

Preparing for the Texas PreK-4 Teacher Certification

A Guide to the Comprehensive
TExES Content Areas Exam



Janice L. Nath

John Ramsey

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Edited by

Janice L. Nath

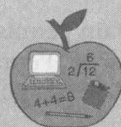
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Preface

SETTING THE STAGE: WHO, WHAT, WHY, AND WHERE

Changing from ExCET to TExES

In the fall of 2002, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) implemented a new educator examination program that supplants the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET), the educator certification program in place since 1986. The new program is called the Texas Examinations for Educator Standards (TExES).

This change is the result of the P-16 Initiative, a collaboration of SBEC, the Texas Education Agency, the regulator of elementary and secondary public education, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (the regulator of higher education). Their purpose was to establish a seamless, cohesive system of P-16 education that aligns educator certification with the mandated student curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). National Evaluation Systems (www.texas.nesinc.com) developed all the TExES under contract from SBEC.

This program is based on educator standards that defined the rigorous content and professional knowledge and skills that an entry-level educator should possess. This book is focused on preparing prospective teachers for one of the certification examinations, the Early Childhood to Grade Four Generalist (EC-4).

Who: The EC-4 Prospective Teacher Audience

This book is intended for those individuals seeking certification as teachers in early childhood through grade 4 classrooms in Texas. These prospective teachers must meet an array of quality and preparation criteria, including at least two state-administered examinations. This book addresses the standards, competencies, and associated content of the EC-4 Generalist examination. The Generalist standards and competencies require knowledge and skills associated with elementary curricular content and appropriate learning and assessment practices. The other examination required for certification is the EC-4 Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) examination. This second examination is specifically focused on the knowledge and skills associated with classroom pedagogy and professional ethics.

The What: EC-4 General Discipline Content

This book is a preparation resource that can be used as either a primary source text or a supplemental review guide for the EC-4 examination. Note that this book is not an SBEC publication; rather, it is an effort by experienced and dedicated educators to contribute to the certification process for the benefit of the state's prospective teachers and students. These educators are fully aware that passing this examination is not *all* that makes a good teacher, having seen numerous wonderful teacher candidates (who may not have easily passed the state examinations) teach excellent lessons with children. However, we do submit that this is excellent information for *any* EC-4 teacher to know.

The book's content focuses on the Texas standards, competencies, and allied content of seven areas of discipline knowledge (aligned with the TEKS, the mandated student curriculum of the state of Texas). The discipline areas, the basis of elementary curriculum, include reading/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, music, and health/physical education. A study skills chapter is also included to assist examination-takers in the preparation process.

Each content area chapter is organized around the pertinent standards. Each chapter first presents the Texas standards, a summary of the competencies with discussion, practice examination questions and discussion, and an overview of the related knowledge base (i.e., the facts, concepts, skills, and appropriate practice). However, due to the nature of each content area's standards and competencies, each chapter has its own unique organization. For example, some subject areas have more standards than competencies, while others have more competencies than standards. Thus, the length and organization of each chapter will vary.

Standards refer to broad, general goal statements related to each discipline area. They serve as an inclusive umbrella for a dimension of the discipline. Competencies are akin to objectives, operationalizing each standard into a number of more specific subcomponents of knowledge, skill, and appropriate practice. These competencies, however, have been paraphrased from the official text published by SBEC.

The examination questions use a multiple-choice format and are written at the comprehension and application level of Bloom's taxonomy. The discipline areas are not treated equally in terms of the number of questions for each. For example, the reading/language arts component of the examination represents about 40 percent of all examination questions. The math, social studies, science, and other combined (fine arts, physical education, and health) components on the other hand, each represent 15 percent of all examination questions.

Why: A Rationale for This Book

Prospective Texas teachers currently come from all over the United States and the world. Their educational experiences and cultural backgrounds vary to a

significant extent in terms of quantity and quality. Their prior knowledge about U.S. public school curricula will also vary. However, Texas has mandated a statewide curricula. Texas history, for example, is a mandated curricular requirement, and Texas requires its EC-4 teachers to have appropriate knowledge of that subject regardless of their educational preparation and background. This book provides a resource tool for prospective Texas teachers to identify, review, and/or remediate the knowledge, skills, and appropriate practice required for this Texas Generalist examination.

