

New York State Department of Civil Service Publication

Questions and Answers about Municipal Civil Service Examinations

In New York State, competitive civil service examinations provide a way to ensure that appointments to municipal public service jobs are based on merit and fitness. Those people who are interested in public service employment must demonstrate that they have the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to do a particular job by taking a civil service examination.

Examinations are given by municipal civil service agencies for specific job titles under their jurisdiction. The examinations that are offered are based on the duties performed by incumbents in the title for which the examination is announced. Each examination has minimum qualifications that must be met. (There may also be residency requirements.) Minimum qualifications and the subjects of examinations for the same or similar titles may vary from one civil service agency to another based on program needs, including the way in which the duties of the positions are defined. An examination most frequently includes a written test. Also, there is an application fee for most examinations.

You can find out about examinations being offered and where examination announcements are posted by contacting the civil service agency for the municipality in which you are interested in being employed. You can also watch for postings of examination announcements in your local library or other public place. Examination announcements provide information on the title, minimum qualifications, typical job duties, and the type and subjects of the examination that will be given. For your convenience, this brochure includes the telephone numbers of all municipal civil service offices in New York State.

Most local civil service examinations outside of New York City are prepared by the New York State Department of Civil Service. Listed below are answers to the most frequently asked questions about local civil service examinations prepared by the State. Also addressed are some questions municipal employees have about promotion examinations.

1. How are test scores on a written civil service test determined?

First, the raw score is determined which is generally the number of questions the candidate answers correctly. After the results are analyzed, a band score table is constructed for the test. The band score table is then applied to the raw score to determine the final score. Typically, a band score covers a range of scores and bands are reported in five point increments. This method of scoring is called band scoring.

Example: A range of raw scores from 45 to 47 are assigned a band score of 80.

If you received a raw score of either 45, 46 or 47, your final score would be 80.

Some candidates are entitled to veterans' credits. In accordance with the New York State Constitution, these credits are added to the final scores of passing candidates. Veterans' credits cannot be added to failed scores. On open competitive examinations, which are those open to the general public, qualified non-disabled veterans receive 5 points and disabled veterans receive 10 points.

2. Why are tests band scored?

Band scoring provides a more realistic assessment of a candidate's performance on written tests than point-by-point scoring. It takes into account that no test can measure a candidate's abilities with perfect confidence or assess all the abilities relevant to a given job. Also, increasing the use of band scoring on civil service tests considerably opens the field of candidates who can be considered for appointment.

3. Can I see the eligible list?

Yes. You can see an eligible list at the office of the civil service agency that announced the examination. A copy of an eligible list may be obtained from that agency under the Freedom of Information Law; payment of a fee may be required.

4. How can I have the same score as someone else and be ranked differently?

Municipal civil service rules provide that candidates on an eligible list be ranked. For information on the method used to rank candidates with the same score, candidates should consult the agency responsible for administering the examination.

5. Who can be considered for appointment from a civil service list?

Everyone ranked above or tied with the third candidate on the eligible list can be considered for appointment. This is sometimes referred to as the Rule of Three.

In accordance with Civil Service Law, appointing authorities may elect to give preference in appointment to residents of their jurisdiction. In these instances, a list of resident eligibles is considered first for appointment. The Rule of Three is applied to this resident list.

6. How could I get the same failing score on two different tests?

Using the band scoring method, all failing scores are reported as "60." For instance, say a test has 90 questions, and the minimum passing score is set at 54 raw score points. If you answered less than 54 questions correctly, your final score would be reported as "60."

7. How can I find out how my score was determined?

An opportunity to do a computational review is provided for most civil service examinations. If a computational review is offered and you would like to review your answer paper to determine how it was scored, you must submit a request in writing within 10 days after you receive your score to the municipal civil service commission or personnel office which administered the examination.

At the computational review you will be able to determine how many questions you answered correctly and the method by which your final score was determined.

In those few cases where a computational review is not available, the municipal civil service agency, upon request, can provide this information.

Promotion Examinations

1. Why did I get the same score on the open competitive and the promotion examinations? I should have received 3 seniority credits on the promotion examinations.

In band scored promotion examinations, seniority credits are added to passing raw scores. If the combined total of your raw score (generally the number of questions answered correctly) and your seniority credits is in the same score band as your raw score, your score on the promotion examination will be the same as on the open competitive examination.

Example: A final score of 80 is assigned to a range of raw scores from 45 to 48.

A final score of 85 is assigned to a range of raw score from 49 to 53.

If you received a raw score of 45 and have 3 seniority credits, your total raw score would be 48. With or without your seniority credits your final score would be 80. If you had received a raw score of 47 and have 3 seniority credits, your total raw score would be 50 which would place you into the next higher band. In this case, your final score would be 85.

2. Why aren't seniority credits added to the final score anymore?

Civil Service Law requires that seniority be given due weight. For examinations that are band scored, the addition of seniority credits to the final score would give undue weight to seniority.

3. Why did a co-worker get an 82.5 on an exam? Don't all final scores now fall into bands that are in 5 point increments?

This difference is due to the award of veterans' credits. On all examinations, veterans' credits must be added to passing final scores. On promotion examinations, non-disabled veterans receive 2.5 points and disabled veterans receive 5 points.

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