

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PRAXIS EXAMINATION(S) IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY AND AUDIOLOGY

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Introduction

In 1996 the American Speech-language Hearing Association began a review of student performance on the Praxis Examination(s) in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. There was a concern that demographic groups performed differently on the examination. A subcommittee of the Clinical Certification Board was formed with representatives from the Council on Academic Accreditation, the Council on Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders, the Academic Affairs Board, the Multicultural Issues Board, and the National Black Association for Speech Language Pathology and Audiology. A consultant from the Educational Testing Service also met with the subcommittee to provide technical assistance on the nature and construction of the test. The task force was charged with identifying factors that influenced student performance on the examination. After a review of student performance on the examination, the subcommittee had difficulty confirming that specific factors related to disparate performance of certain demographic groups.

In 1999 The ASHA Executive Board formed a second Subcommittee on National Examination Performance to develop a plan and products to improve performance of all test takers on the Praxis examination(s). In order to develop products that were appropriate the subcommittee conducted a survey to identify ways to assist individuals to better prepare for the Praxis Examination in

Audiology and Speech-Language pathology. ASHA's Information and Research Division assisted with the development of the survey. Analysis was completed by REDA International, Inc. The survey was distributed to 2247 students, 1753 recent graduates and 250 directors of academic programs in communication disorders and sciences. Responses were received from 299 students enrolled in master's degree programs in speech-language pathology and Audiology, 747 recent graduates who had applied for ASHA certification, and 111 program directors. The results were analyzed by REDA International, Inc. with assistance from the ASHA Information and Research Division.

Survey Results: Students and recent Graduates

Assistance and Preparation for the Praxis Examination

The survey respondents used a Likert scale to indicate the assistance they received in preparing for the Praxis examination. The students' and recent graduates' responses were as follows:

- ◆ Most information obtained about the Praxis was received through other students (78% students, 82% recent graduates)
- ◆ It is possible to improve one's score on the Praxis examination by studying for it (59% students, 70% recent graduates)
- ◆ Commercially prepared study guides are helpful in preparing for the Praxis examination (57% students, 69% recent graduates)
- ◆ Instructors provide adequate information about the content of the Praxis during regular academic classes (34% students; 46% recent graduates)
- ◆ Instructors provided information about where to obtain study materials for the Praxis (34% students; 46% recent graduates)
- ◆ Formal workshops and review courses are helpful in preparing for the Praxis (23% students; 26% recent graduates)
- ◆ I am satisfied with the level of satisfaction my instructors provided me in preparing for the Praxis (22% students; 41% recent graduates)

- ◆ Studying specifically for the Praxis is not necessary (19%; 30% recent graduates)
- ◆ Most information obtained about the Praxis was through my instructors (20% students; 26% recent graduates)
- ◆ Most information about the Praxis was obtained through my advisor (13% students; 14% recent graduates)
- ◆ Most information obtained about the Praxis was through my clinical supervisor (12% students; 19% recent graduates)
- ◆ Instructors provided adequate information about test-taking strategies for the Praxis during regular academic classes (12% students; 23% recent graduates).

The majority of students and recent graduates responding to the survey did not feel that their faculty had prepared them adequately for the Praxis examination. More than three-fourths agreed or strongly agreed that most of the information they received about the Praxis examination was from other students. Most of the students and recent graduates believed that studying for the Praxis make is possible to improve one's score and over one-half felt that commercially prepared study guides were helpful.

Performance and Preparation Strategies for the Praxis Examination

The respondents were asked how many times they had taken the examination as well as how many times they had passed. They were also asked how they prepared for the examination(s) and what they felt were the most effective strategies in preparing for it. Nearly 2 percent of the student respondents indicated that they had taken the examination two or more times. Nearly 9.8 percent of the respondents had taken the examination in speech-language pathology two or more times.

None of the audiology students had taken the examination more than once. However 14.1 percent of the audiology recent graduates had taken the examination in audiology more than once. Half of the students who had taken

the Praxis examination in audiology had passed it. A larger percentage (64%) of the audiology students who had taken the Praxis examination in speech-language pathology had passed it. For the recent graduates, the majority (91.8%) of those who had taken the Praxis examination(s) had passed it. Further, 95.5 percent of the recent graduates who had taken the Praxis examination in speech-language pathology had passed it.

The respondents were asked to identify the specific strategies and materials they used to study for the Praxis examination(s). The most frequently used strategy by both students and recent graduates was individual study (80.3% and 84.3%, respectively). One-third of the respondents indicated that they studied in groups for the examination (32.8% and 34.9% for students and recent graduates, respectively). The least used methods of preparation for both the students and recent graduates were review courses by state associations (1.7% and 1.1% respectively), review courses developed by the academic program (12.0% and 12.7% respectively), video or audiotape review courses (2.3% and 2.8% respectively), materials developed by the program (5.7% and 6.2% respectively). Over one-half of the students reported using the *ETS Study Guide* (1995a,b) (51.2% and 63.2%, respectively); one-third reported using *How to Prepare for the NESPA* (1991) (34.3%; 30.3%). Few students reported using *Test at a Glance* prepared by ETS to prepare for the examination (18.1%; 22.1%). Both the students (56.9%) and recent graduate (60%) believed that individual study was the most effective preparation activities. One-third (33.4%) of the students and over one-third (36.5%) of the recent graduate respondents believed that the *ETS Study Guides* (1995a.b.) was one of the most effective strategies.

