



THE **PRAXIS**  
S E R I E S™

# Proper Use of The Praxis Series™ and Related Assessments

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*Listening.  
Learning.  
Leading.*

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Educational Testing Service (ETS) is committed to furthering quality and equity in education by providing valid and fair assessments, research, and related services. Central to this objective is helping those who use our assessments to understand what we consider to be proper test use. The purpose of this document is to define what the *Praxis*™ program means by proper test use for *The Praxis Series*™ and related assessments. It is not intended, however, to be a complete treatment of proper assessment use. It is not intended to provide recommendations for specific study designs, procedures, or data-gathering approaches to accumulate additional validity evidence or to establish cut scores for *The Praxis Series* tests.

### Proper Assessment Use

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Proper assessment use, in essence, means there is adequate evidence to support the intended use of the assessment and to support the decisions and outcomes rendered on the basis of candidates' assessment scores. Proper use, therefore, is inextricably connected to validity. Validity refers to the extent to which there is logical and/or empirical evidence supporting the purpose for which the assessment will be used and for the interpretations of assessment scores for a defined group of candidates. Less formally, validity evidence enables one to say with confidence that the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure and may be used for its intended purpose.

It is important to note that validity evidence is needed for each different use of the assessment. Assessment results may be appropriate (valid) for one use, but not necessarily for another. For example, an assessment validated for use in credentialing (licensure or certification) decisions cannot be assumed to be valid for use in selection (hiring) decisions. An assessment validated for use in measuring a prospective teacher's content knowledge cannot be assumed to be a valid measure of a prospective teacher's pedagogical skills.

This view of proper use also presumes that the intended purpose of the assessment is considered acceptable. Opinions may vary as to what constitutes acceptable use. The *Praxis* program believes that acceptable use, in general, means that better decisions are made by using the assessment than if the assessment was not used at all, and that the benefits of assessment use clearly outweigh any unintended negative consequences that may result from the test's use.

### Validity of The Praxis Series and Related Assessments

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This section describes the three divisions of *The Praxis Series* of teacher licensure assessments (*Praxis I*®, *Praxis II*®, and *Praxis III*®), the School Leadership Series of assessments, and the ParaPro assessment. A brief description of each is provided in the appendix.

The primary purpose of these assessments is to measure the knowledge and/or skills thought to be important for beginning practice. The assessment scores are used to inform licensure decisions or comparable decisions about entry-level competencies of educators—including, for example, whether someone has met the NCLB Highly Qualified requirement. In this case, scores may not be used for licensure by itself, but fulfillment of the Highly Qualified requirement means that the teacher demonstrates content knowledge consistent with what the state requires of candidates first seeking a license to teach that content. Functionally, this means that even experienced teachers may need to pass the licensure assessment required by the state.

Validation of assessments used for licensure-level decisions is based predominantly on evidence that the content of the assessment adequately represents knowledge and/or skills judged to be important for practice upon entry into the profession. In other words, there should be alignment between the knowledge and/or skills included on the assessment and the knowledge and/or skills needed by beginning practitioners. Technical standards advocate that some form of a job analysis or practice analysis be conducted to identify knowledge and/or skills important for practice (AERA, APA, NCME, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

The *Praxis* program follows recognized methods of job analysis to define its assessment content domains. (See Knapp & Knapp, 1995<sup>2</sup>, for an overview of job analysis/practice analysis procedures.)

## **Proper Uses of The Praxis Series and Related Assessments**

This section describes the intended and acceptable uses of *The Praxis Series* and related assessments. It also describes technical requirements that may be needed to comply with proper assessment use.

### **Praxis I**

**Teacher Licensure.** *Praxis I* assessments may be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for teacher licensure decisions. The *Praxis* program recommends that before adopting the assessments, the licensing body or agency review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered on the assessments is consistent with state standards and with expectations of what the state’s teachers should know and be able to do. The licensing body or agency also must establish a passing standard, or cut score. More than one approach to setting a passing standard may be used. The choice of approach should be consistent with the design and format of the assessment, as should the decision that’s made on the basis of the assessment score.<sup>3</sup>

**Entrance Into Teacher Preparation Programs.** These assessments also may be used by institutions of higher education to identify students (“rising juniors”) with sufficient reading, writing and mathematics skills to enter a teacher preparation program. If an institution is in a state that has authorized the use of *Praxis I* for teacher licensure and has set a passing score, the institution may use the same minimum score requirement for entrance into its program. Even so, institutions are encouraged to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis I* scores, when making final entrance decisions.

