

GOAL: Pass part or all of the GED test

Contributed by Rodney Ferguson
Richmond Public Library

Introduction

You have taken a big step in your education and life by deciding to take the GED test. “GED” stands for General Education Development and is composed of five tests, namely: Writing; Reading; Social Studies; Science; and Mathematics. These tests (when passed) certify that you have high-school level academic skills. Only people who have *not* earned a high-school diploma may take the GED tests. Although you will not be required to know all the information that is usually taught in high school, you will be expected to process and understand high school level information.



The fun thing about preparing for the GED test is the exposure you get from reading articles about wide variety of subjects—both fiction and non-fiction. Working on math problems – especially word or story problems – will increase your critical thinking skills as well as your creative problem-solving skills. Learning to write effectively will serve you in many job and personal situations. In short, passing the GED will prove to the world and yourself that you are truly educated.

Let’s help you pass the GED Test!...

Getting Started

This is how the various tests breakdown:

Test Name:	What’s Covered:	How Much it Counts:
Writing Part I	Sentence Structure	30%
	Organization	15%
	Usage	30%
	Mechanics	25%
Writing Part II	Essay	
Social Studies	U.S. History	25%

	World History	15%
	Civics and Government	25%
	Economics	20%
	Geography	15%
Science	Life Science	45%
	Earth and Space Science	20%
	Physical Science	35%
Reading	Nonfiction Texts	25%
	Literary Texts	75%
	Prose Fiction	
	Poetry	
	Drama	
Mathematics	Numbers and Operations	20-30%
	Geometry	20-30%
	Measurement and Data Analysis	20-30%
	Algebra	20-30%

In the practice book, each unit is roughly composed of topics according to these percentages. Now you don't have to know all of the material (stuff) in the book, because the GED folks are primarily testing you on your ability to quickly understand what you read, not how much you have memorized. Another good thing to know is that you have the option of taking one test at a time or taking all of them together. If it feels too overwhelming to study for the whole test, just take it one test at a time. Finally, you can take the test up to 3 times a year. If you pass some parts but not others, you can retake the parts you didn't pass.

To find out when and where the test is being offered, check with Library Literacy Staff or at your local Adult School.

Books & Materials

Books

In order to save money, I suggest that you obtain your own up-to-date book that covers *all* of the GED tests rather than one book for each test. The best book I've seen is The Steck-Vaughn Complete GED Preparation (the GED book, for short) which can be found on your library shelves (ask your Literacy Coordinator if s/he has copies) or you can order your own at <http://steckvaughn.harcourtachieve.com>. There are lots GED books on the market, but I think this is the best as far as systematic development for the test. The GED testers do not expect you to know everything you would have learned in high school, so GED books stress learning reading comprehension, problem solving, and writing skills rather than learning vast amounts of information.

Some students may want to study a pre-GED book before they work on the harder GED book. Most pre-GED books give an overview of some of the material given in a regular GED books

with less demanding vocabulary and simpler sentence structure. My suggestion is to jump in with a regular GED book, but go at a slow pace in the beginning with the help of your tutor.

For software, websites and other materials, I suggest starting with the easier pre-GED materials. However, I do believe that using books is the best way to go. Books are static and can be reviewed repeatedly with very little effort, whereas software is often timed, and tapes, CD's and DVD's have to be "rewound." Working hard on a difficult book is good practice for the GED; whereas, struggling with software can be frustrating and confusing. I rarely see students do software or watch a DVD with a dictionary by their sides. These media just don't lend themselves to close study.

Software

If you must use software here is a suggestion:

GED Practice 1120

New Readers Press, 2005

<http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=3350>

New Readers Press says, "This straightforward, convenient, and flexible GED test-practice CD-ROM is perfect for time-challenged adults who want to pass the GED. It provides 1,100 GED-type questions from the five test areas plus a variety of study options to best meet students' test preparation needs." Ask you Library Literacy Staff if they would be able to purchase this software for the library.

Websites

<http://www.teach12.com> – Suggest that your literacy program/library buy some DVDs from The Teaching Company. They offer college level lectures on a wide variety of subjects. Remember the GED covers lots of stuff. Getting an overall feel for a wide variety of disciplines is informative and fun.

www.wikipedia.org – Wikipedia is an on-line encyclopedia. Read about topics you don't know. Take notes where applicable.

