

## SECTION 2

# PREPARING FOR THE TESTS

This section of the Virginia Reading Assessment (VRA) Study Guide provides information to help you prepare to take the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers and the VRA for Reading Specialists. Reading this section will help you understand how to use the test preparation resources available in this guide and will assist you in developing a study plan for the VRA.

### Studying for the Test

Follow the steps outlined below to prepare to take the VRA. Additional information about each step is provided in the sections that follow.

Step	Description
Read the Test Blueprint	<p>Read the test blueprint to learn the reading instruction knowledge tested by the VRA and to check your familiarity with the subject matter being tested.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The VRA test blueprints are available at <a href="http://www.vra.nesinc.com">www.vra.nesinc.com</a>.</li> </ul>
Answer Sample Test Items	<p>Answer the sample test items included in this study guide. This step will help you prepare for the VRA by familiarizing you with the content and format of sample items that are similar to actual test items included in the VRA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sample test items for Elementary and Special Education Teachers are contained in Section 3.</li> <li>Sample test items for Reading Specialists are contained in Section 4.</li> </ul>
Develop a Study Plan	<p>Develop a study plan to help you acquire the knowledge you will need for the VRA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the content defined by the test blueprint and addressed in the sample test items.</li> <li>Plan to study the content defined by all test objectives, but pay particular attention to content with which you are less familiar.</li> </ul>

Step	Description
Use Additional Resources	<p>Identify and take advantage of additional resources to help you study for the VRA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult Section 5 of this study guide for a glossary of reading instruction terminology and a reading list of state standards and other resources to assist you in preparing for the VRA.</li> <li>• Review "Test-Taking Tips" in this section of the study guide to develop effective strategies to employ during the VRA test administration.</li> </ul>

### Read the Test Blueprint

The first step in preparing for the VRA is to identify the information the test will cover. The test blueprint for this assessment is the **only** source of this information. You should read through the entire set of test objectives for your test field to get a general grasp of the material the test covers. The test blueprints are available on the VRA Web site at [www.vra.nesinc.com](http://www.vra.nesinc.com).

Once you have a broad grasp of the test content, read each objective and its descriptive statements carefully to get a more specific idea of the knowledge you will be required to demonstrate on the test. When you have become familiar with the test objectives, make a list of those test objectives about which you feel you know the least. In addition, refer to "Structure of the Tests" in Section 1 for information on the number and type of test items covering each domain.

Use this review of the test objectives and test structure to set priorities for your study time.

The components of the VRA test blueprints are as follows:

- **Domains**—represent major content areas of the test as specified by the English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools (SOL) and *Virginia Licensure Regulations for School Personnel* in identified areas.
- **Objectives**—are broad, meaningful statements outlining the knowledge and skills required for an entry-level teacher in Virginia public schools, as defined by the Virginia standards and regulations.
- **Descriptive Statements**—provide detailed information about the content of each objective by including examples of the types of subject matter covered.

The following excerpt illustrates the content and format of a sample VRA domain, objective, and descriptive statement.

**Field 001: Elementary and Special Education Teachers  
Test Blueprint (Excerpt)**

Domains

- I. Assessment and Diagnostic Teaching
- II. Oral Language and Oral Communication
- III. Reading Development
- IV. Writing and Research

**EXCERPT: DOMAIN 1**

**DOMAIN I—ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING**

**0001 Understand the characteristics and uses of assessment and screening measures for evaluating students' language proficiency and reading skills.**

For example:

- Demonstrate knowledge of formal assessments (e.g., norm referenced, criterion referenced), informal assessments (e.g., informal reading inventories, anecdotal records), and screening measures for evaluating students' oral and written language proficiency.
- Demonstrate knowledge of formal and informal assessments and screening measures for evaluating emergent readers' and beginning readers' knowledge and skills, including concepts of print, phonemic awareness, letter recognition, sound-symbol knowledge, single-word recognition, and decoding.
- Demonstrate knowledge of formal and informal assessments and screening measures for monitoring the ongoing development of students' reading skills and strategies, including word-attack skills, vocabulary, word recognition in context, reading fluency, and oral and silent reading comprehension.

**0002 Understand the use of assessment data to plan reading instruction.**

For example:

- Recognize how to use assessment data to diagnose the reading needs of, and tailor instruction for, individual students.
- Recognize how to use diagnostic reading data to differentiate instruction to accelerate the development of students' reading skills.
- Recognize how to use diagnostic reading data to differentiate instruction to address the needs of students with reading difficulties.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the role of flexible groupings in instruction to address students' changing reading needs.

## Answer the Sample Test Items

After you have become familiar with the test objectives, try to answer the sample test items included in this study guide for the VRA test you are planning to take. Set aside ample time for this exercise. If possible, take the sample test items in a quiet room that simulates the testing environment. You may wish to note the time it takes you to complete the set of sample items. Recall, however, that the actual VRA test contains 90 multiple-choice items as well as the designated number of constructed-response items.

Sample test items for the VRA for Elementary and Special Education Teachers are contained in Section 3 of this study guide. Sample test items for the VRA for Reading Specialists are contained in Section 4. In each section, an answer key reports the correct response for each sample multiple-choice item and explains the rationale for the correct response. A sample response is provided for each sample constructed-response item.

