

Study Guide for the *Middle School English Language Arts Test*



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Study Guide for the *Middle School*
English Language Arts Test



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Chapter 1

Introduction to the *Middle School English Language Arts*
Test and Suggestions for Using This Study Guide



Introduction to the *Middle School English Language Arts Test* and Suggestions for Using This Study Guide

Introduction to the *Middle School English Language Arts Test*

The *Praxis*™ *Middle School English Language Arts* test assesses test takers' understanding of the essential knowledge required for a beginning teacher of English at the middle school level. In developing assessment material for these tests, ETS works in collaboration with teacher educators, higher education content specialists, and accomplished practicing teachers to keep the tests updated and representative of current standards.

The *Middle School English Language Arts* test (0049) consists of 90 multiple-choice questions and 2 constructed-response questions, and covers 4 major areas in the following proportions:

Content Category	Approximate Number of Questions	Approximate Percentage of Total Score
• Reading and Literature Study	45	37%
• Language Study	16	13%
• Composition and Rhetoric	29	25%
• Short Essays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual Interpretation • Teaching Reading/Writing 	2 (constructed response)	25%

Test takers have 120 minutes to complete the test.

How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide gives you instruction, practice, and test-taking tips to help you prepare for the *Middle School English Language Arts* test. In chapter 2 you will find a discussion of *The Praxis Series*™—what it is and how the tests in *The Praxis Series* are developed. In chapter 3 you will find information on how to answer multiple-choice questions. In chapter 4 you will find information on answering constructed-response questions and on how constructed-response questions are scored. Then chapters 5, 6, and 7 will help you prepare for the test, give you the chance to take a practice test, and show you answers and sample responses and how they were scored.

So where should you start? Well, all users of this book will probably want to begin with the following two steps:

- **Become familiar with the test content.** Note what chapter 5 says about the topics covered in the test you plan to take.
- **Consider how well you know the content.** Perhaps you already know that you need to build up your skills in a particular area. If you encounter material that feels unfamiliar or difficult, fold down page corners or insert sticky notes to remind yourself to spend extra time in these sections.

Also, all users of this book will probably want to end with these two steps:

- **Familiarize yourself with test taking.** Chapter 3 contains information to help you sharpen your skills in reading and answering multiple-choice questions. Succeeding on multiple-choice questions requires careful focus on the question, an eye for detail, and patient sifting of the answer choices. Chapter 4 explains how constructed-response tests are scored and contains valuable tips on how to succeed on test questions in this format.

When you feel you understand the question formats, you can simulate the experience of the test by taking a practice test (chapter 6) within the specified time limits. Choose a time and place where you will not be interrupted or distracted. After you complete the test, look at chapter 7 to find the correct answers, explanations of those correct answers, and sample responses that scored well, scored poorly, or scored in-between. Score your responses to the multiple-choice questions and then examine the sample responses to the constructed-response questions to help you focus on the aspects of your own practice responses that were successful and unsuccessful. This knowledge will help you plan any additional studying you might need.

- **Register for the test and consider last-minute tips.** Consult <http://www.ets.org/praxis> to learn how to register for the test, and review the checklist in chapter 8 to make sure you are ready for the test.

What you do between these first steps and these last steps depends on whether you intend to use this book to prepare on your own or as part of a class or study group.

Using this book to prepare on your own

If you are working by yourself to prepare for the *Middle School English Language Arts* test, you may find it helpful to fill out the Study Plan Sheet in appendix A. This work sheet will help you to focus on what topics you need to study most, identify materials that will help you study, and set a schedule for doing the studying. The last item is particularly important if you know you tend to put off work.

Using this book as part of a study group

People who have a lot of studying to do sometimes find it helpful to form a study group with others who are preparing toward the same goal. Study groups give members opportunities to ask questions and get detailed answers. In a group, some members usually have a better understanding of certain topics, while others in the group may be better at other topics. As members take turns explaining concepts to each other, everyone builds self-confidence. If the group encounters a question that none of the members can answer well, the members can go as a group to a teacher or other expert and get answers efficiently. Because study groups schedule regular meetings, group members study in a more disciplined fashion. They also gain emotional support. The group should be large enough so that various people can contribute various kinds of knowledge, but small enough so that it stays focused. Often, three to six people is a good size.