Key Vocabulary/Concepts

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|
| ◆ Nouns | ◆ Pronouns | ◆ Verbs | ◆ Adjectives |
| ◆ Adverbs | ◆ Prepositions | ◆ Colon | ◆ Semicolon |
| ◆ Exclamation Point | ◆ Comma | ◆ Essay | ◆ Paragraph |
| ◆ Graph | ◆ Democracy | ◆ Evolution | ◆ Algebra |
| ◆ Geometry | ◆ Distributive Law | | |

Reading Practice/Activities

1. Understand the nuts & bolts of reading:

- Practice breaking apart words into syllables:
syl/la/bles or prac/tice, for example
- Build your vocabulary:
 - practice using the dictionary
 - read with a dictionary next to you
 - create your own dictionary of words you would like to remember. Jot down unfamiliar words and their definitions in a separate notebook and review them periodically.
 - Read the daily newspaper to build your vocabulary.
- Learn the parts of a sentence (phrases, clauses, etc.)
- Be able to correctly use punctuation (periods, commas, etc.)
- Know parts of speech (noun, verb, adverb, adjective, etc.)
- Understand paragraphs (topic sentence, details, examples, etc)
- Be able to interpret poems, short articles and stories (theme, plot, main idea)
- Understand how books are put together (table of contents, title page, chapters, etc.)
- Know the meanings of, and be able to spell and correctly use tricky homonyms like “accept” and “except.”

2. Develop your study skills:

- Have a study goal
- With your tutor, develop a study plan: Set a goal for when you want to pass the GED. Develop a plan to study enough to reach your goal. In most general GED books there are more than 100 lessons. Pick a date when you would like to pass the GED. Figure out how many days you have until the test day. Divide the number of days into how many lessons are in the book. Then you will now know how many lessons to do each day in order to prepare for the test. For instance, if there are 120 lessons in your book and you want to pass the test in 60 days, divide 120 by 60. The answer is 2. This means that you should do at least 2 lessons in order for you to reach your goal.
- Work your plan on a daily basis
- Survey = quickly look over the lesson. Discover what the lesson will cover.
- Question = turn the headings into question form
- Read = Read to find the answers to the questions you formed
- Recite = say and write repeatedly the answers you have discovered
- Review = in the days and weeks to come the answers to your questions

3. When you are reading through the GED book:

- Underline important passages, take notes, answer all of the practice questions, check the answers in the back of the book, and review.
- Look for topic sentences in paragraphs.
- Read with curiosity
- Come to your tutoring session with questions about what you have read.

Writing Practice

For the GED you will need to develop essay writing skills in order to write a 5 paragraph essay, including introduction, body, and conclusion.

To practice, write an essay using one of the topics from your GED book. Here is a sample outline that has helped my GED students pass the essay part of the writing test. Turn a GED essay topic into a two sided argument/discussion, where you pick one side:

- Introduction Paragraph: Start with an interesting opening sentence, continue with background information about your topic, end this paragraph with a strong statement of your point of view.
- First body paragraph: Argue for your point of view.
- Second body paragraph: Describe opposing points of view.
- Third body paragraph: Attack/challenge/question opposing point of view
- Conclusion: What have you learned from thinking about your topic and completing your essay? What wisdom have you gained? Reiterate why your point of view is correct.

Other Practice

1. Memorize:

Addition facts
Subtraction facts
Multiplication (times) tables
Division facts



2. Review and commit to memory the basics of world history, US history, science and literature. Fortunately, the GED practice books provide this information in an orderly fashion. Try to see the overall structure of the presentation of information in the book.
3. Learn to read and understand graphs.
4. Check out and enjoy educational books, videos and DVD's on history, science, and literature from the library.
5. Think about test-taking skills. The GED is composed of mostly multiple choice questions. This is how you answer multiple choice questions about an article or math problem:
 - Read the question before you look at the answer.
 - Come up with the answer in your head before looking at the possible answers, this way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.
 - Eliminate answers you know aren't right.
 - Read all the choices before choosing your answer.

- If there is no guessing penalty, always take an educated guess and select an answer.
 - When you are being timed, you may want to read the questions before you read the article.
 - Don't keep on changing your answer; usually your first choice is the right one, unless you misread the question.
6. Check out a book from the library on test taking tactics and strategies and review it together with your tutor.

Games & Activities

The most important activity you can do to prepare for GED test is to sharpen your thinking and decision-making skills because it requires you to think and make decisions on many areas and topics. There are at least five basic tools that we use in effective thinking on the GED, they are listed below with some game ideas that will help you practice those tools:

