

PLANNER I EXAMINATION

STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study guide is to provide an overview of the testing process for the Planner I exam, including information regarding the test format, and preparing for the day of the test. We hope the information provided will help to relieve some test anxiety and help you perform to the best of your ability.

THE EXAMINATION

The examination is a three-phase test consisting of a multiple-choice test worth 40%, an in-basket exam worth 45%, and a computer-simulated software test worth 15% of the total score. The computer portion simulates work using Microsoft Office products Word, Excel, and Outlook. The multiple-choice test assesses reading comprehension, logic and reasoning, math, map reading, city planning, historical preservation, building and zoning, and GIS technology. The in-basket exam assesses the candidate's ability to prioritize, recognize problems, make judgments, and resolve problems. Candidates take all phases of the examination on the same day. The computer simulation portion of the test is administered first, followed by the multiple-choice, and then the in-basket. Total administration time, **not** including check-in and instructions, will be at least five hours.

The Multiple-Choice Phase

Preparation:

The multiple-choice test consists of questions covering reading comprehension, logic and reasoning, math, map reading, city planning, historical preservation, building and zoning, and GIS technology. If you know that you have room to improve in any of these areas, it is recommended that you gather related materials and practice. If you have difficulty with reading comprehension, find a text book or knowledge based magazine, read small passages and then ask yourself questions about what you read: "What was the main idea? What is important in this passage?" If you don't know the meaning of a word, look it up. If math is a problem area, find a math test and practice solving word problems. The exam also assesses basic knowledge of city planning, historical preservation, building and zoning, and GIS technology. If you are unfamiliar with these knowledges, reading material on the subjects should provide you with some basic knowledge. You should be able to find reading material online or at the library. You can practice map reading by obtaining a road atlas and learning how to use it; most atlases are self-explanatory. The more you practice and challenge yourself, the better prepared you will be on test day.

Test Day:

You can write in the test booklet, but remember that only the answers recorded on your scannable answer sheet will be graded. Circle important sentences or key words in the questions and especially in the reading passages of the Reading Comprehension section. In general:

- Read each question carefully.
- Don't be afraid to go with the first answer that comes to your mind. First instincts are often correct.
- If you find a question difficult or confusing, skip over it and come back to it after you have finished the test. Do not spend too much time on any one item. If you skip a question, be sure to make a corresponding "skip" on your answer sheet. Circle the question in your test booklet as a reminder to go back and answer it if time allows.
- Try to think of the answer to the question before looking at the alternatives. If you do not know the answer, try to eliminate those choices that are clearly wrong. This makes the chance of picking the correct answer easier. Again, you can write in your test booklet, so feel free to cross out the wrong alternatives. After eliminating the obviously wrong answers, pick the best alternative from those that are left.
- Be careful not to be misled by alternatives that are only partially true. Always select the best answer.
- Frequently check that the number on the on the scannable answer sheet matches the question you are answering, especially if you have skipped questions.
- If you have time, go back, answer any questions you skipped, and review your answers. There are no penalties for incorrect responses, so answer every question, even if you have to guess.

The In-Basket Phase

The in-basket portion of the test simulates the typical tasks incumbents might encounter in an office setting. Of the three phases, the in-basket presents the biggest challenge to most test-takers. In this phase of the exam, you are asked to assume the duties of an incumbent working in a similar job. You are provided with materials comparable to those encountered during a typical work day. These may include telephone messages, calendars, a table of organization, memos, letters, notes, etc. Using the data provided, you are asked to accomplish certain tasks. You will be documenting your work/responding using a Word document on the computer, and your completed responses will then be evaluated and graded. Although you will not be graded on spelling, grammar, or punctuation, the raters must be able to understand your responses.

The in-basket exercise is designed to evaluate the following ability areas:

- Prioritizing
- Problem Sensing
- Problem Solving
- Decision-making/Judgment
- Planning and Evaluation

Preparation:

The following outline provides an overview of the areas to be evaluated. Familiarize yourself with the information below. This information suggests some ways to approach the in-basket. The answers to the questions within this outline provide a solid framework for handling the in-basket exam.

