

Educating and Interacting with the Public

Book #13

Examination Preparation Book



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Local 1000 AFSCME, AFL-CIO
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Booklet #13

Educating and Interacting with the Public

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Introduction

Purpose

This booklet is designed to help you prepare for specific New York State civil service exams. The 40 practice questions that follow are examples of the kinds of questions you're likely to encounter for the topic "Educating and Interacting with the Public." Despite the title, this topic is not actually limited to dealing with the public. Questions under this topic may also address communications in general and interactions with representatives of other agencies.

Study Guide Contents

The following pages are composed of 40 multiple choice questions. An answer key is located on page 12, followed by explanations of the correct answers, beginning on page 13. Pages 21 and 22 present some general points to keep in mind when answering questions about this topic.

How to Use This Booklet

Complete a few questions at a time and then review your answers in the back of the booklet. The explanations in the back of the booklet tell you why the right answer was right and why the wrong answers were wrong. If you answer a question incorrectly, try to analyze why you chose the wrong answer.

Good luck!

Practice Questions

1. You are going to be the moderator at a meeting that will address a controversial issue. What is the first thing you should do at the meeting?
 - a. Allow each side to present its position.
 - b. State that you do not expect the two sides to reach an agreement on the issue.
 - c. Make sure that everyone agrees on the facts involved in the issue.
 - d. State your own position on the issue.

2. A caller asks for an explanation of a complex agency policy. How should you respond to this request?
 - a. Explain the policy in general terms and refer the caller to a written statement of the policy.
 - b. Refer the caller to the agency's website.
 - c. Refer the caller to your supervisor.
 - d. Offer to mail the caller a printed copy of the policy.

3. What is the most effective way to ensure that an audience will remember the main points of a presentation?
 - a. Use-eye catching visual aids.
 - b. Use humor to make the presentation more lively.
 - c. Allow time for questions after your presentation.
 - d. Repeat and emphasize your main points.

4. You are preparing to make a presentation about a complicated new procedure for processing applications. What is the most effective way to ensure that the audience will be able to follow the procedure after they have attended your presentation?
 - a. Make your presentation as detailed as possible.
 - b. Provide handouts with all the information the audience will need to know.
 - c. Provide the audience with an outline of your presentation.
 - d. Encourage the audience to take notes.

5. Which of the following is the most important thing to keep in mind when preparing a presentation?
 - a. The interests of the audience.
 - b. The availability of visual aids.
 - c. The availability of charts and graphs.
 - d. The size of the audience.

6. What is the most important thing your agency can learn from letters it receives from members of the public?
 - a. How well your agency's public information efforts are working.
 - b. What additional training your agency's staff may need.
 - c. Whether your agency's public information processes may need to be changed.
 - d. How well the public feels your agency is meeting their needs.

7. The deputy director of your agency recently made an erroneous statement in a presentation at a business conference. This comment might lead some attendees to make errors that would be costly for their businesses. How should your agency handle this situation?
 - a. Post a correction on the agency's website.
 - b. Send a correction to all attendees.
 - c. Tell agency staff to be prepared to answer questions about the topic.
 - d. Correct the error the next time the deputy director makes a public presentation.

8. An angry caller refers to your agency's staff as "idiots" and repeatedly states that your agency's actions are creating serious problems for him. How should you handle this situation?
 - a. Let the caller continue to "vent" until he calms down.
 - b. Tell the caller you cannot speak to him and will discontinue the conversation if he calls your coworkers "idiots."
 - c. Try to turn the conversation to an unemotional discussion of the caller's problem.
 - d. Refer the caller to your supervisor.

9. You will be moderating a meeting that will be attended by people who have different priorities. How can you make the meeting as productive as possible?
 - a. Ask participants to consider changing their priorities.
 - b. Acknowledge the different priorities but point out common interests and goals.
 - c. Conduct the meeting as if all participants have the same priorities.
 - d. Begin the meeting by asking everyone to make a statement about his or her priorities.

10. You are writing a letter to a member of the public about one of your agency's policies. What is the first thing you should do?
 - a. Prepare a rough draft.
 - b. Make an outline.
 - c. Do some brainstorming.
 - d. Decide on the purpose of your letter.

