

WGU Guide for the Special Education Praxis Test

Updated by the WGU Teachers College Team

Start here…

This guide will help you get started with your Special Education: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications 5543 Praxis study with free online learning resources. These resources are aimed at candidates working toward the mild/moderate special education certification. Work with a tutor if appropriate. Rely on your Mentor to help you stay on track with program requirements and deadlines. Passing high-stakes standardized tests is a team effort – you are not alone!

What are the topics covered in the guide?

- FAQs: What to expect from the 5543 Special Education Praxis
- Key Preparation Strategies for Constructed Responses
- WGU-specific content: What are the cut scores needed?

FAQs: What to expect for the Special Education 5543 (Mild to Moderate) Praxis

Where do I find info on which tests(s) to take for my program?
Find your state on the Teacher Licensure Home Page. If you haven't already, watch this video on the Teacher Licensure Application process. Work closely with your Mentor to monitor field experience deadlines and other program requirements.

Where do I find resources for Elementary Education Praxis tests?
To obtain WGU study guide on the Elementary Education Praxis, connect with your mentor. You can locate ETS resources for the 5001 and 5018 exams below:

- ETS Study Companion for the Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects (5001). You may receive a **FREE sample test for each subtest** you register for. If not, purchase each sample test separately from the Praxis 5001 subtest bundle preparation materials page.
- ETS Study Companion for the Elementary Education: Content Knowledge (5018). ETS offers one full length practice exam available to purchase at the Elementary Education 5018 Praxis Preparation Materials page.

Where do I find help with the Praxis CORE or my state's basic skills test?
Go here for Teachers College Basic Skills prep. Khan Academy also has Praxis Core Writing, Reading, & Math help.

When should I take this test?
Please work closely with your Mentor to determine when in your degree plan to begin Praxis study. Many teacher candidates report best success soon after the first Special Education Instructional course (D005/D232).

Where can I take the test?
You may take your Praxis either at home or at a testing center; check exam sites for updated access and cost information. Follow the ETS testing center guidelines. Currently, the Praxis 5543 is available to take at home. If you take your Praxis at home, **please test your system BEFORE exam day** using these ETS Equipment Requirements. The WGU System Check includes operating system and bandwidth checks.

What COVID (or other disease) protocols should I be aware of?
Please check with your local testing center before test day. You may need to bring your own mask and wear it throughout the exam. Follow the ETS testing center guidelines.

- If you are taking the Praxis at home, there may still be specific criteria to follow. Here is WGU guidance for Praxis at home.

May I use anything else to help me?
You may use scratch paper at a testing center or a whiteboard at home. Be prepared to show both sides of the whiteboard to the proctor to show it is clean; if the whiteboard is bolted to the wall, show that it cannot be removed. You may use only those materials provided to you or approved by the proctor, such as pencils or whiteboard pens and erasers. Otherwise, your work area must be completely clean.

What question formats are on the test? Multiple choice, short answer, essay, etc.?
Each Praxis will be comprised of mostly of multiple-choice test items. Most questions will be standard: select one answer from four options. Some will have multiple correct answers. You may also encounter at least one "drag & drop" test item where you are asked to move answer options to various parts of the screen.

Praxis 5543 consists of 90 selected-response (multiple choice questions) and 3 constructed response (short answer) questions.

Is there partial credit for answers that have multiple correct answers?
More than 10% of each test may involve multiple choice items where you select more than one answer option; all responses must be correct, or the entire test item will be marked wrong. There is no partial credit.

Are there trick questions on the test?
No. The questions are straightforward. Answer the question you see on the test.

Where can I get information about accommodations?
If you would like to request accommodations from ETS for a disability or health-related need, here are the directions. If you are not testing through ETS, please contact your test provider.

If English is not your primary language, you may be eligible for extended testing time through Primary Language Not English (PLNE, sometimes referred to as ESL) accommodations. Your testing accommodation needs to be finalized before registering for the test and can take up to 6 weeks to complete.

ETS or state test administrators retain sole discretion to grant medical, disability, or PLNE accommodations.

Is there a waiting period in between attempts?
There is usually a mandatory waiting period between attempts at the Praxis or state content tests; check test sites for more specific information.

Are there additional study guides?
Each Praxis Core or state Basic Skills test has a study guide or study companion provided by the publisher or state at no cost. If you need help locating the appropriate site for study materials, please ask your Mentor. You may also reach out to contenttests@wgu.edu for further assistance.



Praxis 5543: Special Education (Mild to Moderate)

Get organized: What do you know and need to know?
The ETS Study Companion: Special Education: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications (5543) includes very helpful information about the exam and preparation. We recommend reviewing these topics and identifying areas requiring further study.

- Page 5 describes the overall test, such as number of questions and time allowed. You will have 90 selected response test items (multiple choice).
- Pages 9-13 provide a detailed breakdown of content with each topic, which include:
    - Development and characteristics of learners (14%)
    - Planning and the learning environment (17%)
    - Instruction (17%)
    - Assessment (14%)
    - Foundations and professional responsibilities (13%)
    - Integrated constructed-response questions (25%)
- Page 13: Before you begin the test questions, review the terminology and definitions section. This section clarifies how the terms are used in the 5543. For example: "a biological parent, legal guardian, surrogate, natural, adoptive or foster parent may be referred to as a parent."
- Pages 31-33 go into even more detail for each content area in Special Education, including discussion prompts to help you integrate facts, concepts, and skills. Factual recall alone is not sufficient to pass a Praxis; for best success, you should be able to analyze and apply content knowledge.

Practice & Analyze: How can I study & prepare for constructed response questions?

