



THE **PRAXIS**
S E R I E S™

Myths & Realities

About The Praxis Series™

*Listening.
Learning.
Leading.*

Background on The Praxis Series

For more than 50 years, ETS has researched, developed and administered teacher assessments. **The Praxis Series™** is the most widely used teacher licensure assessment program in the United States. The **Praxis** tests are based on extensive national job analyses and have been developed in collaboration with leading educators, industry experts, and state policy-makers. As the debate continues over how to improve teacher quality in the U.S., some question the licensure process itself. Is the process effective in preparing teachers for the classroom? Do licensure tests accomplish their purpose? What is the level of oversight in the test development process? In this document, ETS will answer questions that some have raised about the **Praxis** tests. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion over how best to advance teaching and learning through effective teacher preparation and appropriate regulation of the profession.

Myth: There is one test, called **Praxis**, which is used for all teacher licensure.

Reality: The Praxis Series comprises more than 140 different tests in more than 70 different subject areas.

Praxis tests are administered nationwide and are used by 39 states and jurisdictions to measure three important skill areas for teacher licensure:

- Basic skills – **Praxis I**[®] tests measure basic academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. These exams are designed for use as a precursor to entry into a traditional teacher preparation academic program and for state licensure.
- Content or subject knowledge – **Praxis II**[®] tests measure knowledge of core subject areas such as English, mathematics and biology. These exams are designed for prospective teachers applying for state licensure.
- Pedagogy or teaching skills – The **Praxis II** Principles of Learning and Teaching tests use a case-study approach to assess general pedagogical knowledge at various grade levels. Again, these exams are designed for prospective teachers applying for state licensure. In addition, ETS offers states the **Praxis III**[®] assessment, an observation-based evaluation of beginning teachers' classroom performance.

State licensing agencies work with ETS to review and select those **Praxis** tests that best meet each state's needs for evaluating teacher candidates' readiness to enter the profession. It is important to note that passing a state-approved licensure test is just one criterion for obtaining a license to teach. Typically, states also have requirements for student teaching, other field experiences, minimum grade point averages, and/or hours in a particular major field of study.



Myth: The content in **The Praxis Series** tests does not reflect the subject area knowledge that is needed for effective teaching.

Reality: More than 90 percent of the tests in The Praxis Series measure subject area knowledge.

The content matter of the **Praxis II** subject tests is defined and validated by teachers in each of the subject areas tested. ETS oversees intensive committee work and national job analysis surveys to ensure that the specifications for each test are aligned both with the knowledge requirements of the entry-level teacher's job and with the appropriate teaching curriculum standards established by the nation's organizations for professional teaching disciplines.

For example, mathematics content is aligned with the standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and science with the National Science Teachers Association.

ETS also works with each ETS client state to identify those subject tests that best align with the state's content standards for entry-level teachers teaching subject areas and/or grade levels.



Myth: Praxis tests are not rigorous.

Reality: Similar to other professional licensure tests, Praxis tests are designed to assess whether a candidate, at the time of entry into the profession, possesses a sufficient level of knowledge and skill to perform important occupational responsibilities effectively and responsibly.

The process used to establish the job relevance of Praxis test content adheres to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* developed by the American Educational Research Association, The American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. The *Standards* states that the most appropriate source of validity evidence for licensure tests is the connection between test content and knowledge and/or skills that are important for job performance. ETS works closely with practicing teachers in relevant subject areas throughout the test development process to:

- define job knowledge and/or skill requirements important at the time of entry into the profession (professional standards review and job analysis studies)
- develop test specifications and test items that align with those requirements
- validate test content and assist states in setting appropriate passing scores

This approach has consistently resulted in assessments of high technical quality, which enable licensing agencies to make informed decisions about the qualifications of prospective teachers. In the latest review of teacher licensure tests by the National Research Council, part of the National Academy of Sciences, **The Praxis Series** was the only teacher licensure program reviewed that met most of the council's demanding criteria for quality.



Myth: Passing scores for the Praxis tests, set by ETS, are not high enough.

Reality: ETS does not set the passing scores for any of the Praxis tests. Each state sets its own scores.

A passing score represents what each state believes is the level of knowledge or skill that candidates must demonstrate on a particular Praxis test in order to qualify for an entry-level license to teach in that state. Each state is responsible for establishing its own passing score for each test. On behalf of each state, ETS works with panels of teachers skilled in the licensure area being tested, who are convened to review each test question. Using psychometrically accepted methods, panel members identify and recommend a passing score for each test. It is ultimately the state's responsibility whether to accept the panel's recommendations for the passing scores. Additional factors a state considers include anticipated pass rates, and the supply of and demand for teachers in the state.



Myth: The **Praxis** tests for pedagogy give credit for opinions rather than fact.

Reality: The **Praxis II** pedagogy tests are based on in-depth research about effective teaching practices and give credit only for proven teaching approaches.

Pedagogy tests in **The Praxis Series** are grounded in job analysis research (the standard industry practice for licensure tests) and on the teaching standards defined by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), a nationally recognized organization dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing, and ongoing professional development of teachers. Scoring is conducted by practicing educators who undergo extensive training in the critical elements of each question and which aspects of a response should be credited, based on the INTASC standards. Test takers' opinions are not considered in the scoring process. ETS continues to study the latest research on pedagogy and to incorporate relevant new findings into the assessments, and is currently utilizing experts to undertake an ongoing analysis of test questions to ensure that they are consistent with the most current research.



Myth: The **Praxis Series** is not appropriate for evaluating alternate-route teacher candidates.

Reality: **Praxis** tests are appropriate for any candidate seeking to enter the teaching profession, whether he or she has traveled a traditional teacher-preparation path or pursued an alternate route.

Praxis tests are a component of all alternate-route programs in the states that use **The Praxis Series**. ETS works with states, and with national programs such as Teach For America, to ensure the **Praxis** tests are made available to alternate-route candidates.

Whatever the route, ETS's experience is that responsible licensing decisions include three key components: education, experience and examination. While the relative weight assigned to each factor may change in order to open the door to prospective teachers who follow an alternate route to licensure, ETS believes that the teacher's role in advancing student learning is so important that an examination, education, or experience alone will not provide sufficient basis to make an appropriate decision regarding licensure.

Regardless of what route a teacher might take to get in the classroom, ETS also believes that states should have a consistent and uniform licensure standard for all candidates — a standard that aligns to the state's student content standards and to the knowledge and skill requirements the state has defined for teaching various subject areas and grade levels.



Myth: The **Praxis** tests are out-of-date.

Reality: ETS regularly evaluates the **Praxis** tests to ensure test content is current. Each year, approximately 150 new test forms are developed and older forms are retired.

ETS conducts regular, ongoing reviews and revisions to keep **Praxis** tests current with evolving standards.

In addition, for every **Praxis** test developed, ETS brings in practicing professionals from states that use the assessments. These professionals evaluate the alignment of the test content with national teaching standards and with the job requirements of beginning teachers.



Questions about **Praxis** or any of the myths and realities in this document?

For more information, visit www.ets.org.