11. You will be taking part in a panel discussion about one of your agency's programs. You know that another panelist has been highly critical of the program, and you expect that she will continue her criticism in the discussion. How should you handle this situation?
 - a. Refuse to take part in the discussion.
 - b. Ignore any criticism the other panelist raises.
 - c. Be prepared to speak on the program and to respond to likely criticisms.
 - d. Insist that the other panelist refrain from making critical remarks about the program.

12. You are speaking at a public meeting. One member of the public makes a suggestion that you consider reasonable and worthwhile. How should you respond?
 - a. Say that you will bring the suggestion to the attention of the appropriate person.
 - b. Say that you agree with the suggestion.
 - c. Explain that you are not in a position to make decisions about such suggestions.
 - d. Explain that your agency has probably already considered the idea being suggested.

13. A representative of another agency requests information about a particular topic. You have some but not all of the information requested. You know how to obtain the information you don't have, but it may take some time to get it. What should you do?
 - a. Provide the information you have and say that you will send the rest as soon as you get it.
 - b. Wait until you have all the information requested before providing any.
 - c. Provide the information requested and ask if it is sufficient.
 - d. Provide only the information you currently have.

14. You receive a call from another agency asking for clarification of a complex topic. You have a general understanding of the topic, but your supervisor knows much more about it than you do. Your supervisor is out of the office and you expect her back in about three hours. How should you handle this situation?
 - a. Provide clarification based on your understanding of the topic.
 - b. Ask the caller to call you back in three hours.
 - c. Provide the information you have and say that you will call back if you learn it is incorrect.
 - d. Say that someone will call back in three hours with a clarification.

15. What is the most serious problem caused by allowing one person to monopolize the discussion in a meeting?
 - a. The meeting may take longer than it should.
 - b. Other participants may not have an opportunity to express their views.
 - c. Some participants may lose interest in the meeting.
 - d. Some participants may assume that the moderator agrees with the person monopolizing the discussion.

16. A caller asks for information about a program that is operated by a different agency. How should you respond?
 - a. Refer the caller to the other agency's website.
 - b. Explain that your agency is not responsible for the program.
 - c. Refer the caller to the program office in the other agency.
 - d. Provide the information to the best of your ability.

17. In making a presentation, it is usually most effective for a speaker to
 - a. Read from a prepared script.
 - b. Speak from notes.
 - c. Read from slides.
 - d. Speak spontaneously without relying on notes.

18. Which of the following should a speaker avoid in making a presentation at a public meeting?
 - a. Technical jargon.
 - b. Controversial topics.
 - c. Financial topics.
 - d. Regulatory issues.

19. When making a presentation at a public meeting, you are asked a question about a subject that you do not fully understand. How should you respond?
 - a. Provide an answer based on your understanding of the subject.
 - b. Discuss a related topic that you understand better.
 - c. Say that you don't know the answer at the moment and offer to get back to the questioner when you do.
 - d. Explain that the question is not really related to the topic you have been presenting.

20. What is the best way to begin a letter in response to a letter that is basically a complaint?
 - a. I am replying to your complaint concerning new regulations on bottle deposits.
 - b. This is in regard to your complaint concerning new regulations on bottle deposits.
 - c. Your letter addressed to our agency has been forwarded to me for a response.
 - d. Thank you for your letter expressing your concern about new regulations on bottle deposits.

21. You are preparing a letter concerning an error your department has made. What should you include in this letter?
- A detailed explanation of what caused the error.
 - A statement identifying which member of the staff was responsible for the error.
 - An explanation of how your department intends to correct the error.
 - A statement explaining that your department is doing the best it can with the resources available to it.
22. You are writing a letter to a nonprofit organization that has omitted an important piece of information in its application for a grant. How should you begin this letter?
- I am writing to inform you that you failed to include an important piece of information in your recent grant application.
 - Your recent grant application did not include necessary information concerning...
 - Your recent grant application cannot be processed because you neglected to include information concerning...
 - Your recent grant application failed to include information concerning...
23. An angry caller uses abusive language and obscenities. How should you deal with this situation?
- Tell the caller that you cannot continue the conversation if he uses obscene language.
 - Refer the caller to your supervisor.
 - Allow the caller to “vent” before responding.
 - Hang up on the caller.
24. What is the best way for the moderator of a meeting to deal with an individual who is monopolizing the discussion?
- Ignore the individual.
 - Encourage other people to contribute to the discussion.
 - Adjourn the meeting.
 - Ask the individual to refrain from making any further remarks.

