



ASWB Test Mastery Inclusion™ :
Self-Coaching Guide for the
TestPrep Profile Assessment

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Developing 16 Essential Competencies for Mastering High-Stakes Tests?

The Test Mastery Inclusion™ program is a self-development program designed to provide test takers with comprehensive insights into how they typically prepare for and eventually cope with the pressures of high-stakes exams. The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* is a self-report survey that is the foundation for the Test Mastery Inclusion program. High-stakes exams are simply defined as major tests with important consequences for test takers. More specifically, high-stakes exams: (a) are typically required for graduation; (b) must be passed to enter and oftentimes exit college, graduate school, or professional degree programs; and (c) must be passed to become licensed or certified to practice a profession. High-stakes exams typically fall into either an educational track or a professional track.

This coaching guide should be used by test-takers preparing for a high-stakes exam to identify how they can strengthen test preparation and test readiness competencies. This guide presents an overview of the 16 essential competencies required to master high-stakes exams and introduces users to the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report which assesses these 16 essential competencies. This Test Mastery Inclusion Coaching Guide provides tips on how to effectively self-manage and leverage these essential competencies. Table 1 lists the four Dimensions, the 16 Competencies, and the three Composites measured by the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*.

Table 1: ASWB TestPrep Profile Dimensions (N = 4), Competencies (N = 16) & Composites (N = 3)

TestPrep Profile Dimensions:	Test Mastery Competencies Measured:
I. Motivation Plus <i>(Test Preparation)</i>	1. Committed
	2. Studious
	3. Productive
	4. Energetic
II. Responsibility Plus <i>(Test Preparation)</i>	5. Organized
	6. Time-Efficient
	7. Self-Disciplined
	8. Assertive
III. Confidence Plus <i>(Test Readiness)</i>	9. Mentally Tough
	10. Self-Assured
	11. Internally Controlled
	12. Attentive
IV. Resiliency Plus <i>(Test Readiness)</i>	13. Optimistic
	14. Centered
	15. Composed
	16. Quality-Oriented
Overall Preparation Composite	Based on 8 Test Preparation Scales (I & II)
Overall Readiness Composite	Based on 8 Test Readiness Scales (III & IV)
Overall Mastery Composite	Based on 16 Competency Scales (I, II, III & IV)

Mastering High-Stakes Exams: Being “Test Prepped” & “Test Ready”

In order to master high-stakes exams, test takers must prepare successfully for the examination through diligent test preparation and study. Yet succeeding at test preparation is not always enough. A test taker must also be “test ready” when taking the exam. Test readiness relates to being both highly confident that one’s test preparation efforts will lead to a passing score, and very resilient so that the test taker can withstand the pressures and demands of taking such a challenging exam.

The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* assesses both of these major dimensions of test mastery (i.e., “test preparation” and “test readiness”). Therefore, test takers can complete this profile to better gauge the strength of their test preparation and test readiness competencies. Unfortunately, most of the traditional test preparation programs overemphasize the knowledge acquisition requirements while oftentimes neglecting the test mastery mindset. The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* can be added to these traditional programs to correct this limitation.

The four Test Mastery Styles assessed with the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*, summarized in Table 2, are based on Overall Test Preparation by Overall Test Readiness. Therefore, these two important composite variables are briefly defined below:

Test Preparation: This composite score is computed by summing the Motivation Plus and the Responsibility Plus Dimension scores presented in Table 1. Therefore, the following essential competencies contribute to this composite score: Committed, Studious, Productive, Energetic, Organized, Time-Efficient, Self-Disciplined, and Assertive. Higher Test Preparation scores mean that a test taker is more motivated and responsible when it comes to preparing for the test.

Test Readiness: This composite score is computed by summing the Confidence Plus and the Resiliency Plus Dimension scores presented in Table 1. Therefore, the following essential competencies contribute to this composite score: Mentally Tough, Self-Assured, Internally Controlled, Attentive, Optimistic, Centered, Composed, and Quality-Oriented. Higher Test Readiness scores mean that a test taker is more confident and resilient when it comes to taking the test.

Table 2: Test Mastery Styles: The Four Test Preparation-by-Test Readiness Styles¹

Test Mastery Styles	Test Readiness (Lower)	Test Readiness (Higher)
Test Preparation (Lower)	<p>Style 1: Test Prep (Low)/ Test Ready (Low):</p> <p>These test takers need to become more engaged in the test preparation process in addition to remaining more poised when taking the test. That is, they need to self-manage their competencies so that they can increase their levels of motivation, responsibility, self-confidence, and resiliency when preparing for and taking high-stakes exams.</p>	<p>Style 2: Test Prep (Low)/ Test Ready (High):</p> <p>These test takers need to become more motivated with and engaged in the test preparation process, but they do appear to be more poised when it comes to handling the demands and challenges of preparing for and taking high-stakes exams. This group should clearly benefit from higher test taking self-confidence and resiliency.</p>
	<p>Style 3: Test Prep (High)/ Test Ready (Low):</p> <p>These test takers are very motivated and responsible when it comes to preparing for a high-stakes exam. However, as the date for completing the test approaches, and even during the actual testing session, these test takers run a greater risk of struggling with their poise, as evidenced by a loss of self-confidence and increased feelings of stress and worry.</p>	<p>Style 4: Test Prep (High)/ Test Ready (High):</p> <p>These test takers remain fully engaged with the test preparation process and they tend to remain extremely poised when preparing for and taking high-stakes exams. That is, this group exhibits very desirable levels of motivation, responsibility, confidence, and resiliency when it comes to test preparation and test readiness.</p>

¹ The ASWB TestPrep Profile provides a summary report of a test takers' specific Test Preparation-by-Test Readiness style (a.k.a. Test Mastery Styles) along with guidance on which competencies to focus on in order to increase one's odds of mastering high-stakes exams.

Understanding the 16 Test Mastery Competencies

A more in-depth description of the 16 essential competencies measured by the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* follows, along with a brief interpretation strategy for each competency score. Some practical coaching suggestions are also provided below describing how test takers can strengthen these essential test mastery competencies. Test takers should become familiar with the following 16 essential competencies which form the foundation of this competency-based coaching program.