Here are some ways to use this book as part of a study group:

- **Plan the group's study program.** Parts of the Study Plan Sheet in appendix A can help to structure your group's study program. By filling out the first five columns and sharing the work sheets, everyone will learn more about your group's mix of abilities and about the resources (such as textbooks) that members can share with the group. In the sixth column ("Dates planned for study of content"), you can create an overall schedule for your group's study program.

- **Plan individual group sessions.** At the end of each session, the group should decide what specific topics will be covered at the next meeting and who will present each topic. Use the topic headings and subheadings in chapter 5 to select topics. Some sessions might be based on topics from the review courses contained in this chapter; other sessions might be based on the sample questions from this chapter.
- **Prepare your presentation for the group.** When it's your turn to be presenter, prepare something that's more than a lecture. Write two or three original questions to pose to the group. Practicing writing actual questions can help you better understand the topics covered on the test as well as the types of questions you will encounter on the test. It will also give other members of the group extra practice at answering questions.
- **Take the practice test together.** The idea of the practice test is to simulate an actual administration of the test, so scheduling a test session with the group will add to the realism and will also help boost everyone's confidence.
- **Learn from the results of the practice test.** For each test, score each other's answer sheets. For the constructed-response questions, read chapter 7, which contains the sample responses to those questions and shows how they were scored, and then try to follow the same guidelines that the test scorers use.
 - *Be as critical as you can.* You're not doing your study partner a favor by letting him or her get away with an answer that does not cover all parts of the question adequately.
 - *Be specific.* Write comments that are as detailed as the comments made in chapter 7 by the scoring leader. Indicate *where and how* your study partner is doing an inadequate job of answering the question. Writing notes in the margins of the answer sheet may also help.
 - *Be supportive.* Include comments that point out what your study partner got right and that therefore earned points.

Then plan one or more study sessions based on aspects of the questions on which group members performed poorly. For example, each group member might be responsible for rewriting one paragraph of a response in which someone else did an inadequate job of answering the question.

Whether you decide to study alone or with a group, remember that the best way to prepare is to have an organized plan. The plan should set goals based on specific topics and skills that you need to learn, and it should commit you to a realistic set of deadlines for meeting these goals. Then you need to discipline yourself to stick with your plan and accomplish your goals on schedule.

Chapter 2

Background Information on *The Praxis Series*[™] Subject Assessments



What Are *The Praxis Series*™ Subject Assessments?

The Praxis Series™ Subject Assessments are designed by ETS to assess your knowledge of the subject area you plan to teach, and they are a part of the licensing procedure in many states. This study guide covers an assessment that tests your knowledge of the actual content you hope to be licensed to teach. Your state has adopted *The Praxis Series* tests because it wants to be certain that you have achieved a specified level of mastery of your subject area before it grants you a license to teach in a classroom.

The Praxis Series tests are part of a national testing program, meaning that the tests covered in this study guide are used in more than one state. The advantage of taking *Praxis* tests is that if you want to move to another state that uses *The Praxis Series* tests for licensure, you can transfer your scores to that state. Passing scores are set by states, however, so if you are planning to apply for licensure in another state, you may find that the passing scores there are different. You can find passing scores for all states that use *The Praxis Series* tests online at www.ets.org/praxis or on the website of the state for which you are seeking certification/licensure.

What Is Licensure?

Licensure in any area—medicine, law, architecture, accounting, cosmetology—is an assurance to the public that the person holding the license has demonstrated a certain level of competence. The main premise of licensure is that the person holding the license *will do no harm*. In the case of teacher licensing, a license tells the public that the person holding the license can be trusted to educate children competently and professionally.

Because a license makes such a serious claim about its holder, licensure tests are usually quite demanding. In some fields licensure tests have more than one part and last for more than one day. Candidates for licensure in all fields plan intensive study as part of their professional preparation: some join study groups, others study alone. But preparing to take a licensure test is, in all cases, a professional activity. Because it assesses your entire body of knowledge or skill for the field you want to enter, preparing for a licensure exam takes planning, discipline, and sustained effort. Studying thoroughly is highly recommended.