If an institution of higher education is in a state that has not authorized the use of *Praxis I* for teacher licensure, that institution should review the assessment specifications to confirm that the skills covered are important prerequisites for entrance into the program; it will also need to establish a minimum score for entrance. These institutions, too, are encouraged to use additional student qualifications when making final entrance decisions.

### **Praxis II**

**Teacher Licensure and NCLB Highly Qualified Compliance.** *Praxis II* assessments may be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for teacher licensure decisions. This includes candidates who seek to enter the profession via a traditional or state-recognized alternate route, and those currently teaching on a provisional or emergency certificate who are seeking regular licensure status. *Praxis II* assessments also may be used by states to satisfy federal No Child Left Behind regulations regarding Highly Qualified teachers. However, before a *Praxis II* assessment may be used for teacher licensure or for NCLB Highly Qualified compliance, the licensing body or agency must verify that the content of the assessment is appropriate (valid) for such uses in that particular state. Upon such verification, the licensing body or agency must then establish a passing standard, or a cut score. Our interpretation of NCLB regulations is that cut scores for licensure and Highly Qualified status are interchangeable. If a cut score already exists for either purpose, it can be applied to the other.

**Program Quality Evaluation.** Institutions of higher education may want to use *Praxis II* assessment scores as one criterion to judge the quality of their teacher preparation programs. The *Praxis* program recommends that such institutions first review the assessment specifications to confirm alignment between the assessment’s content and the content covered by the preparation program.

**Entrance Into Student Teaching.** Institutions of higher education may want to use *Praxis II* content assessment scores as one criterion for permitting students to move on to the clinical

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<sup>2</sup> Knapp, J.E., & Knapp, L.G. (1995). Practice Analysis: Building the Foundation for Validity. In J.C. Impara (Ed.), *Licensure Testing: Purposes, Procedures, and Practices* (pp. 93-116). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

<sup>3</sup> *Setting Performance Standards: Concepts, Methods, and Perspectives* (2001), edited by Gregory J. Cizek and published by Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, is a useful reference for procedures, practices and issues related to standard setting.

portion of their program—the student teaching phase. This use of the test is often based on the argument that a student teacher should have a level of content knowledge comparable to that of a teacher who has just entered the profession. This argument does not apply to pedagogical knowledge or skills, so *The Praxis Series* tests that only focus on pedagogical knowledge (the Principles of Learning and Teaching set of assessments) should not be used as prerequisites for student teaching.

The *Praxis* program suggests that institutions analyze the content knowledge a candidate must have to perform satisfactorily in the role of student teacher. This is analogous to conducting a small-scale job or practice analysis. The program can then review the *Praxis II* assessment specifications to verify that it adequately covers the content important for its student teachers. If the institution's state does not require that students pass this content test for state licensure, the institution also will need to conduct a standard-setting study to establish a minimum score for entrance into student teaching.

There are three scenarios involving the use of *Praxis II* content assessments for entrance into student teaching: (1) The state requires that all content-based requirements for licensure be completed before student teaching is permitted, (2) The state requires the identified *Praxis II* content assessment for licensure, but not as a prerequisite for student teaching, and (3) The state requires the identified *Praxis II* content assessment neither for licensure nor as a prerequisite for student teaching.

If an institution is in a state that uses the identified *Praxis II* content assessment for licensure, it may be that the state has also required candidates to meet its content-based licensure requirements before being permitted to student teach. In this case, additional validity evidence on the part of the program may not be necessary, as the state, through its adoption of the assessment for licensure purposes, has accepted that the assessment's content is appropriate, set a schedule for when content-based licensure requirements are to be met, and already established the passing scores needed to meet its requirements.

If an institution, but not the state, requires that students meet the content-based licensure requirement before being permitted to student teach, and the state requires the use of the identified *Praxis II* content assessment for teacher licensure, the institution should review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered is a necessary prerequisite for entrance into student teaching and that the curriculum students were exposed to covered that content. Institutions may use the state-determined licensure passing standard as its minimum score for entrance into student teaching or they may elect to set their own minimum scores; either way, they are encouraged to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis II* content scores, when making final decisions about who may student teach.