Competency #1: Committed

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Would benefit from increasing the drive and motivation to master the high-stakes exam at all costs and with flying colors.
- **Average Scorer:** Has an acceptable amount of drive and motivation to pass the high-stakes exam and score well.
- **Higher Scorer:** Is highly motivated to do whatever it takes to not only master the high-stakes exam, but to score as high as possible on it

Test Takers May Need To:

- Become fully committed to test preparation.
- Increase test preparation productivity.
- Become more passionate about the need for test preparation.
- Set higher standards for themselves in terms of both test preparation goals and the elevated scores that these test takers aim to achieve.

Competency #2: Studious

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Needs to learn how to fully enjoy the intellectual demands and routines that accompany studying for high-stakes exams.
- **Average Scorer:** Shows some enjoyment and commitment to the intellectual demands and routines that are needed when studying for high-stakes exams.
- **Higher Scorer:** Really enjoys and is committed to the intellectual demands and routines that are required when studying for high-stakes exams.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Study books, audio recordings, and/or computer-based instruction on effective test-taking strategies and study skills.
- Learn to enjoy test preparation studies.
- Become fully committed to completing many different practice tests to strengthen “test taking muscles.”
- Continuously develop test-taking knowledge and skills by repeatedly studying flash cards, online tutorials, and related reference materials.
- Fully commit to a test preparation program that covers all of the more complex subjects on the high-stakes exam.
- Possibly utilize special tutoring for the more difficult subject matter that could be on the test.

Competency #3: Productive

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Is less likely to be fully productive and might get behind schedule when studying for high-stakes exams, and therefore might avoid, delay, and even skip some test preparation activities.
- **Average Scorer:** Is likely to be reasonably productive and stay on schedule when studying for a high-stakes exam and regularly attends test preparation activities.
- **Higher Scorer:** Is more likely to be fully productive and even ahead of schedule when studying for high-stakes exams and reliably attends all recommended test preparation events (e.g., review classes).

Test Takers May Need To:

- Fully commit to completing all exam-related readings, assignments, and practice tests on time.
- Try never to get behind in exam-related studies.
- Become committed to completing all required practice tests which form the cornerstone of a strong test preparation program.
- Use all available time to maximize test preparation productivity, including a portion of their spare time.
- Realize the need to delay some leisure activities in the service of more test preparation.

Competency #4: Energetic

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Probably likes to take it easy and not act with the sense of urgency and energy required to master high-stakes exams.
- **Average Scorer:** Engages in test preparation and study activities with moderate energy levels.
- **Higher Scorer:** Acts with a sense of urgency and energy when undertaking all of the test preparation and study requirements.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Try to push a bit harder in terms of total study time in order to stay ahead of schedule.
- Commit more spare time to active study time when preparing for the high-stakes test.
- Study how to successfully multi-task in order to handle many different test preparation projects at once.
- Try to overcome any tendencies to “take it easy” or to get a bit lazy when preparing for high-stakes exams.
- Make sure to get the proper amount of rest, diet, and exercise to maintain needed levels of energy.

Competency #5: Organized

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Test taker needs to learn how to maintain a highly organized study environment required when preparing for high-stakes exams and might even prepare for the test in a disorganized manner.
- **Average Scorer:** Is usually able to maintain an organized study environment and approach high-stakes exams in an organized manner.
- **Higher Scorer:** Approaches high-stakes exams in a highly organized manner and knows how to maintain a very organized study environment during the test preparation phase.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Study books, articles, and/or audio recordings on how to stay organized.
- Make sure study materials, textbooks, class notes, and practice tests are properly filed and easily accessible as they prepare for a high-stakes exam.
- Make sure study partners are highly organized and productive when they study and prepare for a high-stakes test together.
- Utilize a well-designed study schedule and to strictly adhere to this schedule at all times.

Competency #6: Time-Efficient

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Needs to learn how to manage time optimally and to utilize highly time-efficient test preparation strategies.
- **Average Scorer:** Is generally good with time management and typically utilizes time-efficient test preparation strategies.
- **Higher Scorer:** Is a strong time manager and utilizes very time-efficient test preparation strategies.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Consistently complete all test preparation activities on time.
- Take a time management course if needed.
- Engage in the self-study of time management principles by studying brief articles and audio recordings on time management.
- Avoid wasting time at all costs, especially when preparing for high-stakes exams.
- Avoid becoming overextended in their personal and/or work lives since this type of situation will surely interfere with test preparation efforts.

Competency #7: Self-Disciplined

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Needs to develop and maintain the self-discipline to stick to the test preparation “game plan” and must avoid procrastinating and cutting corners.
- **Average Scorer:** Is oftentimes able to stick to a test preparation “game plan” and is generally disciplined when utilizing study time.
- **Higher Scorer:** Reliably sticks to a winning test preparation “game plan” and always maximizes study time while remaining disciplined.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Keep their word to teachers, tutors, family, and/or friends and stick to the approved study schedule.
- Avoid skipping any study groups or review classes when preparing for the high-stakes exam.
- Avoid procrastination when it comes to studies because this will only increase the odds of needing to cram right before the test.
- Avoid thoughts of cancelling or skipping the high-stakes exam, and instead increase their level of motivation to commit fully to this important test.
- Never engage in cheating of any kind.

Competency #8: Assertive

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Might be unassertive and therefore cannot effectively block actions by others that interfere with studying for the high-stakes exam.
- **Average Scorer:** Typically remains assertive to block others’ attempts to interrupt study efforts.
- **Higher Scorer:** Is appropriately assertive and can easily disarm attempts to interrupt study efforts while winning over supporters.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Study simple ways to increase assertiveness so that nothing will get in the way of test preparation efforts.
- Attend a brief assertiveness training workshop if necessary.
- Simply begin to act more assertively when it comes to protecting test preparation time and resources.
- Assertively push selves to study harder as opposed to waiting for others to motivate them to study more.

