

WGU GUIDE FOR THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PRAXIS® EXAM

Updated annually 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 exam study with free online learning resources. These resources are aimed at candidates working toward the mild to moderate special education certification. Passing high-stakes standardized tests is a team effort—you are not alone!

What are the topics covered in this guide?

- [FAQs: What to expect from the 5543 Special Education Praxis Exam](#)
- [Key Resources for Content Categories](#)
- [Key Preparation Strategies for Constructed Responses](#)

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

Where do I find resources for Elementary Education Praxis exams?

You can locate ETS resources for the 5001 and 5018 exams below:

- [ETS Study Companion for the Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects \(5001\)](#)
 - ETS offers one full-length practice exam available to purchase on the [Elementary Education 5001 Praxis Preparation Materials](#) page.
- [ETS Study Companion for the Elementary Education: Content Knowledge \(5018\)](#)
 - ETS offers one full-length practice exam available to purchase on the [Elementary Education 5018 Praxis Preparation Materials](#) page.

Where can I take the exam?

You may take your Praxis exam either at home with ProctorU or at a testing center; check exam sites for updated access and cost information. Follow the [ETS testing center guidelines](#). Currently, the 5543 is available to take at home. If you take your exam at home, **please test your system BEFORE exam day** using these [ETS Equipment Requirements](#).

What COVID (or other disease) protocols should I be aware of?

Please check with your local testing center before test day. If you are taking the exam at home, there may still be specific criteria to follow from the exam provider. At a testing center, you may need to bring your own mask and wear it throughout the exam. Follow the [ETS testing center guidelines](#).

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 exam? Multiple-choice, short answer, essay, etc.?

Each exam will comprise 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 and drop” test item in which you are asked to move answer options to various parts of the screen. 5543 consists of 90

selected-response (multiple-choice) and 3 constructed response (short answer) questions.

Is there partial credit for answers that have multiple correct answers?

About 10% of each exam 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 need accommodation for medical or language concerns, please refer to the exam site for further guidance. Testing center locations or dates may be limited. Praxis exams provide few alternate arrangements other than additional time. See the [ETS Disabilities Accommodations](#) or [ETS English Language Accommodations](#) pages.

Is there a waiting period in between attempts?

There is usually a mandatory waiting period between attempts of the Praxis or state content exams. Check exam sites for more specific information.

Are there additional study guides?

The Special Education 5543 Praxis exam has a [study companion](#) at no cost on the [ETS site](#). The study companion includes practice questions.

Praxis Exam: 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 exam; for best success, you should be able to analyze and apply content knowledge.

Key content resources: What is the best approach for using the [WGU Special Education Praxis 5543: Core Knowledge and Mild to Moderate Applications Study Guide](#)?

- Begin with the [Self-Assessment](#).
- Study topics with low confidence (1s and 2s); review topics you marked with higher confidence (3s and 4s).

Practice and analyze: How can I study and prepare for constructed response questions?

- Practice writing short answers (up to 50 words) and under timed conditions. Allow up to 30 minutes for all three 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 and information you can use in your response.
- 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 prompts in 5543 generally include a description of a student or classroom. You are likely to see some data (quantitative and qualitative). You will see two to three “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 Jamie 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 one 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 whiteboard what the tasks are asking for.
 - i. Three strategies for equal talk time
 - ii. Progress on IEP goal
 - iii. Generalizing skill with partner
 - b. Read the scenario and make note of key details that align to what the tasks are asking so that you can quickly align scenario details to the tasks.
 - i. Three 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, such as “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.
 - i. Do I have three different strategies? Do the strategies relate to equal talk time for a partner conversation?

- ii. Do I link each strategy directly to the IEP goal?
 - iii. Do I have at least one recommendation for generalization?
 - c. Define all terms you use to aid in fully developing your thoughts.
 - For example, do you define what it means to generalize the skill or what social skills are?
3. Finalize your response.
- a. Read over what you wrote before you 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 relevant to the question	Response demonstrates a basic or general understanding of the aspects relevant to the question	Response demonstrates a weak or limited understanding of the aspects relevant to the question	The response demonstrates little or no understanding of the aspects 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 question
Understands the material in the prompt	Thorough understanding	General understanding	Weak understanding	No understanding or serious misconceptions
Knowledge of 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 on the [Special Education 5543 Praxis site](#).

Stay confident. **You can do this!**

