



# Preparing for City of Chicago Employment Tests: A Guide for Test-Takers

## About the Test Preparation Guide

Thank you for your interest in employment with the City of Chicago. This guide provides information on exam preparation and test anxiety. It is intended to provide a general resource for test-takers. It is not specific to one pre-employment test. It also does not cover preparation for job interviews. We hope you will find the information useful.

## What Might Be on the Test?

The City of Chicago generally gives two types of pre-employment tests: job knowledge tests and skills assessments. **Job knowledge tests** ask about the technical knowledge required for the job. They may incorporate multiple choice, true/false, matching, or another type of test item (see example to the right). The other category of testing often used by the City of Chicago is **skills assessment**. These tests often involve completing tasks that are similar to those seen on the job.

Test-takers may complete one or both of these pre-employment tests depending on the nature of the job. Refer to the job posting of the position to which you are applying for more information about the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the job. The content of the test will be linked to this information. For example, if a position requires extensive knowledge of Excel, the testing process might incorporate an activity that asks applicants to demonstrate a mastery of Excel.

### Example for the Position of Baker

#### Example Job Knowledge Items

**Multiple Choice:** How many cups are in one quart?

- 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups
- 4 cups
- 2 cups
- 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups

**True/False:** Bread always contains yeast

- True
- False

**Matching:**

Match the activity with the corresponding tool used to complete the task:

- |            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| Cutting    | Rolling pin |
| Mixing     | Knife       |
| Flattening | Sieve       |
| Straining  | Whisk       |

#### Example Skills Assessment Item

**Work Simulation:** With the ingredients in front of you, make a batch of oatmeal chocolate chip cookies. You will have 30 minutes to complete this task.

## Test Preparation Strategies

There are many different ways to prepare for pre-employment tests. You may want to try out different techniques until you find the best strategies that work for you.

**Set goals.** Use the SMART Framework to think about your learning goals (see next page).

**Make an outline.** If you think you will have to explain or summarize information or make a reasoned argument, it may be useful to create an outline of the key points or steps.

**Find a study buddy.** Some test-takers work best when learning in a group environment. Note: this will not work for every testing situation.

**Pencil it in.** Make time to prepare every day, even if it is just thirty minutes.

**Mix it up.** Evidence suggests that learning is enhanced when you cover multiple topics in each session rather than tackling one subject at a time.

**Teach it.** One of the most effective ways of deepening your understanding of a topic is to teach it to someone else.

---

**Testing Tip:** In order to get a sense of what will be on the test, review the job description listed on the City of Chicago website. What knowledge, skills, and abilities are listed? You can also look at the class specification, which describes the characteristics of the job.

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dhr/supp\\_info/job\\_specifications.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dhr/supp_info/job_specifications.html)

---

**Notable Quote:** “By varying one’s testing strategies, the actual final exam — the dreaded assessment — isn’t nearly as scary.”

- Benedict Carey, author of How We Learn

## **Application: Using SMART Goals to Enhance Microsoft Word Skills**

You are applying for a position that requires extensive knowledge of Microsoft Word, and the last time you used Microsoft Word regularly was back in 1998. You are aware that since 1998, Microsoft has updated the Word program and that it may be different from what you remember in terms of appearance and functionality. You want to refresh your skills, but you don't know where to begin. This is how SMART goals can help.

### 1. **Specific** - specific difficult goals tend to be more effective than "do your best"

Your goal: learn how to type a 1 page formal memo using a recent version of Microsoft Word. Learn how to perform the most commonly used functions in the program. If you don't have Word on your personal computer, you can practice at a public library computer.

### 2. **Measurable** - develop criteria for goal accomplishment

Your goal: learn the major functions of each tab (e.g. insert, page design, view) in two weeks. Spend two days practicing the major functions of each tab.

### 3. **Attainable** - goals should be challenging but realistic

Your goal: it will be easier to fit in 2 hours of learning and practice each day than 6 hours.