Competency #9: Mentally Tough

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Needs to learn how to feel like a “winning” test taker and might need to learn how to better cope with the pressures of high-stakes taking.
- **Average Scorer:** Generally feels like a successful test taker when taking high-stakes exams and can oftentimes cope with the pressures of test-taking.
- **Higher Scorer:** Feels like a “winner” with the “right stuff” when taking high-stakes exams and can usually cope effectively.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Utilize positive self-talk and affirmations whereby they learn to self-reinforce ambition of being “winning” test takers.
- Utilize positive visualizations viewing selves performing as successful test takers at all times.
- Make sure to stay as physically fit as possible for sitting for demanding high-stakes exams.
- Practice winning test-taking strategies to better guarantee success on the high-stakes exam.
- Complete many different types of practice tests under simulated “game conditions” to learn to cope with the pressure associated with high-stakes exams.

Competency #10: Self-Assured

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Often feels discouraged and hopeless when taking a high-stakes exam and therefore might need to develop and strengthen test taking self-esteem.
- **Average Scorer:** Usually feels prepared and confident when taking high-stakes exams and tends to have high self-esteem.
- **Higher Scorer:** Almost always feels totally prepared and confident when taking high-stakes exams and therefore possesses high levels of test taking self-esteem.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Take many practice tests to gain the confidence of seeing their scores improve over time.
- Never get discouraged or demoralized when taking high-stakes exams, instead view the entire test preparation and test taking process as a very meaningful growth experience in their life.
- Strive to remain very satisfied with all aspects of test preparation and test taking activities, as these feelings of satisfaction contribute to higher self-confidence.
- Possibly utilize a tutor to learn how to best approach the most difficult questions on the test and to strengthen overall test taking confidence.

Competency #11: Internally Controlled

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Possesses an “external” locus of control and therefore might believe that passing a high-stakes exam is due to chance, fate, or luck.
- **Average Scorer:** Tends to believe that passing the test is due to skill and hard work but may sometimes believe that chance and luck play a role.
- **Higher Scorer:** Has an “internal” locus of control and believes that passing a high-stakes exam is primarily due to skill and hard work.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Adopt the attitude that ultimate success on a high-stakes exam is due to hard work, study, and practice and is not due to luck or chance.
- Believe in the importance of the hard work and effort required to excel at taking a high-stakes exam.
- Always visualize selves passing a high-stakes exam and then celebrating the success afterwards with reinforcing self-talk.
- Fully realize that ultimate success with a high-stakes exam is due to both strong work ethic and day-to-day decisions to push to the limits in terms of studying and taking practice tests.

Competency #12: Attentive

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Might get confused and defocused very easily during important exams and therefore might forget important facts and details.
- **Average Scorer:** Is able to concentrate and stay focused most of the time when completing important tests.
- **Higher Scorer:** Can effectively concentrate while staying fully focused on each and every question, even with timed tests.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Practice staying fully vigilant and attentive while taking practice tests since this skill will generalize to the actual test.
- Set aside some difficult practice questions and to focus as much on their concentration levels when completing these questions as they do on getting the right answers.
- Learn to avoid getting distracted with surrounding sounds or distracting movements as they strive to improve their focus when taking practice tests.
- Take practice tests to also further develop their awareness and ability to know exactly how much time remains at any point in the exam.

Competency #13: Optimistic

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** At risk to take a pessimistic, overly negative view of having to take a high-stakes exam.
- **Average Scorer:** Tries to keep an optimistic, positive view of having to take a high-stakes exam.
- **Higher Scorer:** Confidently takes a very optimistic, positive view of having to take a high-stakes exam.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Try to remain positive and optimistic at all times in relation to test-taking thoughts and ruminations.
- Use encouraging self-talk every time best efforts were made to answer a challenging question (e.g., "I understood the question, I applied my strategy, and I feel that I did my very best on this rather difficult item. I am pleased!").
- Try to avoid any distractions the day of the exam, especially self-imposed distractions.
- Optimistically focus more on the process of efficiently taking a high-stakes exam as opposed to what the eventual grade will be.

Competency #14: Centered

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** At risk to be very moody, restless, and at times "out of control" when sitting for an important test.
- **Average Scorer:** Tends to stay calm and "centered" when taking an important test but may have moments of restlessness.
- **Higher Scorer:** Typically stays very calm and "centered" when taking an important test, and knows how to maintain a clear mind during a challenging high-stakes exam.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Take various practice tests to also learn how to sit calmly, breathe deeply, and let go of any feelings of tension during the testing process.
- Practice entering a relaxed state of being very calm yet very attentive so that this state of mind can be used when taking the actual test.
- Commit to staying "centered" while avoiding getting too excited or too frustrated when taking both the practice tests and the actual test.
- Learn to just breathe deeply and tell self to "relax, clear the mind, and slowdown," especially if thoughts ever start racing during an exam.
- Always keep any negative emotions in check when taking a high-stakes exam, especially feelings of anger, frustration, and/or fear.

Competency #15: Composed

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Might at times experience troublesome “test nervousness” and might be at risk to exhibit excessive fear and worry during high-stakes exams.
- **Average Scorer:** Is usually able to stay relaxed and at ease while taking a high-stakes exam though may exhibit some nervousness.
- **Higher Scorer:** Usually experiences “test calmness” and is often able to stay relaxed and worry free during a high-stakes exam.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Complete practice tests while focusing as much on staying calm, relaxed, and worry free as on getting the correct answers.
- Learn how to relax physically during high-stakes tests by engaging in a mild form of progressive relaxation by tensing and relaxing various muscle sets, while self reinforcing when a sense of relaxation sets in (e.g., “I can feel my entire body start to relax so I am more confident that I will be better able to deal with the challenges of the test”.)
- Learn to trust self during practice testing sessions when in a positive “mental zone” where they are able to read, analyze, and correctly answer very challenging questions.
- Eliminate such emotions as fear and worry from test-taking experience, although this type of thought stopping and reframing might require working with a skilled professional.