- Practice writing short answers (up to 50 words) and under timed conditions. As you get closer to your exam date, start timing yourself – allow up to 30 minutes for all 3 constructed-response test items, meaning about 10 minutes per test item.
- Practice organizing your thoughts quickly. Use scratch paper or your whiteboard to organize your ideas, thoughts, and what you know.
- Practice answering the prompts directly. Start with a general response, then go into specific details. Analyze the structure of your practice answers.
- Practice avoiding fluff or filler. Focus on the question and answer it. Analyze your practice responses for keeping the content meaningful and descriptive.
- Practice supporting your statements with descriptive details. Use the data provided in the prompt. Analyze your practice responses for the quality of your evidence.
- Practice addressing each prompt. An incomplete answer is better than no answer. Analyze practice responses for how fully you answered each prompt.

Review key components: What makes a successful constructed response?
Constructed-response questions are generally scored on the following:

- Content knowledge – What do you know about this topic?
- Support – How do you know this is the right approach? Provide examples or additional details.
- Purpose – Answer the question being asked.

Be as honest and as accurate as you can. This is your opportunity to demonstrate what you know in your own words.

Review this sample strategy for composing a constructed response.
The constructed response in 5543 generally include a description of a student or classroom. You are likely to see some data (quantitative and qualitative.) You will see 2-3 "tasks" or prompts to answer using the description and the data.

See page 21 in the ETS Study Companion: Special Education: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications (5543) for a scored, sample question.

Sample constructed response prompt:
Jamie is a sixth-grader. He is a student on the autism spectrum. He wants to engage with other students but his social skills are not appropriate for middle school. He wants to be in the spotlight and be the focus of attention, and often talks out of turn in class. Other students avoid him, which frustrates Jamie. One of his IEP goals is to improve his ability to take turns when speaking in groups of peers.

Tasks

- Describe three strategies the special education teacher could use to help Jamie have a conversation with a partner during SEL time where both partners have equal talk time.
- Explain how each strategy you listed in part 1 will help Jamie make progress on his IEP goal.
- What can the special education teacher do to help Jamie generalize what he is learning with his partner to whole class discussions?

1. **Brainstorm what you know quickly and what the question is asking on scratch paper or whiteboard.**
    a. Read the tasks first. Outline on your scratch paper or white board what the tasks are asking for.
        i. 3 strategies for equal talk time
        ii. progress on IEP goal
        iii. generalizing skill with partner
    b. Read scenario and make note of key details from scenario that align to what the tasks are asking, so that you can quickly align scenario details to the tasks.
        i. 3 strategies for equal talk time - "talks out of turn"
    c. Now, outline and develop your thoughts for each of the three tasks using these key details.
2. **Develop your response.**
    a. If you cannot recall the name of a particular strategy like "Gradual Release of Responsibility," you can still describe it: "I would model the behavior for the student, then we would practice together, then the student would practice with a peer."
    b. Check that you are responding to all the task details in your response. Do I have three different strategies? Do the strategies relate to equal talk time for a partner conversation? Do I link each strategy directly to the IEP goal? Do I have at least one recommendation for generalization?
    c. Define all terms you use to aid in fully developing your thoughts. Ex. Do you define what it means to generalize the skill or what social skills are?
3. **Finalizing your response.**
    a. Read over what you write before you hit submit. While you will not be graded directly for spelling or grammar, you will be assessed for readability, so be sure to use complete sentences.
    b. Consider your audience as you review your work. It is highly likely that an actual human will read your work after it is scored first by the software, so please keep that person in mind as you write.

Review this rubric: What is required on Constructed Responses for 5543?
Familiarize yourself with this constructed response rubric. Use it to self-assess your own practice questions to help you improve the quality of your timed responses.

	Score of 3	Score of 2	Score of 1	Score of 0
General	Response demonstrates **thorough understanding** of the aspects of special education relevant to the question	Response demonstrates a **basic or general** understanding of the aspects of special education relevant to the question	Response demonstrates a **weak or limited** understanding of the aspects of special education relevant to the question	The response demonstrates **little or no** understanding of the aspects of special education relevant to the question
Address the entire question	**All** parts of the question are appropriately addressed	**Most** parts of the question are appropriately addressed	**Some** parts of the question are appropriately addressed	**Fails** to address the question or restates the prompt.
Understands the material in the prompt	**Thorough** understanding	**General** understanding	**Weak** understanding	**No** understanding or serious **misconceptions**
Knowledge of students, special education subject matter, pedagogy, facts relevant to the prompt.	**Strong**	**Basic**	**Weak**	**None**
Explain and support with details	**Strong**	**Basic**	**Weak**	**None**

Work through practice questions: Did you master the concepts?
Content knowledge is not enough – you need to practice applying content knowledge and solving sample test items. Consider your test-taking strategy while you work through sample questions from reliable sources.

- Start with the ETS Study Companion: Special Education: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications (5543): take the sample test on pages 13-22.
- ETS offers two full length practice exams available to purchase at the ETS Special Education 5543 Praxis site.

Stay confident. You can do this!



WGU-specific content

What are the cut scores needed?
WGU pays careful attention to constantly evolving state requirements for licensure or endorsement. For the latest update on specific program Praxis or state content exam requirements (ex. CSET, NESS, FTCE, GACE, etc.), please refer to this WGU Handbook page.

Unless your licensing state requires a higher score, a passing score for WGU is the same as the Utah score. Special education licensure and endorsement scores are listed on the ETS Utah Requirements page.

Need help? Reach out for assistance, if needed:
Talk to your Mentor if you need further resources. Take a sample Praxis to determine your readiness and to identify what more to study. Best luck on your 1st attempt of the actual test!