### 4. **Relevant** - seek feedback and support from supervisors/mentors when creating goals

Your goal: use a tutor (potentially a knowledgeable coworker or family member) to teach you the most frequently used functions in Word. Focus on learning the basics and the functions that might be used most often for the position. Then you can master more advanced topics.

### 5. **Timely** - set time limits for the overall goal and tasks to accomplish that goal

Your goal: the skills assessment is in two weeks! Give yourself 1.5 weeks to learn the functions, and the full two weeks to practice working with a current version of Microsoft Word.

## **Checklist- Before the Test**

- ✓ Get plenty of sleep. Last minute cramming for a test is counterproductive. Your brain works better when you are well rested, so it makes more sense to get eight hours of sleep than to stay up studying.
- ✓ Be active. Walking or engaging in some moderate physical activity helps to alleviate stress and improve brain activity.
- ✓ Get organized. Double check the time and location of the testing site. Map out your route to the test, and plan time for traffic and unforeseen circumstances. You should aim to be at the test location 15-30 minutes before the examination begins.
- ✓ Clear your head. It may be useful to incorporate anxiety reduction techniques to improve your focus.
- ✓ Review the job posting and the job description in the class specification posted on the City of Chicago Website.

---

**Testing Tip:**

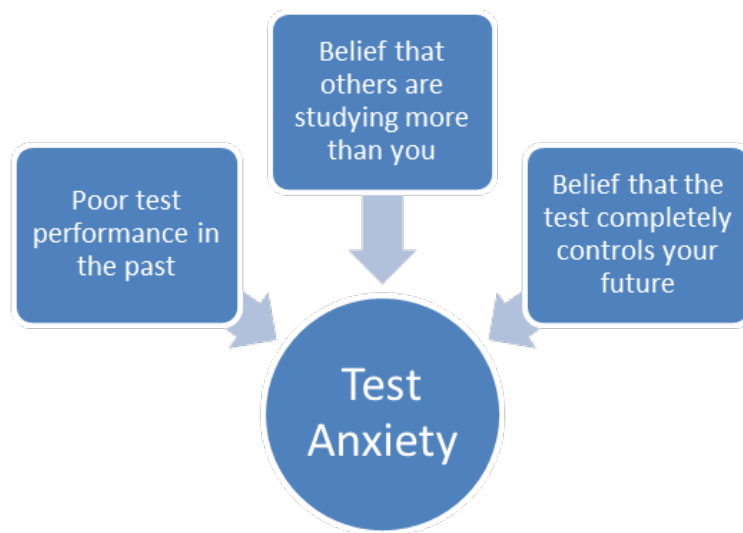
Read the entire question and the response options before marking down your answer.

---

**What is Test Anxiety?**

The idea of taking a test may fill you with dread, but you are not alone. Many test-takers experience test anxiety. These negative feelings can work to your advantage because they keep you alert; however, if they become too extreme, then they may interfere with your performance.

Tips for alleviating anxiety can be found in the “Checklist-During the Test” box on the next page.



---

**Your Turn!** Think about what has made you anxious when taking tests in the past. What can you do differently this time?

---

## Tips for Taking Multiple Choice Tests

Many job knowledge tests given at the City of Chicago incorporate multiple choice questions. In a multiple choice test, more than one response option is presented. The test-taker must choose the most appropriate or accurate response based on the question. Below are strategies that can be used when taking multiple choice tests:

- \* Read the entire question before looking at the potential responses. Note any key words in the text.
- \* Read every possible answer before responding to the question.
- \* Eliminate any alternatives that you know are incorrect (distractors). This will increase the probability of choosing the correct response.
- \* If you are not sure of the correct answer, use logical reasoning to try to work through the problem.
- \* Ignore potential patterns of responses (e.g. every fourth answer is **C**). Use only the logic of the test content to decide how to respond.
- \* Complete the easy questions first. You can go back to the hard questions after a few minutes.