Where: The Organization of the Book

This book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 presents generic but relevant study skills and examination preparation guidelines. Chapter 2 deals with language arts and reading; Chapter 3 presents mathematics; Chapter 4 deals with social studies; Chapter 5 presents science; Chapter 6 presents art; Chapter 7 presents music; and Chapter 8 presents health and physical education. As noted, each chapter presents the standards, a summary of the related competencies with discussion, practice examination questions with discussion, and an overview of the related knowledge base (i.e., the facts, concepts, skills, and appropriate practice). Authors were tasked with offering as much as possible but were restricted by length limitations. We hope that you will continue to seek more theory and ideas for good teaching.

SBEC: Additional Background

If you've ever wondered who makes up the rules under which one becomes certified as a teacher, counselor, principal, superintendent, or any of the other professional roles in public schools, in Texas the answer is the State Board for Educator Certification. Since education is one of the powers reserved to the states under the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, each state is really responsible for its own system of public education—including decisions about who is licensed to teach in that state.

The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) is the result of 1995 action by the Texas Legislature. Its purpose is "to recognize public school educators as professionals and grant educators the authority to govern the standards of their profession." The Board is responsible to the Legislature for overseeing all aspects of the preparation, certification, and standards of conduct of educators in the state's public schools.

In just a few years, SBEC has shown a willingness to be innovative. It has implemented an accountability system for entities that prepare educators (sixty-nine institutions of higher learning and seventeen additional alternative certification programs at this writing) that is unique in the nation. It is phasing out the historic practice of issuing lifetime certificates in favor of certificates that are

renewable every five years and requiring professional development during the five-year life of the certificate to assure that educators stay current in their professional knowledge. Most recently, the Board is changing the classes of certificates to better meet the emerging needs of elementary and secondary schools in the state.

STRUCTURE. SBEC is currently composed of fifteen members appointed by the Governor to six-year terms. Of the total, twelve are voting members and three are participating, but nonvoting, members. The voting members currently comprise:

- Four classroom teachers
- One counselor
- Two school administrators
- Five citizens of the state not employed in public schools

The *nonvoting* members comprise:

- One dean of a Texas college of education
- One staff member of Texas Education Agency appointed by the Commissioner of Education
- One staff member of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board appointed by the Commissioner of Higher Education

MEMBERS. While members are appointed for six-year terms, as is usual with a group this size, individuals sometimes move or change positions so that they can no longer hold a certain seat (e.g., a classroom teacher becomes an assistant principal). To get the most up-to-date information on the current membership of the State Board for Educator Certification the best source is its website: www.sbec.state.tx.us.

This website contains a wealth of information on the Board, its current membership, scheduled meetings, agendas, minutes; information on requirements and standards that apply to various types of certificates; press releases and reports generated by the Board and its staff; information on investigations and enforcement of certification standards and the Code of Ethics. It is also an excellent source of information for individuals who are certified in another state and who wish to become certified in Texas.

Good luck to all prospective teachers! We hope that this information will help you pass the examination and also help you become an excellent and knowledgeable teacher. May you give your best to children each and everyday.



ABOUT THE EDITORS

DR. JANICE NATH is currently a faculty member in the Department of Urban Education at the University of Houston-Downtown. She is the co-editor of *Becoming a Teacher in Texas: A Course of Study for the Professional Development ExCET*, *Becoming an EC-4 Teacher in Texas: A Guide for the Early Childhood through Fourth Grade (EC-4) PPR TExES*, and *Forging Alliances in Community and Thought: Research in Professional Development Schools*. Dr. Nath headed a Professional Development School

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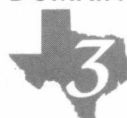
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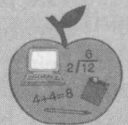
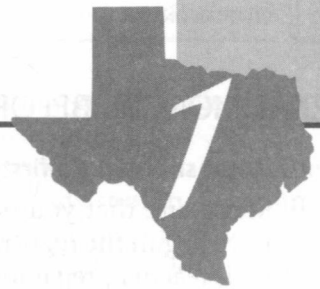
Study Skills and Other Helpful Hints

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Studying early and studying smart for the EC-4 Generalist will pay off with a higher test score for you, the test taker. In fact, research suggests that good things happen to students who improve their study and test-taking skills. Students with strong study skills find it easier to study, consistently earn better grades and higher test scores, and become more successful in life. Therefore, we begin with this chapter to give you strategies and hints to help you study for and complete this examination with success. This chapter will be designed along a timeline and written in a question-and-answer format to facilitate your learning.



SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE THE EC-4 GENERALIST

What should I do first?

Make sure that you have selected a good time to take the EC-4 Generalist and have begun the registration process properly (either through the state or through your teacher preparation entity). Late registration can cost you more money and may cost you a delayed test day. Some candidates can now register online, but you may still need a barcode or approval number if you are receiving certification training through a university or alternative certification program. Addresses can be found at the end of this chapter.

How should I begin preparing for the EC-4 Generalist?

Studying for this important exam can seem to be overwhelming. There is so much information to learn (the good news is that much of it will probably be a review). Therefore, it is necessary to break this task down into smaller, more manageable steps. The key is to get organized by developing time-management skills and material-management skills. Start to review and learn any new information early!

What time-management skills will I need and how do I develop them?

The primary time-management skills you will need to develop are to set manageable time goals and workload goals for each study session. For example, if you begin studying for the exam four months before the test date, plan to study about three days a week for approximately 30 to 60 minutes per session. This is a manageable and reasonable study schedule for most. However, if you begin preparing for the EC-4 Generalist one to two months before the test date, you will need to study more days during the week and spend more time in each study session to ensure that you sufficiently cover the materials on the test. Scheduling your study sessions by writing them on your calendar as you would an appointment with your doctor or dentist will emphasize the importance of this time for you. Also, try to schedule your study sessions for the same time of the day or evening. This will help you develop and stick to a study routine.

Did you know that our brains more easily remember the first and last items we read as compared to items in the middle of a passage or list? This is important, if you want to maximize the amount of material you can remember. Don't study continuously during your study sessions. It is better to take frequent study breaks to create as many beginnings and endings as possible without forfeiting any of those minutes you have set aside for your entire session. For example, each chapter of this book is divided into smaller sections to deal with separate indicators. Several concepts are often covered in each of these subdivisions. Try to concentrate on one of these concepts for a bit and then return to another. However, study breaks should not be long. A brief 2- to 5-minute mental vacation is all it takes to give your mind a rest while your mind absorbs the material you have just read. Some suggestions for brief study breaks include listening to a

favorite song, stretching your muscles by doing a few exercises, getting a quick drink or snack, or simply closing your eyes for a few moments.

For each of your study sessions, you must also set a workload goal that can be accomplished within the time allotted to your study session. For example, a reasonable workload goal would be to read five to ten pages of content material from a textbook or study guide or to work through several practice questions and their correct answers. Setting small time goals and workload goals are powerful and effective ways to overcome most study blocks that can often make a longer study session seem overwhelming. As Henry Ford once said, "Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs."

What material-management skills will I need and how do I develop them?

You may have many materials that help you study for this test besides this book. The material management skills you need include keeping your EC-4 study materials organized and accessible. If your study materials are scattered through-

out your house, apartment, dorm room, or other locations, you will waste valuable time locating and organizing them before you can begin your study session. Find an easily accessible place such as a desk, bookcase, or filing cabinet and return all of your study materials to this location when you have finished using them.

Your materials should be organized in such a manner that you can quickly find the books, notebooks, note cards, or study guides that you need. Using different colored file folder or manila file folders with colored labels for each content area is an effective method of organizing a large body of study material. For example, if you place all of your mathematics materials in a red file folder, you will quickly be able to locate everything when you are ready to study that content area. Further organization of your materials may have to be done if

the content areas contain multiple areas that you need to study and review separately. Some domains contain many subsections. Due to the breadth of these topics, several file folders of the same color should be labeled separately with each content title—but stored together in a box or desk drawer for easy access.