25. You are preparing a letter in response to a letter from a member of the public. What is the best way to determine how much explanation you need to include in your letter?
- Study similar letters your department has prepared.
 - See how much explanation is provided on your department's website.
 - Study the letter you received.
 - Assume that the recipient of your letter already has a basic understanding of the subject.
26. You are part of a panel discussion about a topic related to one of your agency's programs. Another panel member makes a critical comment about the program that is based on inaccurate information. How should you handle this situation?
- Ignore the comment and state your agency's position on the program.
 - Explain that the other panelist has deliberately distorted the facts.
 - Point out the inaccuracy in the other panelist's comment.
 - Ask the other panelist to acknowledge his error.
27. You are speaking at a public meeting. One member of the public makes a suggestion that you consider misguided and impractical. How should you respond?
- Thank the person and state that you welcome all suggestions from the public.
 - Tell the person that the suggestion reflects a lack of knowledge about the subject.
 - Say that the suggestion is an excellent idea even though you know it is not.
 - Ask if anyone would like to comment on the suggestion.
28. A representative of another agency calls about negative comments he has heard about one of your agency's programs. You think the comments may be based on erroneous information, but you are not sure because you are not directly involved in the program. How should you handle this situation?
- Explain that the facts don't support the negative comments.
 - Say that your agency does not respond to negative comments.
 - Explain that you are not directly involved in the program.
 - Say that you will look into the situation and call back.

29. An angry member of the public repeatedly interrupts your presentation at a public meeting. Which of the following would be the best response?
- “I came here as a favor and I don’t have to put up with this.”
 - “We have a lot to cover this evening, so in fairness to everyone here please let me continue.”
 - “If you don’t stop interrupting, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”
 - “There’s one in every crowd.”
30. Which of the following would be appropriate to include in slides used in a presentation?
- A printout of your department’s budget.
 - A summary of the key points you would like people to remember.
 - A transcript of your presentation.
 - A copy of a letter you are sending to members of the public.
31. Which of the following is the best way to begin a presentation?
- With a joke.
 - With an account of the history behind your subject.
 - With a call to action.
 - With a statement of the purpose of your presentation.
32. Which of the following is an example of nonverbal communication?
- Eye contact.
 - A website.
 - A brochure.
 - E-mail.
33. One of the attendees at a public meeting asks a question that you are not sure you understand. How should you respond?
- Answer the question based on your understanding of it.
 - Make a general comment about the subject of the question.
 - Paraphrase the question and ask if you have understood it correctly.
 - Ask the person to repeat the question.

34. A letter to a member of the public should begin by
- Providing some background about the subject of the letter.
 - Stating the purpose of the letter.
 - Explaining the author's role in state government.
 - Answering any questions the recipient of the letter might have.
35. You are preparing to speak at a large conference. Of the following, what is the most important thing for you to know about your audience?
- Their political affiliation.
 - Their average educational level.
 - Their knowledge of your subject.
 - Their attitude toward state government.
36. You are preparing a survey to obtain suggestions from the public on how your agency can improve its customer service. Which of the following questions would be most useful to include in this survey?
- How would you rate our agency's customer service?
 - How can our agency improve its customer service?
 - How often do you interact with our agency?
 - How would you rate the courtesy and helpfulness of our agency's representatives?
37. While you are on the phone answering a question about your agency, a visitor comes to your desk and starts to ask you a question. There is no emergency or urgency in either situation, that of the phone call or that of answering the visitor's question. In this case, you should:
- Excuse yourself to the person on the phone and tell the visitor that you will be with him or her as soon as you have finished on the phone.
 - Explain to the person on the phone that you have a visitor and must shorten the conversation.
 - Continue to talk to the person on the phone while looking up occasionally at the visitor to let him or her know that you know he or she is there.
 - Continue to talk with the person on the phone until you are finished and then let the visitor know that you're sorry to have kept him or her waiting.

38. Which of the following is the most important reason to use handouts when making a presentation?
- a. To shorten the presentation.
 - b. To help the presenter remember key points.
 - c. To give attendees detailed information they may not remember after attending the presentation.
 - d. To allow attendees to follow the presentation without paying attention throughout it.
39. You want to place information on your agency's website about how a new regulation will affect small business owners. What would be the most effective way to do this?
- a. Use a question-and-answer format.
 - b. Post the regulation.
 - c. Post a message from the commissioner regarding the regulation.
 - d. Post a list of the types of businesses affected by the regulation.
40. You are leading a committee meeting that is addressing a controversial issue. You hope the meeting will lead to consensus on some key decisions. How should you manage this situation?
- a. Use majority rule to make decisions.
 - b. Delegate decision-making to a subcommittee.
 - c. Seek support for decisions after debate and discussion.
 - d. Avoid making decisions that would raise objections.

