

## Study Tips for School Counselor Illinois Licensure Testing System (ILTS) 235 Test

Updated May 1, 2023

One requirement for licensure as a School Counselor in Illinois is passing the ILTS content test.

In addition to having the appropriate content knowledge, to be successful on these tests, you must also use effective test taking strategies and techniques to manage test anxiety.

The School of Education has gathered resources on test taking and stress management to help you as you prepare for and take your content test. These suggestions come from faculty, current and former candidates who have passed content tests, test preparation websites and literature on test taking.

### Part 1. Test Preparation.

**General Test Score Information.** This link provides information on how to interpret your score report. [http://www.il.nesinc.com/Content/Docs/IL\\_AnnotatedScoreReport\\_ContentTests.pdf](http://www.il.nesinc.com/Content/Docs/IL_AnnotatedScoreReport_ContentTests.pdf)

- Test scores are reported on a scale of 100 to 300.
- Your total test score is based on the number of multiple-choice questions you answered correctly.
- Each subarea score is also reported on a scale from 100 to 300 and provides feedback on your performance by subarea.
- Each multiple-choice question is weighted equally.
- There is no penalty for wrong answers.

**235 School Counselor ILTS Test Preparation Links.** ILTS provides a great deal of information about the test, which you can find at [http://www.il.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML\\_FRAG/IL235\\_PrepMaterials.html](http://www.il.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/IL235_PrepMaterials.html) Note that the link to the practice test is at the bottom of this page.

The most helpful test prep sections are

- [Test Framework](#) which lists all of the areas covered on the test
- [Three preparation videos](#)
- [CBT Tutorials](#)
- [Test-Taking Strategies](#) (includes study strategies as well.)

### Two Additional Videos.

- [Teacher Certification Test Strategies and Tips - YouTube](#)
- [Effective Cramming - YouTube](#) (This one also has good general study tips for anyone, whether you are “cramming” or not. However, it does emphasize preparing in a short period of time.)

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### General Study Strategies and Resources to Prepare for Content Tests

- Make flash cards of key terms from:
  - Course notes
  - Tables of Contents and indices of key texts
- Study strategies suggested by Blake and Shutt (2013):
  - SQ3R study technique:
    - **S**urvey the material;
    - **Q**uestion what you see;
    - **R**ead the material with questions in mind;
    - **R**everview the information acquired while reading;
    - **R**ecite the information
  - Note taking skills:
    - Outlining
    - Graphic organizers (e.g. mapping)
    - **REST:**
      - **R**ecord what was read or heard;
      - **E**dit- condense notes by deleting irrelevant information;
      - **S**ynthesize- note information that was stressed;
      - **T**hink about the notes while studying the information)

As a reminder: If you have a diagnosed learning disability, be sure to use any test accommodations that are available to you.

To prepare for the content test, you may find it helpful to develop an individual study plan, work with a study partner, or set up a study group. If you want help doing so, please contact Dr. Nancy Barrett, [nfbarret@uis.edu](mailto:nfbarret@uis.edu), School of Education's Assessment and Accreditation Coordinator for assistance.

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### Part 2. Managing Test Anxiety.

Not surprisingly, doing well on an ILTS test does not depend solely on your content knowledge and test preparation. Anxiety and stress play a role as well.

Downs (2017) provides an excellent set of study tips for medical students addressing test anxiety. We have adapted that list to meet the needs of aspiring teachers.

#### Before the Exam:

1. **Put things in perspective.** Remind yourself that your upcoming exam is important, but your entire future doesn't depend on this one test. Remember that you can retake an ILTS test as many times as you need to pass.
2. **Remind yourself of past successes.** Recall previous positive experiences you have had both on tests and in the classroom.
3. **Don't give a test the power to define you.** Your performance on an exam mostly depends on how effectively you study, the test-taking strategies you use, and how well you can manage test anxiety. These are all things that you can control, to some extent. Learning about the test and the type of questions that are asked can help in this regard.
4. **Visualize completing the test successfully** despite your anxiety. Use vivid images and play the entire "tape" in your mind – from the moment you wake up on the day of the exam to the moment you finish the exam.
5. **A certain level of anxiety is actually helpful** in performing your best.
6. **Use anxiety control strategies** to moderate your anxiety level if it becomes excessive. A simple Anxiety Control exercise is included in the next section.
7. **Take practice tests** and use them not only to work on test-taking but also to control your anxiety level. If you're afraid of not being able to finish the exam in time, do timed practice questions.
8. **Get a good night's sleep for several days before the exam.** With adequate sleep, your ability to think clearly and to deal with anxiety will both improve. You might try imagining yourself as a professional athlete: ask yourself how you would prepare yourself mentally and physically for an important game. Doing a moderate workout early in the evening (5:00 or 6:00) may help you sleep more soundly at night. If you often have trouble sleeping, consult your physician.
9. **Reduce your intake of caffeine** the day of the test.
10. **Become familiar with the ILTS test process by reviewing the instructions.**
11. **Know how many questions and how much time you have to take the test.** That way, you can pace yourself during the test.
12. **Take a time-out.** Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
13. **Contact [UIS's Counseling Center](#)** (217) 206-7122 if you want to talk to a professional counselor about test anxiety and stress.