Competency #16: Quality-Oriented

Competency Interpretation:

- **Lower Scorer:** Might struggle to avoid careless mistakes during challenging exams and typically does not utilize or adhere to a proven test taking strategy.
- **Average Scorer:** Is usually able to avoid careless mistakes when taking high pressure exams and uses a proven test-taking strategy.
- **Higher Scorer:** Has learned how to avoid careless mistakes when taking high pressure exams and adheres to a proven test taking strategy.

Test Takers May Need To:

- Complete a large number of practice tests to learn how to avoid careless mistakes when taking a high-stakes exam.
- Take practice tests to learn to focus on carefully reading and thinking through all questions, but especially the more difficult questions.
- Utilize specific test-taking strategies when completing high-stakes exams (e.g., work at a predetermined pace, take brief notes when allowed, know when to make educated guesses, and know how to apply a strategy to multiple choice questions).
- Always avoid rushing answers to the point where uneducated guesses are made.
- Practice checking answers when completing a high volume of practice tests in order to skillfully and efficiently check answers when taking high-stakes exams.

Interpreting the ASWB TestPrep Profile Report

The major goal of this section is to help you understand how to interpret the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report. The report includes the Test Mastery Style (Test Preparation by Test Readiness). Scores for the 16 Test Mastery Competencies that contribute to each of the four TestPrep Profile Dimensions are presented and described in the report. Description of high, average and low scores for each of the competencies are given in the report along with suggested actions to improve each competency.

Scores shown in the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* Report are Percentiles. This means, for example, a score of 60 means approximately 59% of the national comparison group scored lower on that Dimension or Competency. The national comparison group is comprised of other high-stakes test-takers. The scores are charted on bar graphs with score ranges designated as High, Average, and Low. Scores in the High and Average range are important to making a test taker Test Prepped and Test Ready for the high-stakes assessment, but the Competencies in the Low range are the areas that need attention.

The Percentile scores in the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report can be converted to seven mastery levels to help provide a more specific understanding of scores on the competencies and dimensions. Narrative-based mastery levels may be used to help understand competency level. The Percentile scores can be converted to narratives that range from “Basic” for the lowest score to “Good” for the average score to “Outstanding” for the highest score. By using the overall mastery level description presented below, a test taker can rely on a straightforward and relatively simple interpretation strategy.

Overall Mastery Level

Low				High			
< 2	2 - 15	16 - 31	32 - 69	70 - 83	84 - 97	98 >	
Basic	Developing	Adequate	Good	Desirable	Very Desirable	Outstanding	

Self-Coaching Recommendations: To facilitate the matching of a test taker’s scores to self-development action steps, interventions (labeled above as “Test Takers May Need To”) were listed in this guide and the report for each of the 16 competencies. However, high-stakes test takers should always remember that the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* is only one piece of the test mastery plan. Therefore, test takers should consult with coaches, instructors, and/or guidance counselors on how to become even more prepared during the test preparation and the test readiness phases that ultimately lead to test taking mastery. Still, because individuals will more than likely be taking a wide variety of high-stakes exams for educational and employment purposes over the course of their lives, any attempt to strengthen one’s high-stakes test taking competencies is time well spent.

Test Mastery Style: As summarized earlier, the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report includes the four “Test Preparation-by-Test Readiness Styles.” High-stakes test takers will discover if they are: *Style 1* (Lower Preparation/Lower Readiness), *Style 2* (Lower Preparation/Higher Readiness), *Style 3* (Higher Preparation/Lower Readiness), or *Style 4* (Higher Preparation/Higher Readiness)². However, test takers should remember that these four groupings are in relation to other high-stakes test takers. The ultimate goal is to do everything in one’s power to strive for Style 4, whether this means brilliantly self-managing one’s weaker competencies or strategically leveraging one’s stronger competencies. This might also mean working with a test preparation coach or professional guidance counselor if a test taker feels that the challenge will require more than self-development initiatives.

Interpretation Guide: While the report and this guide provides descriptions for each of the competencies, a brief interpretation reference is also provided on the following pages to give users an easy way to review definitions of the four dimension scores, the 16 competency scores, and the three composite scores in one place. This brief interpretation reference provides the definitions of both “lower” and “higher” scores. Due to the large number of test mastery competencies that are assessed with the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*, this interpretation guide should be at one’s fingertips (See below).

² Test takers are grouped as being lower in terms of Test Preparation and/or Test Readiness if they obtain below average scores on these two major composite scores. Conversely, test takers are grouped as being higher in terms of Test Preparation and/or Test Readiness if their scores are equal to or greater than 50 on these two composite scores.

Test Mastery Competencies:	BASIC SCORES suggest that the test-taker has the following development needs:	ENHANCED SCORES suggest that the test-taker has the following strengths:
Test Preparation - Motivation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase commitment to preparing for the test • Learn to like the demands of studying for the test • Increase productivity during the test preparation phase • Increase ability to maintain a high energy level when preparing for the test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows commitment to preparing for the test • Enjoys the mental demands of studying for the test • Shows high productivity during the test preparation phase • Acts with a sense of urgency and energy when preparing for the test
Committed	– Increase the drive and motivation required to pass the test	– Does whatever it takes to both pass and excel on the test
Studious	– Learn to fully embrace the mental demands and routines of test preparation	– Demonstrates enjoyment of and commitment to the mental demands and routines of test preparation
Productive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve productivity and ability to stay on schedule when studying for the test – Try not to avoid, delay, or skip critical test preparation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Demonstrates full productivity and ability to stay on or ahead of schedule when studying for the test – Reliably attends all test preparation events (e.g., review classes)
Energetic	– May like to “take it easy” and not act with the sense of urgency and energy required when preparing for the test	– Acts with a sense of urgency and energy when engaging in all of the test preparation and study requirements
Test Preparation – Responsibility:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve organization when studying for the test • Work on the time management skills required for test preparation • Increase self-discipline during test preparation phase • Learn to assertively protect preparation and study time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses organization skills effectively during the test preparation phase • Shows highly efficient time management when studying • Demonstrates self-discipline when preparing for the test • Assertively protects test preparation and study time
Organized	– Improve creating and maintaining a highly organized study environment to foster test preparation	– Maintains an organized study environment during the test preparation phase.
Time-Efficient	– Learn to manage time optimally and utilize highly time-efficient test preparation strategies	– Demonstrates strong time management skills and utilizes time-efficient test preparation strategies
Self-Disciplined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve self-discipline to stick to the test preparation “game plan” – Decrease any tendency to procrastinate and/or cut corners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reliably sticks to a winning test preparation “game plan” – Always maximizes study time while remaining disciplined
Assertive	– Work on assertively blocking actions by others that interfere with test preparation	– Disarms attempts to interrupt test preparation efforts and builds allies to help in preparation
Test Preparation Composite	Develop increased motivation and responsibility to excel fully at the test preparation phase.	Demonstrates the optimal levels of motivation in addition to the required level of responsibility to excel fully at the test preparation phase.