If an institution of higher education wants to use *Praxis II* but is in a state that has not authorized use of the identified content assessment for teacher licensure, that institution should review the assessment specifications to confirm that content covered on the test is a necessary prerequisite for entrance into student teaching and that the curriculum students were exposed to covered that content. Institutions also will need to conduct a standard-setting study to establish a minimum score for entrance; and they are encouraged to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis II* content scores, when making final decisions about who may student teach.

**Entrance Into Graduate-Level Teacher Programs.** Graduate-level teacher programs most often focus on providing additional or advanced pedagogical skills. These programs do not typically focus on content knowledge, itself. Because of this, such programs expect students to enter with sufficient levels of content knowledge. In states that use *Praxis II* content assessments for licensure, sufficient content knowledge may be defined as the candidate's having met or exceeded the state's passing score for the identified *Praxis II* content assessment. In this case, additional validity evidence on the part of the program may not be necessary, since the state, through its adoption of the assessment for licensure purposes, has accepted that the assessment content is appropriate.

However, if a graduate-level program is in a state that has not authorized the use of the identified *Praxis II* content assessment, that program should review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered on the test is a necessary prerequisite for entrance into the program. The program also will need to establish a minimum score for entrance; and it is encouraged to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis II* content scores, when making final entrance decisions.

## Praxis III

**Teacher Licensure.** The *Praxis III* assessment may be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for teacher licensure decisions. *Praxis III* is used as a requirement for the second level of licensure once teachers are working in the classroom. The *Praxis* program recommends that the licensing body or agency first review the assessment specifications to confirm that the domains of practice covered by the assessment are consistent with state standards and with expectations of what that state's teachers should know and be able to do. A passing standard (cut score) also will need to be established for such use by the licensing body or agency.

**Professional Development Needs.** The *Praxis III* assessment also may be used by districts or schools to identify areas of pedagogical practice in which their teachers may benefit from additional professional development opportunities. If a district or school is in a state that has authorized the use of *Praxis III* for teacher licensure, that district or school still must consider how it will use information obtained from the administration of the assessment to determine what types of professional development opportunities are appropriate for which teachers. This use is different from performance appraisal/evaluation use that affects salary, promotion and tenure determinations. The only appropriate uses for the *Praxis III* are professional development and licensure.

## The School Leadership Series

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**School Leader/Administrator Licensure.** This series of assessments may be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for school leader/administrator licensure decisions. The *Praxis* program recommends that the licensing body or agency first review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered by the assessments is consistent with state and/or disciplinary standards and expectations of what their school leaders/administrators should know and be able to do. A passing standard (cut score) will need to be established for such use by the licensing body or agency.

**Professional Development Needs.** This series of assessments also may be used by districts or schools to identify areas of practice in which their school leaders/administrators can benefit from additional professional development opportunities. If a district or school is in a state that has authorized use of the identified assessment for licensure, that district or school still must consider how it will use information obtained from the administration of the assessment to determine what types of professional development opportunities are appropriate for which school leaders/administrators. This use is different from performance appraisal/evaluation use that affects salary, promotion and tenure determinations. The only appropriate uses for the School Leadership Series are professional development and licensure.

If a district or school is in a state that has not authorized the use of the identified assessment for licensure, it should review the assessment specifications to confirm that they are consistent with the knowledge and skills valued by the district or school and expected of its school leaders/administrators. The district or school still will need to consider how it will use information obtained from the administration of the assessment to determine what types of professional development opportunities are appropriate for which school leaders/administrators. This use is different from performance appraisal/evaluation use that affects salary, promotion and tenure determinations. In this case, the only appropriate use for the School Leadership Series is professional development.

## The ParaPro Assessment

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**NCLB Compliance.** This assessment can be used by states and/or school districts to satisfy federal No Child Left Behind regulations for instructional paraprofessionals. The *Praxis* program recommends that the state and/or school district first review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered by the assessment meets NCLB needs. A passing standard (cut score) also will need to be established for such use by the state or school district.