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### During the Exam:

1. **Get to the test site a little early.**
2. **Try to avoid talking with other students right before the exam.** (Their anxieties may increase your own.) Instead, take a walk around the building and silently talk to yourself, meditate, breathe, and/or pray. Moving your body can help rid you of some of the nervous energy you are experiencing.
3. **If possible, choose a seat in a place with few distractions** (probably near the front). You might also want to bring earplugs to limit distractions.
4. **Remind yourself that you don't know all the material** that could possibly appear on the test and nobody else does either. Still, you can do your best to get some "mileage" out of what you do know. And remember you only need a score of 240 out of 300 to pass.
5. **Expect a few curve balls** on the exam. Remind yourself that you're not expecting to get 100% on the exam; you only need enough points to pass! Also, your sense of what questions should appear on the test is not going to match perfectly with what the writer of the test had in mind. Therefore, when you encounter a curve ball on the exam, don't get upset and lose your concentration. Instead, you can either make an intelligent guess now or mark the question and return later.
6. **If you begin to have negative thoughts, say STOP** to yourself and remind yourself of past successes.
7. **If you continue to feel overly anxious during the test, use the following ANXIETY CONTROL PROCEDURE** to reduce your tension. This exercise is so simple that you may be skeptical about its effectiveness. However, many students have found that it really helps lower their anxiety to a level that is helpful rather than harmful.
  - Close your eyes.
  - Breathe in slowly to the count of seven and exhale to the count of seven.
  - Continue this slow breathing until you actually feel your body begin to relax. (Most people find that it takes 2 to 4 sequences.)
  - Open your eyes and give yourself a positive, very specific self-talk (i.e., "You're sure to do well. You studied hard. You're doing the best you can.") This whole procedure should take only about a minute and it is well worth the time.
8. **Move your body.** Roll your shoulders. Stretch your legs. Get up for a bathroom break if it's allowed.
9. **Banish all thoughts of how well or poorly you might be doing** on the exam. It's hard to guess accurately, and thinking about your score will only increase your anxiety.
10. **Work through the questions once** rather than rushing through the exam and leaving time at the end for checking. (Nervous test-takers are especially prone to changing correct answers to incorrect when they go back to check their answers.)
11. **Do not obsess about running out of time** on the test. Check the time periodically, but avoid checking too frequently, as this will only distract you and make you more anxious. It can be a

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better strategy to sacrifice a few points by not quite finishing the test than to rush through the last several questions and thus miss many points.

12. **Approach your studying seriously, but think of the test as a game.** Your goal is to collect as many points as you can in the time available. Don't obsess about a particularly difficult question. If you're unsure of the answer, guess and move on. Remind yourself that you can miss several questions and still do well.

### Works consulted

- Downs, C. (2017). *Managing test anxiety*. Brown University. Retrieved from <https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/counseling-and-psychological-services/index.php?%20q=managing-test-anxiety>
- Eulberg, J. *5 strategies to bust test stress*. Western Governor's University. Retrieved from [5 Strategies to Bust Test Stress \(wgu.edu\)](https://www.wgu.edu/5-strategies-to-bust-test-stress)
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- Princeton Review. *Test anxiety tips*. Retrieved from <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/test-anxiety>.

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### Retaking a test.

Despite your best efforts of preparation and planning, candidates sometimes do not pass a content test on the first attempt. While distressing, this should not be cause for alarm. Keep in mind that you have unlimited attempts to pass the test.

Although you will know as soon as you leave the testing site whether you passed or failed, we do not receive score reports until several weeks later.<sup>1</sup> While your first instinct might be to IMMEDIATELY sign up for another test if you find you have not passed, please resist that urge. Wait until you hear from us before you sign up to retake a test. That delay does two things: 1. it gives us a chance to talk about the test, and 2. it gives you a break from focusing on the test, which can help reduce stress.

Know that your HDC faculty and staff all want you to pass your content test and that we are here to help you do so.

If you have suggestions to share with other teacher education candidates, please forward them to me and I will add them to our resource file.

Please contact Dr. Nancy Barrett, [nfbarret@uis.edu](mailto:nfbarret@uis.edu), School of Education's Assessment and Accreditation Coordinator for test taking assistance.

Happy testing!

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we only receive your ILTS scores if you designate UIS as a recipient of your scores.