Test Mastery Competencies:	BASIC SCORES suggest that the test-taker has the following development needs:	ENHANCED SCORES suggest that the test-taker has the following strengths:
Test Readiness – Confidence:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a winning test-taking attitude • Become more self-assured about test-taking skills and abilities • Reduce belief that test-taking success is due to luck or chance rather than skill • Maintain focus and reduce distractions when taking important exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows a winning test taking attitude • Exhibits high levels of test-taking self-confidence • Believes that test-taking success is ultimately due to skill and hard work • Exhibits exemplary focus and concentration when taking important exams
Mentally Tough	– Learning how to cope with the pressures of test taking and adopt the attitude of a “winner”	– Feels like a “winner” with the “right stuff” when taking important exams and can cope effectively with the pressures of test taking
Self-Assured	– Fight feelings of discouragement and hopelessness when taking important tests, to improve test taking self-esteem	– Feels totally confident when taking important tests, and therefore possesses high levels of test taking self-esteem
Internally Controlled	– Give up the belief that passing the test is due to chance, fate, or luck rather than skill and hard work	– Believes that passing the test is primarily due to skill and hard work
Attentive	– Maintain focus to fight confusion in order to remember important facts and details	– Effectively concentrates while staying fully focused on each and every question, even with timed tests
Test Readiness –Resiliency:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight feelings of pessimism and negativity when taking an important exam • Maintain a positive mood and outlook during the testing session • Do not worry too much when completing an important test to avoid careless mistakes on a challenging exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is very positive and optimistic when taking an important test • Knows how to remain calm and stable during demanding testing sessions • Stays worry free and fearless during the testing experience in order to avoid careless mistakes on a challenging test
Optimistic	– Learn to build an optimistic, positive view of having to take the high-stakes test and the opportunities it provides	– Confidently takes an optimistic, positive view of having to take the high-stakes test
Centered	– Learn to maintain a positive, focused and unemotional mood when sitting for an important test.	– Stays very calm and “centered” when taking an important test and knows how to maintain a clear mind during a challenging exam
Composed	– Combat “test nervousness” and excessive worry during the test	– Usually experiences “test calmness” and is often able to stay relaxed and worry free during an important exam
Quality-Oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avoid careless mistakes during challenging tests – Stick to a proven test taking strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avoids careless mistakes during challenging tests – Adheres to a proven test taking strategy
Test Readiness Composite	Develop increased test taking confidence and resiliency to improve results of the test taking process.	Shows higher levels of test taking confidence and resiliency that facilitate the overall test taking process.
Overall Mastery Composite	Develop increased motivation and take increased responsibility in relation to the test, in addition to building test-taking confidence and resiliency.	Shows more motivation and reliability in relation to the test and possesses test-taking confidence and resiliency.

Test Mastery Coaching Basics

The Test Mastery Inclusion Coaching approach is a competency-based program that uses the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* as the foundation. Scientific assessments, such as the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*, can be used to encourage test takers to strengthen competencies that are assessed as being opportunities for growth (Basic, Developing, or Adequate) and motivate test takers to strategically leverage any competencies that are assessed as being personal strengths.

Test takers and coaches can use the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report since it provides a list of actions that could be followed to strengthen each of the 16 essential test preparation and test readiness competencies. For example, if a test taker's percentile score on a competency is in the Low range, this is an opportunity for growth and the test taker should consider strengthening the competency using some of the actions described in the report and this guide. Conversely, a competency to leverage is one where the test-taker scores in the High range.

A few of highly relevant TestPrep coaching interventions designed to increase the potential for high-stakes test takers to pass their important exams are summarized below:

- **Reaffirm self-worth:** For example, before a high-stakes exam, test takers might be encouraged to spend a few minutes writing about their many favorable interests and activities in life. This type of writing reaffirms the test taker's positive sense of self and promotes strong feelings of self-worth. Confidence is boosted and test taking performance increases.
- **Express any worries:** Researchers at the University of Chicago have documented experimentally that writing for 10 minutes about any worries related to taking an upcoming high-stakes exam can mitigate test anxiety. That is, the anxieties and debilitating worries that might emerge in the actual high-stakes testing situation can be significantly reduced by expressing and working through such worries ahead of time during a brief self-coaching writing session.
- **Meditate away negative thinking:** Meditation training can help high-stakes test takers to learn how not to dwell on their test taking worries and instead discard negative thoughts. Therefore, meditators have a higher potential for harnessing all of their "cognitive horsepower" for accurately completing high-stakes exams.
- **Practice under pressure:** Peak performance researchers have documented that repeatedly testing oneself on relevant material helps high-stakes test takers remember the material better in the long run. That is, high-stakes test takers should continuously practice being tested. Ideally, the practice testing sessions will be timed with no study aids so that they accurately simulate the eventual exam day.
- **Reinterpret physiological reactions:** When under high-stakes testing pressure, test takers can try to interpret their physiological reactions (e.g., racing heart, sweaty palms and muscle tension) positively as opposed to negatively. That is, test takers can be taught to interpret their heightened physiological reactions as being indicative of being "charged up" for the high-stakes exam as opposed to being "freaked out." In other words, test takers turn their bodily reactions to their advantage.