**Professional Development Needs.** The assessment also can be used by districts or schools to identify areas of mathematics, reading and writing in which instructional paraprofessionals could benefit from additional professional development opportunities. The district or school still must consider how it will use information obtained from the administration of the assessment to determine what types of professional development opportunities are appropriate for which instructional paraprofessionals. This use is different from performance appraisal/evaluation use that affects salary, promotion and tenure determinations. The only appropriate use for ParaPro is professional development.

## Improper Uses of The Praxis Series and Related Assessments

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As noted above, proper assessment use is defined as acceptability of the intended use combined with evidence to support the intended use. Two specific examples of misuse are listed below but are not inclusive of all possible instances of misuse.

- **Employment Selection or Hiring.** The *Praxis* program believes it is inappropriate for a state, district, school or other local education agency to differentiate among candidates who have all met or exceeded the state's passing score on a *Praxis Series* test or related assessment for purposes of making a selection or hiring decision. These assessments were designed and intended to be used for credentialing, not for rank-ordering candidates or for making decisions that otherwise presume a predictive relationship between performance on these assessments and performance on the job.
- **Employment-Based Decisions Affecting Fully Licensed and Employed Educators.** The *Praxis* program defines a fully licensed educator as one who has met all state licensure requirements and, therefore, is not practicing under a probationary, emergency or provisional license. The *Praxis* program believes it is inappropriate for school districts or other local education agencies to use *The Praxis Series* and related assessment scores for terminating fully licensed educators, determining salaries, promoting or demoting educators, or completing performance appraisals/evaluations.

## Responsibilities for Proper Assessment Use

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Proper assessment use is a joint responsibility of ETS, as the developer of assessments, and of states, agencies, associations and institutions of higher education, as the users of assessments. The *Praxis* program is responsible for developing valid and fair assessments in accordance with technical guidelines established by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (*Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, 1999).

Assessment users are responsible for selecting an assessment they think meets their credentialing or related needs, and for using that assessment in a manner consistent with the test's intended and validated purpose. Assessment users must validate the use of an assessment for purposes other than those intended and supported by existing validity evidence. In other words, they must be able to justify that the intended alternate use is acceptable.

Both ETS and assessment users share responsibility for minimizing misuse of assessment information and for discouraging inappropriate assessment use.

## Closing Remarks

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This document is not intended to serve as a substitute for permissible or impermissible uses of assessments under federal and state laws. ETS offers technical assistance and advice concerning professional and legal responsibilities that relate to assessment use. However, states, agencies, associations and institutions of higher education are legally accountable for their use of an assessment; they must satisfy for themselves that their proposed use of an assessment is appropriate and supported by adequate validity evidence.

## APPENDIX

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### Praxis I

These assessments measure basic academic knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They are delivered in both paper- and computer-based formats. An overview of the *Praxis I* assessments is available at <http://www.ets.org/praxis>. This Web page is the gateway to all three divisions of *The Praxis Series* assessments. (See listing in the left column of the Web page.) Descriptions of assessment content and sample questions can be obtained by clicking on the “Tests at a Glance” link.

### Praxis II

These assessments measure content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge and content-specific pedagogical knowledge. They are delivered exclusively in a paper-based format. An overview of the *Praxis II* assessments, including assessment content and sample questions, is available at the aforementioned Web site.

### Praxis III

This assessment includes semi-structured teacher interviews and classroom observation. It is delivered, scored and managed by individual states. The assessment covers four domains of teaching practice, with primary emphasis on pedagogical practice: Organizing Content Knowledge for Student Learning, Creating an Environment for Student Learning, Teaching for Student Learning, and Teacher Professionalism. Each domain is defined by multiple indicators, with each indicator scored by trained assessors. An overview of the *Praxis III* assessment is available at the aforementioned Web site.

### The School Leadership Series

This series includes the School Leader Licensure Assessment and the School Superintendent Assessment. These assessments are developed and administered by ETS through contracted services with the Council of Chief State School Officers. Overviews of the assessments are available at the aforementioned Web site, under the “Related Assessments” link.

### The ParaPro Assessment

The ParaPro assessment measures basic reading, writing and mathematics knowledge, and the ability to apply this knowledge to assist in classroom instruction. An overview of the assessment is available at the aforementioned Web site, under the “Related Assessments” link.