## Use Additional Resources

Consider additional resources you may use in studying the content defined by the test objectives in the VRA test blueprint. The most appropriate resources may well be your basic subject-area textbooks. You may wish to consult your class notes and other assignments; textbooks currently in use in Virginia public elementary and secondary schools; and publications from local, state, and national professional organizations.

There are many books available on study skills, and you may wish to review one. Some people find it helpful to study with other people who will be taking the same test. If you are comfortable with this approach, consider forming or joining a study group for people who are preparing to take the VRA.

Section 5 of the study guide contains a short list of preparation resources for the VRA as well as a glossary of terminology related to reading instruction.

## Test-Taking Tips

Many factors are important when preparing for the VRA test administration. This section provides suggestions for preparing for the experience of the test administration, as well as strategies that may contribute to your success and confidence during the test session.

Tip	Description
Start Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Report to your assigned test site no later than 7:30 A.M. Testing is scheduled to begin approximately one-half hour after reporting time.</li><li>• Make sure to leave plenty of time to have a good breakfast and arrive on time so that you are relaxed and ready to begin the test when instructed to do so.</li></ul>

Tip	Description
Dress Comfortably	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wear layers of clothing that you can easily remove or add on (for example, a sweater or sweatshirt). This will allow you to make personal adjustments for fluctuations in room or body temperature.</li> <li>• Wear soft-soled shoes to avoid disturbing other candidates when you leave your seat.</li> </ul>
Be Prepared to Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring your admission ticket with you to the test site on the day of the test. Your admission will be delayed if you do not have a ticket.</li> <li>• Make sure you have two pieces of identification—one must be current, U.S. government-issued identification (such as a driver's license), in the name in which you are registered, bearing your photograph and signature (copies will not be accepted).</li> <li>• Be sure to have several sharpened No. 2 pencils with erasers (no pens). Pencils will not be supplied at the test site.</li> </ul>
Follow Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning of the test and throughout, follow all directions carefully, including oral directions read by the test administrator and written directions in the test booklet.</li> <li>• The test booklet contains directions for taking the multiple-choice and constructed-response items. If you do not understand something about the directions, raise your hand and ask a test administrator.</li> </ul>
Pace Your Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each test session is four hours long. The test schedule is designed to allow sufficient time for most candidates to complete the test.</li> <li>• Before starting the test, flip through the booklet to review the number of test items and to set a pace for answering them.</li> <li>• You may find that you need less time than the four hours provided, but be prepared to stay for the entire time.</li> <li>• Do not make any other commitments for this time period that may cause you to work more quickly than you should.</li> <li>• Do not spend a lot of time on a test item that you cannot answer promptly; skip that item and move on. <b>If you skip a test item, mark it in your test booklet so that you can return to it later.</b></li> <li>• If you skip a multiple-choice item, be sure to skip the corresponding row of answer choices on your answer sheet.</li> </ul>

## Section 2: Preparing for the Tests

### Read Carefully

- Read the directions and the test items carefully.
- Read all response options.
- Remember that the test items call for the "best answer." Do not choose the first response option that seems reasonable; read and evaluate all choices to find the best answer.
- Read the test items closely to understand what they ask.
- Do not skim the test items in an effort to save time; you may misread key words and select the wrong answer or spend more time than needed on a test item.
- Read the test items, but don't read *into* them. The test items are designed to be straightforward, not tricky.

### Mark Your Answers Carefully

- Mark your answers on the separate answer document(s) provided. **DO NOT MARK YOUR ANSWERS IN THE TEST BOOKLET.**
- Your answers to the multiple-choice items will be scored by a machine; therefore, the answer you select must be clearly marked and the only answer marked.
- If you change your mind about an answer, erase the old answer completely.
- Do not make any stray marks on the answer sheet.
- You may use any available space in the test booklet for notes, but your answers must be clearly marked on your answer sheet.

**NOTE: If you skip a multiple-choice item, be sure to skip the corresponding row of answer choices on your answer sheet.**

- Your answer(s) to the written constructed-response item(s) must be recorded in the appropriate section of the answer document.

**NOTE: If you write your response to the written constructed-response items in the test booklet, it will not be scored.**

Tip	Description
Choose Wisely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As you read through the multiple-choice item response options, try to find the best answer. If you cannot quickly determine the best answer, try to eliminate as many of the options as possible. Then, select from among the remaining answer choices.</li> <li>• Your score on each test will be based on the number of multiple-choice items you have answered correctly, in combination with your score(s) on the constructed-response items.</li> <li>• There is no penalty for incorrect multiple-choice item answers; therefore, it is better to select an answer than not to respond at all.</li> </ul>
Check Your Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use any remaining time at the end of the test session to check your work.</li> <li>• Go back to the test items that gave you difficulty and verify your work on them.</li> <li>• Check the answer sheet to be sure that you have marked your answers accurately and have completely erased changed answers.</li> </ul>
Follow the Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the Rules of Test Participation contained in the VRA registration bulletin available at <a href="http://www.vra.nesinc.com">www.vra.nesinc.com</a>.</li> <li>• Cellular phones, personal digital assistants, and all other types of electronic information or communication devices are strictly prohibited in the testing facility.</li> <li>• Candidates are not permitted to take any test materials or handwritten or printed notes from the testing room, or to disassemble, copy, or reproduce the test materials in whole or in part, by hand or with the use of any electronic, or other type of, device of any nature.</li> <li>• Violation of these rules, or those stated in the Rules of Test Participation in the VRA Registration Bulletin, may result in the voiding of your test results.</li> </ul>