- **Focus on the positive:** A key Test Mastery Coaching intervention is for test takers to remain positive at all times. Students who focus on the negative run the risk of not studying as hard and failing to reach their goal of passing the high-stakes exam. High-stakes test takers need to learn to “Stop” any negative thoughts on the spot and quickly replace them with positive thoughts. The on-going use of positive test taking affirmations is obviously highly relevant here (See section “Test Mastery Coaching Tip #2 (Intermediate): Positive Affirmations”).

Select Areas Needing Improvement

Test takers are encouraged to initially focus on the 3-5 competencies with the lowest scores (i.e., the weakest) listed in their personalized reports. This list may be reduced down to the most important competency that needs immediate attention (e.g., if one isn’t committed to preparing for a high-stakes exam that is only a few months away, then this low Commitment competency score more than likely needs to be addressed first!). Test takers will want to focus on those competency score recommendations that are in the Low score range.

Also, some test takers might have competency scores that are relatively high compared to the norms (i.e., most of their scores are in the Average and High score ranges), and then their focus might be on their lowest score compared to their other scores, even though none of their competency scores are low. In either case, the competencies on which a test taker scores the lowest are potential targets for immediate improvement.

Select Areas of Strength to Leverage

Test takers should use a similar process to select those competencies that represent their clear-cut strengths. Again, a good starting point is to focus first on the 3-5 competencies that have the highest scores on the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report, and then boil this list down by determining what the top priority competencies within this short list are.

One might want to first focus on those stronger competencies that are in the High score range. However, if one’s overall profile score is relatively low, then the focus would more than likely be on those competencies that are highest. To leverage competencies means using those competencies more to help compensate for weaker competencies. By leveraging a strong set of competencies, high-stakes test takers will maximize their potential.

Implement a Test Mastery Coaching Strategy

Once test takers have identified and prioritized their competency-based strengths and opportunities for growth, they can select the specific coaching interventions they want to utilize. The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report provides a list of interventions. Still, the provided list is only a starting point for consideration.³

Test takers may also consult their guidance counselors, their test preparation instructors, and/or their fellow students for additional ideas on how to optimally address a low competency, dimension, or composite score, or how to best leverage the benefits of a high score. Ideally, the specific coaching interventions selected need to be:

1. Specific to the targeted competency.
2. Measurable to best ascertain if progress is being made.
3. Achievable so that the plan is realistic and does not become overly burdensome.
4. Relevant, meaning that the intervention clearly addresses the targeted competency.
5. Timely, meaning that the intervention can be completed on time so that it proves beneficial for the upcoming high-stakes exam.

While it is not the purpose of this coaching guide to dictate how best to choose and implement each intervention, three universal interventions are described in more depth below so that test takers and coaches will gain a better understanding of what types of coaching interventions they have at their disposal to increase overall test mastery mindset. More specific instruction on these development interventions can be located at bookstores and through online research. Guidance counselors and school psychologists can also be consulted if these resources are available to test takers who need more than a basic coaching model to strengthen a particular competency.

³ It is important to note that research studies do not exist for all of the test taker coaching interventions listed in this strategy guide or on the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report. Still, test validation studies have shown that the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* yields valid and reliable scores, and therefore the essential competencies assessed with this instrument are relevant when it comes to identifying both weaker and stronger test preparation competencies compared to the relevant norm group. In addition, published research exists for certain types of recommended interventions (e.g., shifting from rational to irrational self-talk and learning relaxation skills), while some interventions are based on case study reports. Finally, all recommended interventions have been logically linked to each of the 16 competencies so that test takers will get to review and consider some very viable coaching interventions compared to some less viable interventions that they might have selected on their own without the benefit of the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*.

Universal Test Mastery Coaching Strategies

Test Mastery Coaching Tip #1 (Basic): Increased Self-Awareness

There might be times when certain test takers do not have the time, effort, and/or resources to address their low competency scores. Still, by being fully self-aware of one's lower scores on the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*, a test taker can at least better self-manage those risk exposures.

For example, compared to the relevant norm group, one might not be deemed very productive as assessed with the Productivity Competency. By being more self-aware of this risk exposure, a test taker could make a stronger commitment to at least stay on schedule with required readings even if the possibility to get ahead of schedule with one's readings isn't going to happen. In addition, one might rely more on a highly productive study group as a compensatory strategy to spread the work around as opposed to doing all the test preparation work on one's own. Similarly, a test taker with a very low Productivity competency score will more than likely not be able to complete all of the test preparation work on one's own and might need to be more judicious in terms of the high priority work on which the test taker focuses on.

By being more self-aware one can also leverage a test-taking strength better. If one scores very high on the Energy competency, for example, then a test taker can possibly leverage this strength by dedicating even more hours to the often exhaustive study process. And, if this same person scores high on the Time-Efficiency competency, too, then even more non-study activities could be converted to study time on one's daily test preparation schedule to gain even more time for pure test preparation activities. These are prime examples of leveraging test-taking strengths further to increase one's odds of passing the test.

Once test takers have increased their self-awareness around those strengths and weaknesses that clearly relate to being "test prepped" and "test ready", they will be able to better self-manage their weaknesses while leveraging their strengths. The power of gaining increased self-awareness via self-development assessments like the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* should never be minimized.

Finally, test takers can self-reinforce every time they self-manage a test preparation weakness and/or leverage a known strength. Self-reinforcement is simply the reward test takers give themselves after demonstrating the desired behavior (e.g., improved test preparation competencies). Self-reinforcement can range from simple self-statements to some form of social or material reward. It is recommended, however, that positive self-statements be used as reinforcements. Also, test takers should self-reinforce themselves as soon as they realize that they successfully self-managed a weaker competency or leveraged a stronger one.