---

**Testing Tip:** If you are required to write on your test or answer sheet, write clearly and legibly. This will ensure that your response is scored accurately.

---

## Checklist- During the Test

- ✓ Listen to the instructions, which a testing administrator will read to you. Be sure to listen carefully to make sure you are not missing any information.
- ✓ Read over each question before you respond. Read all of the response options before answering.
- ✓ Double check your work. Review your answers for mistakes.
- ✓ Take your time. You should work at a pace that will allow you to complete the test but will give you enough time to review your work for errors.
- ✓ Feeling anxious? Close your eyes and take five deep breaths. Using a simple stress reduction technique like deep breathing helps you to better focus.
- ✓ Remain confident and say positive things to yourself.
- ✓ Ask questions if you do not understand the instructions.

## Using the Job Announcement to Determine How to Prepare

### Example 1:

*This position does not require a test or interview. Applicants who successfully apply for the position, meet the minimum qualifications, and possess the qualifications best suited to fulfill the responsibilities of the position will be hired in a lottery/random order.*

**How should I prepare?** There is no test required for this position, so you do not need to prepare.

### Example 2:

*This position requires applicants to complete an interview which will include a written exercise and/or a skills assessment test as part of the interview. The interviewed candidate(s) possessing the qualifications best suited to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, based on the oral and written parts of the interview will be selected.*

**How should I prepare?** Note that this position requires a skills assessment test as part of the interview. Refer to minimum requirements under the job posting to consider what skills may be assessed. For example, if it states that candidates must be proficient in Microsoft PowerPoint, it is possible that candidates may complete a PowerPoint activity during the interview.

### Example 3:

*This position requires applicants to successfully pass a skills assessment test and complete an interview. Test results will be sent out by the Department of Human Resources after test results have been compiled and analyzed. Applicants who receive a passing score on the test will be selected to interview, which will include a written exercise as part of the interview. The interviewed candidate(s) receiving a passing score on the test(s) and possessing the qualifications best suited to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, based on the oral and written parts of the interview, will be selected.*

**How should I prepare?** Note that this position requires a skills assessment test that will be scored pass/fail and an interview. Although you can't study for either of these in the traditional sense, you can still prepare. Look at the essential duties and/or preferences in the announcement. For example, if preference is given to candidates proficient in Microsoft Word, it may make sense to review some of the basic functions of the program. In order to prepare for the writing exercise, you may practice writing a letter or essay in order to become more comfortable with writing. You can also gain practice proofreading your work.

## About Us

This preparation guide was prepared by the City of Chicago Department of Human Resources Testing Division. Our mission is twofold. We provide valid, reliable, fair, and standardized tests and administrative services that adhere to industry standards and laws. We also strive to maintain a qualified and diverse workforce.

We work under the guiding principles of the Department of Human Resources, with the purpose of serving the City of Chicago by driving best human resources practices, acting as stewards of change, and establishing and maintaining fair, equitable and transparent employment practices free of political influence.

We thank you for reading this preparation guide and wish you good luck applying for a position with the City of Chicago!

## Additional Resources

- **Managing Test Anxiety:** <http://counseling.uchicago.edu/page/managing-test-anxiety>
- **Harvard University Study Tips:**  
[http://cdowscience.weebly.com/uploads/3/5/8/7/3587237/study\\_tips.pdf](http://cdowscience.weebly.com/uploads/3/5/8/7/3587237/study_tips.pdf)
- **Active Learning:** <http://arc.duke.edu/documents/Active%20Learning.pdf>
- **L.A. County Test Prep:**  
<http://dhrdcap.co.la.ca.us/olt/index.cfm?fuseaction=general.selectTestType>
- **New York Times Study Tips:**  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/07/health/views/07mind.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=3&ref=homepage&src=me](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/07/health/views/07mind.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3&ref=homepage&src=me)