Answer Key

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|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 21. c |
| 2. a | 22. b |
| 3. d | 23. a |
| 4. b | 24. b |
| 5. a | 25. c |
| 6. d | 26. c |
| 7. b | 27. a |
| 8. c | 28. d |
| 9. b | 29. b |
| 10. d | 30. b |
| 11. c | 31. d |
| 12. a | 32. a |
| 13. a | 33. c |
| 14. d | 34. b |
| 15. b | 35. c |
| 16. c | 36. b |
| 17. b | 37. a |
| 18. a | 38. c |
| 19. c | 39. a |
| 20. d | 40. c |

Answers and Explanations

1. The answer is choice c. The first step in dealing with a controversial issue is to determine whether the parties involved agree on the facts of the matter. If they don't, further discussion will serve little purpose. Choice a, allowing each side to present its position, would be appropriate for a debate but not for a meeting. Even if you chose to do this, it would not be the "first" thing you would do. It would be more important to agree on the facts of the matter first. Choice b, saying that you do not expect the group to reach an agreement, is unduly pessimistic. Such a statement would set very low expectations for the meeting. Choice d, stating your own position, would do nothing to deal with the controversy.
2. The answer is choice a. You will probably not be able to provide a complete explanation of a complex agency policy over the phone, but you should do more than just refer a caller to a printed document or a website. The best course of action is to provide a general explanation and tell the caller where to go for further information. Choice b, referring the caller to the agency's website, is a kind of "brush-off." It suggests that you don't want to take the time or trouble to help the caller. Choice c, referring the call to your supervisor, also suggests an unwillingness to be helpful, and your supervisor would probably not appreciate this course of action. Choice d, offering to mail a printed copy of the regulation, would not be very helpful. The caller has requested an explanation of the policy. Sending a copy of the policy does not respond to this request.
3. The answer is choice d. At some point in a presentation, some audience members are likely to "tune out." If their attention lapses at the wrong time, they might miss one of your key points. Even if they are paying attention, they might not realize that some of the points you are making are more important than others. That is why it is worthwhile to use repetition and emphasis to reinforce your main ideas. Choice a, using eye-catching visual aids, might help you capture your audience's attention, but it would not necessarily help your audience remember your key points. The same is true for choice b, using humor. Choice c, allowing time for questions, is usually a worthwhile practice when making presentations, but it too would do little to help people remember what's important.
4. The answer is choice b. Most people remember only a few things from a presentation. If you want people to be able to follow a complicated new procedure, you have to give them written instructions that they can take away with them. Choice a is incorrect because it is unrealistic to assume that people will be able to remember a detailed explanation of a procedure just by hearing it once. Choice c, providing an outline, would be helpful, but the question says that you want people to be able to follow a procedure. An outline will probably not help them to do this. Choice d, encouraging people to take notes, might serve some purpose, but a handout could provide a more accurate and complete guide to following a procedure.

5. The answer is choice a. Of these four choices, the most important thing to consider when planning a presentation is the interests of the audience. People will pay attention only to things that interest them. There is no reason to provide people with information they consider irrelevant. The availability of visual aids (choice b) and charts and graphs (choice c) is worth considering, but it is not as important as the message itself, and the audience's interest in the message. Choice d, the size of the audience, might affect seating arrangements and other logistics, but it would be less important than the interests of the audience.
6. The answer is choice d. The most important thing an agency can learn from the letters it receives is how well it is meeting the needs of the public — in other words, how well it is fulfilling its basic purpose. The other choices all represent things that an agency might learn from the letters it receives, but they are less important.
7. The answer is choice b. The erroneous statement made by the deputy director might have serious consequences. Specifically, it "might lead some attendees to make errors that would be costly for their businesses." Given the seriousness of the situation, the agency has a responsibility to send a correction to all attendees. Choice a, posting a correction on the agency's website, might only be seen in time by a fraction of the attendees at the meeting, or perhaps not by any of them. Choice c, telling agency staff to be prepared to answer questions, is also an unreliable option; it would probably deliver the information primarily to attendees calling in after the fact who had already made the mistake. Choice d is wrong because it does not say how soon the deputy director's next presentation will be and because there's no way to be sure all the same people will attend.
8. The answer is choice c. In a situation like this, the best thing to do is to try to get the angry individual to discuss the issue in a rational, unemotional way. Choice a is incorrect because letting the caller vent is a waste of time and it unnecessarily exposes you to abuse. Choice b is incorrect because the caller has not used obscene or threatening language. If he had, then it would be appropriate for you to hang up. In this situation, it would be appropriate to warn the caller you will hang up if he continues to call your coworkers "idiots," but it would not be appropriate just to hang up. Choice d is incorrect because referring the call to your supervisor is just passing on the problem to someone else.
9. The answer is choice b. The best approach in this situation is to acknowledge that people have different priorities but point out common interests and goals. This approach shows respect for the individuals involved and at the same time attempts to accomplish something based on shared concerns. Choice a is incorrect because asking people to change their priorities may be seen as a disrespectful and simplistic approach. Choice c, ignoring differences in priorities, may also be seen as disrespectful and simplistic. Choice d, beginning the meeting by asking people to make a statement about their priorities, focuses more on disagreement than common ground.

