correct order and make files accessible.
- A-12 Ability to compose correspondence such as letters, memos, and reports to include writing with appropriate clarity, content, conciseness, grammar, and spelling as needed to exchange information and document actions taken.**
- A-13 Ability to read and comprehend written materials such as departmental memos, court orders, and policy and procedure documents as needed to make revisions, implement programs, interpret rules, ensure compliance with regulations, exchange information, and achieve departmental goals.**
- A-14 Ability to use discretion in various situations and show good judgment to include knowing what information is classified or confidential, who is allowed access to classified or confidential information, and knowing date classified information can be released as needed to protect department/agency and employees and maintain confidentiality of records, reports, and files.
- A-15 Ability to review written documents as needed to determine policy or procedure changes that will affect personnel division operation.**
- A-22 Ability to perform mathematical computations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as needed to calculate and review leave and payroll.**
- A-23 Ability to comprehend HRM calendar as needed to ensure forms and ESMTs are completed according to established deadlines.**
- A-24 Ability to manage one's own time to include setting priorities and organizing tasks as needed to ensure work is completed in a timely, efficient, and accurate manner.**

- A-25 Ability to understand and follow oral and written instructions as needed to perform duties as instructed by supervisor and follow rules and procedures as outlined in manuals, memoranda, and policies.
- A-26 Ability to use persuasion and tact when dealing with persons as needed to gain cooperation and achieve departmental goals.

The examination for the PA III will measure the knowledges and abilities that appear in **bold print** on the preceding pages. The remaining abilities and knowledges cannot be measured by a written test and must be demonstrated during the probationary period if you are hired as a PA III.

When reviewing these KSAs and preparing for the test, the reader should note that the examples shown in each statement of how the KSA is used is not always intended to be completely inclusive. In other words, there may be questions on the exam which cover areas not directly mentioned as an example in the KSA.

EXAMINATION DESCRIPTION

In an attempt to provide an opportunity for each candidate to demonstrate possession of the knowledges and abilities listed in the previous section, a multiple-choice, written examination was developed. The examination will consist of approximately 100 questions, and you will be allowed three hours in which to complete the exam. Your answers will be marked on a Scantron sheet using a #2 pencil.

The exam is divided into eleven (11) sections. Each section is comprised of questions which measure similar knowledges or abilities. Listed below and on the following page are the names of each section and the knowledge or ability being measured in the section.

Section 1. HRM

- K-07 Knowledge of HRM system NEMP screen as needed to add a new employee's name, social security number, agency code, and organization code.
 - K-08 Knowledge of HRM system LEAVM activity folder screen as needed to obtain an employee's leave usage and accrual.
 - K-11 Knowledge of HRM system EPM activity folder as needed to change or obtain addresses.
 - K-18 Knowledge of HRM EPMQ screen as needed to determine an employee's social security number and employment status.
 - K-20 Knowledge of HRM Transaction Time Catalogue as needed to determine if a batch of documents have been entered and verify the status.
 - K-22 Knowledge of HRM ATLM activity folder as needed to enter leave usage and pay overtime from the current pay period.
 - K-31 Knowledge of HRM TITL screen as needed to obtain classification grade, FLSA status, and EEOC code.
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Section 2. English/Compose Correspondence

- K-57 Knowledge of English to include grammar, syntax, composition, and business writing as needed to prepare correspondence and reports, give presentations, communicate with others, document activities, prepare training materials, and request information.
- A-12 Ability to compose correspondence such as letters, memos, and reports to include writing with appropriate clarity, content, conciseness, grammar, and spelling as needed to exchange information and document actions taken.
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Section 3. Filing

- K-04 Knowledge of filing techniques, principles, and standards such as color code, alphabetic, numerical, chronological, reverse chronological, and categorical as needed to place and retrieve documents and files in the correct order and make files accessible.
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Section 4. Comparing Data

- A-10 Ability to compare data on computer-generated printouts to similar data on source documents as needed to ensure information was accurately entered and prepare reports.
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Section 5. Proofreading

- A-01 Ability to proof completed documents for contextual correctness, grammar, and spelling errors as needed to suggest changes and ensure documents are completed in a professional manner.
- A-15 Ability to review written documents as needed to determine policy or procedure changes that will affect personnel division operation.
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Section 6. Ability to Manage Time/Organize

- A-24 Ability to manage one's own time to include setting priorities and organizing tasks as needed to ensure work is completed in a timely, efficient, and accurate manner.
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Section 7. Mathematics

- K-56 Knowledge of basic mathematics to include addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as needed to calculate employee leave, separation leave and pay, and payroll.
- A-22 Ability to perform mathematical computations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as needed to calculate, and review leave and payroll.
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Section 8. Knowledge of Performance Appraisal

- K-32 Knowledge of the merit system performance appraisal process to include drafting proper duties and responsibilities, form due dates, mid-appraisal procedures, form distribution, and disciplinary score subtraction as needed to advise supervisors and to process completed

appraisals.