1. **Memory or recall** – There's an old book entitled How to Solve It which helps you solve math problems. Most of the author's suggestions are memory related, such as: "Have you seen the problem before?" "Do you know a related problem?" Memory is an essential element in all thought, especially hard thinking. You need to recall many themes and details to be systematically thoughtful.
 - GED Application: Remembering math formulas, vocabulary words, question types.
 - GAME: "Jeopardy" – Using index cards as flash cards, put questions on one side of the cards, the answers on the other.
2. **Association** – Association is seeing how one idea relates to another or one experience relates to another. This helps you make progress from a basic idea to a more complex idea or set of ideas.
 - GED Application: Some GED questions ask you to draw an analogy between one field and another, like comparing sports training to music practice.
 - GAME: "Awesome Analogies!" – This on-line game asks you to figure out why the first pair of words go together so that you can finish the second word pair. For example, "Cat is to MEOW as dog is to ____.(bark)"
<http://www.quia.com/cb/7146.html>
3. **Pattern discernment and pattern recognition** – Visual patterns, word patterns, idea patterns, and number patterns are important for problem solving. If you "get" the pattern, then you can predict the answer.
 - GED Application: "What is the next number in the sequence: 1, 3, 5, __, __?"
 - GAME: Adventure Sequences" -- Help the cartoon character across a valley by figuring out the sequence:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks1bitesize/numeracy/sequences/index.shtml>
4. **Reason** – A tool we use to move from one idea to the next by logical inference. Inductive reason and deductive reason both begin with presumptions and end with conclusions.

- GED Application: Most GED questions ask you to draw conclusions, figure out the themes, or main ideas from an article.
 - GAME: Checkers, Chess, Poker – These games will help you practice: 1) learning rules, 2) deductive reasoning about what will work to win the game (strategy), and 3) inductive reasoning – using past experience and applying it to the current situation.
5. **Experience** – The primary source of basic information from which we draw conclusions and explanations. It ties our internal thinking to what’s going on in the outside world.
- GED Application: You’ve got to be careful using your personal experience. When you are taking the GED, you are in “GED-land”—everything they assume is correct is correct within the boundaries of the test, even if you may not agree. Having said that, the GED test writers assume you have a basic understanding of your world.
 - GED Application: Draw from personal experience to answer questions.
GAME: “The Sims” – This very popular computer game “sim”ulates human experience; although the game is meant to be fun and entertaining, it has become so realistic that one can experiment with various behaviors in a safe, consequence-free environment to test out the results of various actions.
6. **Intuition** – Intuition is often the label put on those thoughts that appear to be true without reflection or serious thought. It means that sometimes the light just comes on.
- GED Application: While taking the test, if you really don’t know the answer, use your intuition and guess. It can’t hurt.
 - GAME: Battleship – By the process of elimination, you make educated guesses about where your opponent has placed his/her battleships on a grid.

Real World Practice

The best real world practice for taking the GED test is to work through the book and do all of the problems. If you work the book – and I mean the whole book – the chances for you passing the GED are excellent. The Steck-Vaughn Complete GED Preparation book is about 900 pages long. If you do about 15 pages a day, you could be ready for the GED in a couple of months.

Steck-Vaughn has official practice GED tests you or your library literacy services can buy; talk to your Literacy Coordinator about this option:

http://steckvaughnadult.harcourtachieve.com/HA/Templates/SVAEProductTemplate.aspx?catLevel2=AdultEd_GED&catLevel3=AdultEd_GED_GEDPrep&catLevel4=GED_PracticeTests

Independent Practice/Homework Ideas

You know what I’m going to say... Work the book! This means carefully read the articles, get some outside references from the Internet, other books, watch DVD’s from the library that pertain to the main topics of the articles. Look at other sources so you can see how the GED test writers condense lots of information into a small article and come up with questions.

Milestones

- **Initial Effort** – If you can read the articles and feel comfortable understanding some of what you read, that shows that you are reading at a very sophisticated level. Congratulations!!
- **Making Progress** – Once you are reading the articles and answering the questions where you can find the information directly from the article, you are well on your way to passing the GED!
- **Accomplished** – There are many skills you get to show off on the GED test: identifying the main idea, restating information, distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing unstated assumptions, and more. When you can do all this and more, not only will you pass the GED, you will be able to read most anything.



Remember that getting your GED will take time, but you must work at it every day. Try to make it a fun process. If you want to pass the GED, focus on developing confidence in your intellectual abilities. You are very smart. Expect to pass the test. Prepare yourself psychologically and physically to pass it:

- Say to yourself over and over again, “I will pass the GED!” The idea is to block out negative thoughts about not passing the GED.
- Picture yourself with that GED Diploma in your hand.
- Pray, meditate, talk to positive people, or do whatever you have to do to develop and keep a positive mental attitude.
- Get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, talk to a doctor then develop a healthy exercise routine
- Relax



Contributor's Biography

Rodney Ferguson. After growing up in Washington, D.C., Rodney graduated from UC Berkeley and with a B.A. in Philosophy. In 1990, Rodney began his career as the Learning Center Manager for LEAP at the Richmond Public Library, in Richmond, California. He creates curriculum and helps student prepare to pass the GED test.