Why Does My State Require *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments?

Your state chose *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments because the tests assess the breadth and depth of content—called the “domain”—that your state wants its teachers to possess before they begin to teach. The level of content knowledge, reflected in the passing score, is based on recommendations of panels of teachers and teacher educators in each subject area. The state licensing agency and, in some states, the state legislature ratify the passing scores that have been recommended by panels of teachers. You can find out the passing score required for *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments in your state online or by looking in the pamphlet *Understanding Your Praxis Scores*, which is free from ETS (see www.ets.org/praxis). If you look through this document, you will see that not all states use the same test modules, and even when they do, the passing scores can differ from state to state.

What Kinds of Tests Are *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments?

The Praxis Series Subject Assessments generally include two types of test questions: multiple choice (for which you select your answer from a list of choices) and constructed response (for which you write a response of your own). Tests composed of multiple-choice questions can survey a wider domain because they can ask more questions in a limited period of time. Tests using constructed-response questions have far fewer questions, but the questions require you to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge in the area covered. Some tests, such as the *Praxis* Middle School tests, include both multiple-choice and constructed-response questions, allowing them to test both the breadth and depth of your knowledge.

What Do the Tests Measure?

The Praxis Series Subject Assessments are tests of content knowledge. They measure your understanding of the subject area you want to teach. The multiple-choice tests measure a broad range of knowledge across your content area. The constructed-response tests measure your ability to explain in depth a few essential topics in your subject area. The content-specific pedagogy tests, most of which are constructed-response, measure your understanding of how to teach certain fundamental concepts in your field. The tests do not measure your actual teaching ability, however. They measure your knowledge of your subject and of how to teach it. The teachers in your field who help us design and write these tests, and the states that require these tests, do so in the belief that knowledge of subject area is the first requirement for licensing. Your teaching ability is a skill that is measured in other ways; observation, videotaped teaching, or portfolios are typically used by states to measure teaching ability. Teaching combines many complex skills, only some of which can be measured by a single test. *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments are designed to measure how thoroughly you understand the material in the subject area(s) in which you want to be licensed to teach.

How Were These Tests Developed?

ETS began the development of *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments with a survey. For each subject, teachers around the country in various teaching situations were asked to judge which knowledge and skills a beginning teacher in that subject needs to possess. Professors in schools of education who prepare teachers were asked the same questions. These responses were ranked in order of importance and sent out to hundreds of teachers for review. All of the responses to these surveys (called “job analysis surveys”) were analyzed to summarize the judgments of these professionals. From their consensus, we developed the specifications for the multiple-choice and constructed-response tests. Each subject area had a committee of practicing teachers and teacher educators who wrote these specifications (guidelines). The specifications were reviewed and eventually approved by teachers. From the test specifications, groups of teachers and professional test developers created test questions.

When your state adopted *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments, local panels of practicing teachers and teacher educators in each subject area met to examine the tests question by question and to evaluate each question for its relevance to beginning teachers in your state. This is called a “validity study.” A test is considered “valid” for a job if it measures what people must know and be able to do on that job. For the test to be adopted in your state, teachers in your state must judge that it is valid.

CHAPTER 2

These teachers and teacher educators also performed a “standard-setting study”; that is, they went through the tests question by question and decided, through a rigorous process, how many of the questions a beginning teacher would be able to answer correctly. From this study emerged a recommended passing score. The final passing score was approved by your state’s licensing agency.

In other words, throughout the development process, practitioners in the teaching field—teachers and teacher educators—have determined what the tests would contain. The practitioners in your state determined which tests would be used for licensure in your subject area and helped decide what score would be needed to achieve licensure. This is how professional licensure works in most fields: those who are already licensed oversee the licensing of new practitioners. When you pass *The Praxis Series* Subject Assessments, you and the practitioners in your state can be assured that you have the knowledge required to begin practicing your profession.