Prioritizing:

When confronted with data coming from multiple sources, in various formats, with deadlines and due dates, you need to determine where to begin. Assign a level of importance to those tasks so that there is a plan and you can work effectively. Ask yourself:

- What is the most important task?
- What is the most time-sensitive task?
- How many other tasks may be affected by my choice?
- Are my choices logical?
- Can I justify my choices?

Problem Sensing:

Before you even begin to find a solution to a problem, you need to recognize that there is a problem and be able to correctly identify not only the problem as a whole, but also the parts of the problem as well. Ask yourself:

- Is there a problem?
- What is the problem?
- What isn't working?
- Why isn't it working?
- Is that the whole problem or only part of the problem?
- Are there sub-text problems that need to be addressed separately?

Problem Solving:

Once you identify the problems, you need to determine how to fix them. Gather information, analyze that information, and determine how it is relevant to the problems at hand. Find alternatives that are available to you and ask yourself:

- What is the most critical problem?
- Are there multiple ways to fix the problems?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages to the possible solutions?
- What are my alternatives?

Decision-Making/Judgment:

Once you have generated alternative solutions to the problems, it's time to make a decision on the course of action to take. Sound reasoning and good judgment play a critical role in the process, so that you can defend your choices, should they be questioned. Ask yourself:

- What is the best choice?
- What are the consequences of my decision?
- Can I defend my decision?

Planning and Evaluating:

For a plan to be effective, you must have a goal, that is, know what you need to accomplish. You need to keep that objective in mind so that you can take the necessary steps to get to it. As you follow the steps of your plan, be sure to evaluate your progress. Ask yourself:

- What steps do I need to take to reach my goals?
- In what order do they need to be taken?
- What resources do I need to complete my plan?
- Do I need help?
- What other problems might come up?
- How do I evaluate my progress?
- What's my timeline?

Test Day:

- **Read the instructions carefully.** This is where most candidates have difficulty with this phase of the test. Be sure that you clearly understand what is expected. If you are unsure about any instructions, be sure to ask a monitor for clarification.
- Give specific and relevant responses to each scenario.
- **Manage your time so that you can respond to all the scenarios.** It is up to you to use your time wisely.
- Periodically save your work.
- Make sure your answers are clearly written and understandable. If the raters cannot understand what you are trying to say, you will receive only partial credit or no credit at all.
- Once you have finished the in-basket, save your work, and print it. If you have time to review the printed document, you are allowed to make changes and reprint. Once you have initialed your work as a finished document, you will not be allowed to make further changes.

The Computer Simulation Phase

Preparation:

The computer simulation portion of the examination is designed to evaluate your ability to use Microsoft Excel, Outlook, and Word. Both the Announcement and your Examination Notice will provide information regarding what version of each software application will be tested. We recommend that if you are not familiar with the versions being tested that you check your library for the popular “dummies” books and review the basic parts of the applications, or search for online tutorials.

Test Day:

- Read the directions completely before taking the test.
- The computer will count down time remaining with time shown at the bottom of the screen.
- Generally, shortcuts are not accepted, so be familiar with the ribbon for each software program. You will have five attempts to provide the correct response.

The following suggestions will get you off to a good start:

- **Read your Examination Notice** to make sure you know the date, time, and location of the test.
- If you are not familiar with downtown Columbus, use the internet to map out a route and/or drive to our building at 77 North Front Street. Figure out how much travel time is needed, and then add more time for traffic congestion, construction zones, parking availability, and building security check-in.
- Figure out where you will park (parking information/suggestions are listed in your letter) and be sure to bring money to pay for parking. Do not park at a meter because you will not be permitted to leave the testing center to feed a meter.
- If you need the address, put your admission letter with your other paperwork or write the Commission’s address down for reference.
- Bring any required materials with you (calculator, etc.)
- Get enough sleep the night before. This will help you maintain your concentration for the duration of the test. Wear comfortable clothes. The test facility may be hot or cold. You cannot change the room, but you can put on or take off layers.
- Eat a good breakfast, avoiding a lot of carbohydrates and sugar.
- Food and beverages are not allowed in the Test Center, but can be brought and kept in the lobby area.

YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO BRING THIS STUDY GUIDE TO THE EXAMINATION.

An “Employment Information Guide,” an introduction to the civil service process, types of exams, test taking strategies, and other useful information can be found on the Columbus Civil Service Commission website at columbus.gov/civilservice.

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