Examples of self-reinforcing self-statements are listed below:

- *"I am approaching my demanding studies rationally, and I feel better due to my efforts."*
- *"I am getting better sticking to my daily study schedule, and therefore I deserve a relaxing deep breath of fresh air and a soothing stretch."*
- *"Good! I remained optimistic when I used constructive coping skills during that challenging practice test. I am very, very pleased!"*
- *"I am thankful that I was able to say 'No' to my friends who wanted me to go out and party with them instead of staying at home and studying for my test. I am glad I was able to successfully self-manage my assertiveness."*
- *"I am pleased with how quickly I was able to get centered again after experiencing a string of very difficult test questions. I will continue to stay focused and calm as I wrap up my test."*

Test Mastery Coaching Tip #2 (Intermediate): Positive Affirmations

Test takers often struggle with negative self-talk. Their negative internal dialogue is self-defeating and can lead to lower test-taking motivation, irresponsible test preparation behavior, a lack of confidence when taking any high-stakes exam, and an absence of resiliency when the exam is experienced as being overly complicated, too lengthy, and/or unbearably stressful.

However, the use of positive affirmations allows these high-stakes test takers to draw on positive counterstatements that can override the self-defeating internal dialogue. Affirmations are strong, positive statements that suggest that something important has already been accomplished. Such affirmations ideally are suited to refute a continuous, albeit negative inner dialogue going on within the test taker's mind. These negative inner dialogues need to be self-managed and converted to positive affirmations because, at a simple level, a test taker's mental mindset influences and colors their feelings and perceptions about the test taking process, and such thoughts definitely contribute to the ultimate test outcome. Illustrative examples of positive affirmations for increasing ones' test taking self-confidence follow:

- *"I deserve to take as much time as needed in order to prepare for this important exam."*
- *"I have many good qualities as a high-stakes test taker."*
- *"I trust in my abilities to succeed in my test taking goals."*
- *"I'm optimistic about the upcoming test."*
- *"I believe 100% in my ability to succeed."*

Habitual, self-defeating thoughts like, "I will never be able to pass this complicated test" are often "old programming" that is still influencing one's test taking behavior in the here and now. The practice of positive affirmations allows a test taker to replace this self-defeating inner dialogue with more positive ideas and concepts.

Affirmations can be done silently or spoken aloud. One can write down favorite affirmations on a 3-by-5 card or a piece of paper. These affirmations can also be recorded and listened to multiple times a day. Repetition helps to internalize the positive message. Moreover, test takers are most likely to internalize these positive test taking affirmations when they focus on them fully while in a relaxed state, so using affirmations when engaging in meditation or a comparable relaxed state is encouraged. Here are some guidelines for the proper use of affirmations:

- 1. Phrase affirmations in the positive.** Test takers should always affirm what they do want, not what they don't want! Hence, an affirmation such as, "I will no longer be tempted to cheat on a high-stakes exam" is less desirable. Conversely, an affirmation such as, "I am a person with the highest levels of integrity who can always be trusted when taking high-stakes exams" is more acceptable.
- 2. Phrase affirmations in the present tense, not in the future.** Word all affirmations as if the desired attitudes and behaviors already exist. This is important because students are self-managing their new internal dialogue before it manifests into their desired external reality. Hence, instead of saying, "I plan on someday being very confident when I sit for an important test," it would be more beneficial to say, "I am always a very confident test taker when I sit for all of my important exams."

3. Keep all affirmations short and simple. Ideally, an affirmation will be a clear statement that reflects a positive feeling and outcome. Succinct and focused affirmations make a stronger impression on the mind than affirmations that are too long and wordy. Also, avoid overly theoretical affirmations, since they tend to be too complicated and therefore they lose their emotional impact.

4. Experience affirmations as being true. Affirmations help to create a new point of view about high-stakes testing. However, it is recommended that test takers who use affirmations suspend all doubts about the goal of the affirmation while putting their full mental and emotional energy into believing the affirmation, even if for only a few minutes. That is, rather than merely saying or writing the affirmations by rote, test takers should truly embrace the feeling that they have the power to create that reality. Some illustrative affirmations for each of the testing competencies assessed by the *ASWB TestPrep Profile* are listed below.

Affirmations for Test Mastery Coaching (Illustrative Listing Only!)

Committed:

- “I enthusiastically look forward to preparing for the upcoming test.”
- “I am honored to be in the position to sit for this very important test.”

Studios:

- “I enjoy studying very important subjects.”
- “I take great pride in the knowledge that I acquire through my daily studies.”

Productive:

- “I have a very strong work ethic that serves me well during test preparation.”
- “I love being highly productive when I prepare for important exams like the test, and I am routinely rewarded with higher scores.”

Energetic:

- “I wake up full of energy each and every morning.”
- “I always have sufficient energy to work long, productive hours when I prepare for important exams.”

Organized:

- “I am benefiting from maintaining an organized life, especially as I prepare for important exams.”
- “I am learning to live each day by my test preparation study schedule, and I feel very pleased.”

Time-Efficient

- “I trust my ability to skillfully manage my time as I prepare for important exams.”
- “I take pride in staying ahead of schedule with my studies.”

Self-Disciplined:

- “I respect myself that I am an honest test taker whose scores reflect my true skills and abilities.”
- “I can always be trusted to keep my word that I will religiously adhere to a strict study schedule at all times.”

Assertive:

- “I deserve the respect from others to fully accept my right to take as much preparation time as I need for this very important exam.”
- “It is okay for me to ask others to assist me in a wide variety of ways as I wholeheartedly prepare for this very important exam.”

Mentally Tough:

- “I believe in my ability to succeed when taking any high-stakes exam.”
- “I am a winning test taker who enjoys sitting for high-stakes exams.”

Self-Assured:

- “I am learning to be a more self-confident test taker every day.”
- “I have many good qualities as a prepared test taker.”

Internally Controlled:

- “I embrace the reality that I am fully responsible for my success when taking important exams.”
- “My hard work and commitment routinely lead to successful outcomes when I take important exams.”