As well as material management skills, there are other methods for creating an optimal study environment. These methods include:

- A.** Keeping your study environment at approximately 68 degrees: Cooler temperatures help improve concentration and memory.
- B.** Studying facing a blank or neutral wall: Looking at a wall of eye-catching posters or pictures can be very distracting.

HELPFUL HINT

Plan to do something fun after a study session. Studying for this examination requires hard work, commitment, and dedication on your part. Therefore, it is important to schedule an enjoyable activity with which to reward yourself after a study session.

- C. Ensuring your study environment is well lit with high-wattage, soft-light bulbs: Fluorescent or insufficient lighting quickly increases mental fatigue.

SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THE EC-4 GENERALIST

How should I spend my study time and on what should I concentrate when I have only several weeks before taking the EC-4 Generalist?

Organize a Study Group

At this point you should feel competent that you are covering new material and reviewing old material in an effective manner. If you have not begun to prepare

HELPFUL HINT

In addition to studying with this guide, attend a university, district, regional, school-sponsored, or commercial review seminar. A specially prepared review can be a worthwhile investment and can offer additional insights and guidance in your preparation process. Take advantage of this opportunity, particularly if you have previously not done well on this examination.

for the EC-4 Generalist before this time, please read the information in the previous section to help you organize and begin your study process as quickly as possible. Select the main subject areas that you feel may be deficient and concentrate on those areas first. Also, remember that certain subjects (language arts/reading and mathematics) are weighted more heavily (followed by science and social studies) in this test, so focus on these areas if you do not have much time.

If you have been preparing on your own for a while, now is the time, if possible, to organize a study group for review sessions. Other students or teachers who are also preparing for this examination can often offer fresh insight into the content and help maintain motivation for your study sessions. Discussing terms and concepts with others requires you to become actively involved with the material, and one of the best ways to learn something new is to explain and teach it to someone else. Generating your own practice questions and answers and reviewing content material with

a partner or a small group of other test takers is one of the most effective means of preparing for an important examination.

Use Your Senses

Successfully completing the EC-4 Generalist requires you to know and remember a large amount of information. Using numerous sensory channels to store information is a powerful way to remember and recall what you have learned. Try to use your senses of sight, hearing, and touch during each study session. Make it a habit to visualize, discuss, draw, diagram, and/or create a flash card for

what you are reading and hearing. This strategy will help you make connections with the content material and, in turn, help you to recall the information you need when you take the examination. Memory models help as well. For example, you may have had such models such as “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” in mathematics to remember the order of operations, but you can create your own models to help you remember some of the information needed for this test, too.

Use Your Time Wisely

Using your time wisely is a critical component in getting the most out of each study session. If you focus your attention and concentration powers on the materials you are studying, you will be more likely to accomplish your goals. To help you focus and concentrate, try the following suggestions:

- A.** Alternate your activities. Use each study session to review two or more content areas. For example, do not spend an entire study session focusing only on basic science concepts or geography material. Changing topics within a content area or studying two completely different content areas during one session will help keep your mind fresh and more mentally alert.
- B.** Take notes or underline as you read. Using this strategy will help you focus on the most critical ideas and concepts in the material. You will be forced to think about the information being presented and what it means to you. Most importantly, this will stop you from getting to the end of a page or section and wondering what you have just read.
- C.** Begin and end on a positive note. Incorporating this strategy is a simple way to maintain your focus and motivation for studying. If you are not a person who enjoys studying for long and difficult examinations, end your study session at a point where it is easy and logical for you to pick up and begin again. Beginning and ending on a positive note will go a long way in keeping you motivated and helping you concentrate and focus.
- D.** Buy in! If you are going to be teaching young children in Texas, you really should know all this content information! It will be good for students and good for you as a professional, and it is expected to be a part of your professional knowledge. Buying in to this idea will help keep you motivated!

It is also important to remember that the number of indicators within each domain or content area reflects the percentage of the area covered on the EC-4 Generalist. The domains or content areas with more indicators will have more questions on the exam. You will need to spend a greater percentage of your study time reviewing the material in those areas—for example, language arts in the past has had over 30 percent of the test questions. Do not forget to look at the