Section 9. Banding Concepts

K-37 Knowledge of banded scoring concepts as needed to explain exam information to applicants.

Section 10. Reading Comprehension

A-13 Ability to read and comprehend written materials such as departmental memos, court orders, and policy and procedure documents as needed to make revisions, implement programs, interpret rules, ensure compliance with regulations, exchange information, and achieve departmental goals.

Section 11. HRM Calendar

A-23 Ability to comprehend HRM calendar as needed to ensure forms and ESMTs are completed according to established deadlines.

PREPARING FOR THE SELECTION PROCEDURE

Candidates often ask how they should study for an exam like this one. It is important to focus on what will be measured and how it will be measured. You should carefully review the knowledges and abilities contained in this booklet.

Included with this booklet is another booklet entitled, “Personnel Assistant III Study Materials Booklet.” You should carefully read over **ALL** of the material in that booklet. Many, but not all, of the answers to the questions in the exam can be found in this material. You will **not** be allowed to refer to the How to Prepare Guide or the Study Materials Booklet during the exam, so you should be thoroughly familiar with its contents before you take the exam.

As you can see from the list, many abilities are measured by the selection procedure. An ability is *the power to perform an activity at the present time*. An ability is the capacity to do something. You cannot really memorize something to obtain an ability. Accordingly, there is no study material provided in the Study Materials Booklet for most of the abilities. There may also be some knowledges where all the material needed to answer a question is not provided. It is not too late to learn how to perform some of the abilities. If you are not strong in an area, you should practice before participating in the selection procedure.

The three most important things you can do to help prepare for the PA III examination are to (1) review the knowledge and abilities, (2) read this guide to become familiar with the testing process so that you will be more relaxed and not confused during the administration, and (3) thoroughly review the provided Study Materials Booklet.

TIPS FOR TAKING THE EXAMINATION

- Use your time wisely. You will have three hours to take the exam. If you do not know the answer to a question, do not spend too much time thinking about it. Instead, move on to another question and return to the questions you have skipped if you have time.

- Carefully review the question before you attempt to answer it. The questions are not intended to be “tricky,” but you will need to read the question carefully to make sure you understand what it is asking.
- Darken the circles completely on the Scantron sheet so there is no doubt which answer you are giving. If you change your mind, make sure you erase completely.
- You will be allowed to mark or take notes in your test booklet; however, the only information that will be scored is the answers you give on your Scantron sheet.
- Do not panic. In a test like this one, some parts may seem more difficult to you than other parts. Do not give up.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON EXAMINATION DAY

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the examination and for getting to the exam location on the correct day, on time, and with the proper materials that you will need to take the examination.

- Get there early. Give yourself plenty of extra time to get to the test center and to park. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to get there before the scheduled exam time.
- You must bring the test-scheduling letter included in this packet. This letter lists the date, time, and location of the examination.
- You must bring two sharpened #2 lead pencils.
- You must also bring picture identification to the exam location. This may be your driver's license, a military identification card, or a passport.
- You will not be allowed to enter the test site or participate in the selection procedure without your PICTURE IDENTIFICATION and TEST NOTIFICATION CARD.
- You may bring a calculator to use for the Personnel Assistant III examination. 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.
- Do not bring cell phones or other electronic devices into the test room.
- Come dressed comfortably. You may be at the test site for up to 3½ hours.
- Do NOT bring this booklet or the Study Materials Booklet to the test site. You will not be permitted to bring them in. You will not be allowed to use any study or reference materials during the exam.
- The monitor will provide you with instructions concerning restroom availability during the administration. It is important to remember that the time that you take to use the restroom is time away from working on the test. We recommend that you use the restroom before the test begins if possible.

- Candidates making any disturbance or caught cheating will be disqualified from the exam.
- Test monitors can answer questions concerning administration issues only. They will not be able to interpret the questions for you.

BANDED SCORING

When the written exam for Personnel Assistant III 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.

We do not force bands 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. People's scores determine the size of the bands. We never know how many people will be in each band until we receive the test scores.

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.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PA III JOB

How are vacancies filled for the PA III?

The top ten applicants on the register are sent to a hiring agency for consideration. Since the banded scoring process will be 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.

Test Results

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. From the home page, you should click on “OES Login,” 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.

Administrative Questions

If you have any administrative questions or concerns about the exam or questions about any of the information presented in this booklet, please contact the State Personnel Department at (334) 242-3389. Specific information about the content of the exam cannot be provided.