Attentive:

- “I am an attentive student who stays focused on the most important test preparation assignments.”
- “I remain fully alert to my environment at all times when taking important exams.”

Optimistic:

- “I am very pleased and satisfied with how prepared I am for very important exams.”
- “All of my test preparation efforts have come together nicely so that I am now more than ready for this high-stakes exam.”

Composed:

- “I am learning each day to let go of any doubts and fears related to taking important exams.”
- “I am proud of my ability to immediately relax whenever any high-stakes exam gets a bit too demanding.”

Quality Oriented:

- “I am committed to sticking to a winning test taking strategy at all times.”
- “Others perceive me as being a careful test taker who accurately completes important exams in a quality-oriented manner.”

Test Mastery Coaching Tip #3 (Advanced): Rational Thinking

Successful test takers typically think positively and rationally. They maintain an optimistic outlook when both preparing for and taking an actual high-stakes exam. In contrast, developing test takers tend to think negatively and often irrationally. Developing test takers have a pessimistic frame of reference when preparing for and taking high-stakes exams.

Stress experts have shown that irrational, negative thoughts increase feelings of stress, while rational, positive thoughts serve as stress buffers. The following 4-step coaching strategy is recommended to increase rationality and positive thinking among test takers.

- 1. Step 1: Identify Irrational Thinking** – Test takers are encouraged to examine their thoughts and internal self-talk when they are feeling distressed or emotionally upset. These test takers need to learn to discriminate accurately between their use of rational/optimistic thoughts and their use of irrational/pessimistic thoughts (examples of irrational thoughts are listed in step 3).
- 2. Step 2: Dispute Negative Thoughts** – Test takers should challenge and dispute any and all irrationalities and negative thoughts that are identified. Determine if the negativity and pessimism is warranted, and whether or not the irrational thinking makes complete sense. Test takers are encouraged to understand why the irrational, negative thoughts can increase one's feelings of stress.
- 3. Step 3: Substitute Rational Thoughts** – Once test takers understand that they are thinking irrationally and negatively, they can substitute more rational and optimistic thoughts in place of the irrational and pessimistic thoughts. This is the key step with this self-coaching intervention. By substituting more rational thoughts for irrational thoughts, then feelings of incompetency and distress during the test preparation and test readiness phases should lessen and be replaced with feelings of self-empowerment. For illustrative purposes, a few of the irrational thoughts that may have been identified in Step 1 are disputed below with more rational thoughts:

Irrational Thought #1: "I must have approval from all of the significant people in my life before I can 100% commit myself to the amount of time that it will take me to successfully prepare for the test."

Rational Substitute #1: "I would love for everyone to support my need to spend months preparing for my upcoming test, but it is unreasonable to believe that everyone will buy into my plan. I just need to persevere assertively because in the long run all of the significant people in my life will benefit from my test preparation efforts."

Irrational Thought #2: "I must be thoroughly competent, adequate, an achieving in all aspects of my test preparation efforts before I will have any chance of passing my upcoming test."

Rational Substitute #2: "If I drastically improve my test preparation efforts in a just few select areas, my overall ability to perform at a higher level on this important exam will only increase."

Irrational Thought #3: "When things start going wrong when I am completing the test, they will only get worse."

Rational Substitute #3: "I expect a number of surprises and challenges when I take the upcoming test, yet when something unexpected does happen I will use my test resiliency competencies to quickly stabilize and regain my center of balance. I will be fine!"

Irrational Thought #4: “I must be able to answer all possible questions competently and accurately that I encounter on the test.”

Rational Substitute #4: “Almost everyone will miss some answers on the test; that is why everyone’s scores are compared against bell-curve norms. Therefore, while I expect to maximize the number of questions that I answer correctly, I still feel fine knowing that there will be some questions that I might come close on but will still not be close enough.”

Irrational Thought #5: “All aspects of my test preparation are boring, meaningless, and stressful.”

Rational Substitute #5: “I am sure there will be times when I get bored and distressed when preparing for the test, yet I also expect to feel a sense of growing confidence as I log more and more study hours. I will also feel a deep sense of satisfaction as I answer more questions correctly every time I complete another practice test.”

4. Step 4: Self-Reinforce Rational Thinking – Teach test takers to positively self-reinforce themselves whenever they substitute more rational, optimistic thinking for irrational, pessimistic self-talk. Such self-reinforcement increases the probability that they will remain rational and optimistic in the face of all the challenges that they are expected to encounter during the test preparation and test readiness phases. Rationality and optimism are key mental characteristics of test taking masters.

Summary

This Test Mastery Inclusion Coaching Guide for test takers and coaches provides a resource to improve test taker's test mastery mindset as they prepare for high stakes tests. Test Mastery Inclusion is primarily intended to help test takers to better leverage stronger test preparation and test readiness competencies, while strengthening and better self-managing weaker competencies to ensure that they do not become obstacles in one's efforts to pass high-stakes exams.

The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* and the coaching recommendations that the assessment generates serve as supplemental test preparation resources. These coaching resources, aimed at empowering test takers to be both "Test Prepped" and "Test Ready", are not to be used as substitutes for any form of professional service that is needed to ensure success on important exams, including but not limited to test prep coursework, formal instruction, and guidance counseling, to name a few.

Disclaimer

The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* report offers no claims or promises that test takers will master their test by completing this assessment and by implementing the recommended self-coaching tips. In addition, although the coaching suggestions in this report and/or in the various coaching guides have been logically linked to each of the 16 test preparation and test readiness competencies, it is important to note that research studies have not thoroughly evaluated all of the recommended interventions. The *ASWB TestPrep Profile* is a supplemental test preparation instrument and is not intended to be a substitute for formal instruction, professional coaching, and/or guidance counseling. Therefore, neither the author, the publisher, nor any of their agents assume any responsibility or liability whatsoever on behalf of any end user of these TestPrep coaching materials. Instructors, test preparation coaches, and/or school guidance counselors should be consulted if expert advice is being sought on a test taker's overall test preparation strategy.