In the final component to the survey, the students and recent graduates were asked to comment on the strategies that they would recommend to others who were preparing for the examination. For both students and recent

graduates, the most frequently stated strategies or techniques used for test preparation were as follows:

- ◆ enhance/develop test-taking strategies, especially time management strategies
- ◆ review course notes and text books
- ◆ take practice tests
- ◆ complete all coursework before taking the Praxis.

Individuals who indicated that they had not been successful on the examination(s) were asked why they believed they were unsuccessful. The most common responses included the following:

- ◆ timing issues (not enough time to complete the examination(s))
- ◆ test anxiety
- ◆ took the examination(s) prior to completing coursework
- ◆ unfamiliar with test content

Individuals who were successful on the examination(s) were asked to comment on the factors that they believed had helped them to be successful in obtaining a passing score. The most frequent responses were as follows:

- ◆ Took the examination(s) around the same time as the comprehensive examination(s), but not in the same week.
- ◆ Reviewed class/lecture notes
- ◆ Took practice tests to get familiar with the content
- ◆ Practiced time/pacing with practice tests
- ◆ Attended a high quality graduate program
- ◆ Had completed clinical experience.

Survey Results: Program Directors

Preparation Activities Provided to Students for the Praxis Examination.
The program directors were asked to provide information on the assistance

that their respective programs offered to students who are preparing for the Praxis examination(s). The results were as follows:

- ◆ Students in my program have the opportunity to practice the multiple-choice format of the Praxis during the graduate program (53%)
- ◆ Faculty at my program are very aware of the current content and foci of the Praxis in Speech-Language Pathology and/or Audiology (45%)
- ◆ Faculty have worked individually and/or collectively to prepare students explicitly for the Praxis (28%)
- ◆ My program makes special efforts to assist students that may be at-risk of not passing the Praxis (24%)
- ◆ To my knowledge, the training and/or coaching programs have been very successful in helping student prepare for the Praxis (22%)
- ◆ My program has established useful training and/or coaching programs to specifically help students prepare for the Praxis (18%)

Less than half of the directors (45%) reported that their faculty are very aware of the current content and foci of the Praxis examination. They did not feel that their faculty have explicitly worked to prepare students for the examination. However, slightly more than half (53%) agreed that the students have the opportunity to practice the multiple-choice format of the Praxis examination during their graduate program.

The program directors were also asked whether their program used a comprehensive examination as a culminating activity of their graduate program. If so, they were asked about the nature of the examination. The majority (65%) of the program directors indicated that they use a comprehensive examination developed by the program. Another 25% reported that their program uses the Praxis examination(s) as the comprehensive exit examination(s). Of those

programs that use the Praxis as the comprehensive examination(s), 29% reported that their faculty are aware of the current content and foci of the examination. The directors of programs where the Praxis is given as the comprehensive examination(s) report that their faculty work to prepare their students for the examination(s). They were more likely to report that training and/or coaching programs at their institutions had been successful. The program directors reported that they either provide or make available study materials for the students in preparing for the examination(s). The most widely available study materials were the *ETS Study Guides (1995a, b)* (45.9%) followed by *How to Prepare for the NESPA (1991)* (44.1%) Finally, most program directors (94.6%) reported that their students study individually for the examination. Over three-fourths of the directors believe that the students study in groups. However, according to the student and recent graduate responses, only one-third of them actually prepare for the examination in groups.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that most of the information students receive about the examination(s) is from other students. Less than twenty-five percent of the students felt that their instructors and advisors had provided them with sufficient information about the examination(s) or study materials to help them study for the examination. Less than half of the students and recent graduates were satisfied with the assistance provided to them from their instructors and advisors. In addition to using the available study guides to prepare for the examination, the students and recent graduates indicated that individuals preparing to take the examination could enhance their performance on the exams by doing the following:

- ◆ Improve test-taking strategies
- ◆ Improve time management skills
- ◆ Control test anxiety
- ◆ Review course material

- ♦ Take practice tests and complete academic coursework before taking the examination(s).

Recommendations

The Executive Board Subcommittee on National Examination Performance reviewed the survey results and decided that there was a need to provide information about the examination(s) to both test-takers as well as faculty. The Subcommittee recommended that the information be available at the beginning of the 2001-2002 academic year through the ASHA website. A website for test-takers and a separate website for instructors, faculty and advisors are in the process of being developed. The student website will include information on the following topics: the format of the examination(s), myths and misperceptions about the examination, information on test construction as well as a description of the topics covered on the examination. There will be information on the types of questions with strategies for improving performance on each of the three question types, especially the clinical problem solving item types. There will be information on time management and strategies for reducing test anxiety. Specific preparation guidance will be provided for those who will take the examination in a few weeks, those who will take it in a month, and for those who have a longer time to prepare. There will also be advice for those recent graduates who have not been successful on the examination(s) and for those who have completed their graduate programs several years ago and have not yet taken or passed the examination(s). The web sites will also include practical information on who to register for special administrations, how to interpret scores, and other information that will be useful for test-takers. It is believed that the more they know about the examination(s), the greater the likelihood that test anxiety will be reduced.

The faculty/advisor webs site will also include information about the examination, including the content areas and the types of questions. It will also contain strategies for assisting test-takers who are preparing for the

examination(s) such as by providing problem solving items on examination in the graduate program, presenting clinical problems during the academic program, providing opportunities for the students to use basic professional knowledge to solve clinical problems. Both the test-taker and faculty web sites will contain links to test preparation strategies, particularly those related to improving performance on multiple-choice examination(s), time management and test anxiety. It is hoped that both student and other potential test takers and instructors will recognize their respective roles in preparing for the Praxis examination.

References

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