10. The answer is choice d. The first thing to do before writing a letter is to decide on the purpose of the letter. Are you writing the letter to answer a question? To provide clarification? To explain your agency's position? You need to decide on the basic purpose of your letter before you can brainstorm (choice c), make an outline (choice b), or prepare a rough draft (choice a).
11. The answer is choice c. The best way to handle this situation is to be prepared to speak about the program and answer any criticisms about it. Choice a is incorrect because refusing to take part in the program would not reflect well on your agency. It would also allow the critic of your agency's program to criticize it without having anyone defend it. Choice b is incorrect because ignoring criticism is too passive an approach. It is almost the same as acknowledging that the criticism is justified. Choice d is incorrect because a member of a panel discussion is not in a position to restrict what other panelists say. The purpose of a panel discussion is to elicit a variety of remarks.
12. The answer is choice a. The appropriate thing to say in this situation is that you will pass along the suggestion to the appropriate person. Choice b is incorrect because, even if you agree with the suggestion, you do not know if it will be accepted by people in a position to decide on it. Saying you agree with the suggestion may raise false hopes and may place you in a difficult position later on if the suggestion is not accepted. Choice c is incorrect because it sounds as if you are unwilling to do anything about the suggestion. Choice d is incorrect for the same reason and because it sounds as if you consider the suggestion obvious and unoriginal.
13. The answer is choice a. The question says that it "may take some time" to get the information you don't have already. If this is the case, there is no reason to make the representative of the other agency wait to receive the information you already have. That is the approach presented in choice b. Choices c and d are incorrect because they reflect a lack of cooperation and an unwillingness to do the work required to obtain the information you lack.
14. The answer is choice d. Choice a is incorrect because it would not be appropriate to give a response based on your incomplete, and possibly incorrect, understanding of the subject. Choice b is incorrect because you might not have the information you need when the other agency calls back. It would be better to say that someone will return the call as soon as a complete answer is available. Choice c is incorrect because, like choice a, it involves providing information that may not be correct.

15. The answer is choice b. The most serious problem caused by allowing one person to monopolize a discussion is that other participants may not have a chance to express different views. The other choices are all problems, but they are less serious than allowing one person to limit the range of opinions expressed in a meeting.
16. The answer is choice c. The best course of action in this situation is to refer the caller to the office responsible for the program. Choice a is incorrect because referring the caller to a website is not very helpful. The caller will be more likely to get the necessary information by speaking to someone who is involved in the program in question. Choice b is incorrect because telling the caller that your agency is not responsible for the program is not helpful at all. Choice d is incorrect because you are not in a position to speak authoritatively about another agency's program.
17. The answer is choice b. Speaking from notes is usually the best way to make a presentation. Choice a is incorrect because reading from a prepared script is almost always boring. It also makes a presentation seem less interactive and limits the ability of a speaker to change the presentation if the audience seems bored or confused. Some talented political figures are able to read effectively from a script, but most people are not. Choice c, reading from slides, is incorrect because in this situation what the speaker says is adding nothing to what is projected on the screen. Choice d, speaking spontaneously without using notes, might create several problems. A speaker who does not use notes might forget to include important points. Notes help a speaker stay on track and make a well-organized presentation.
18. The answer is choice a. A speaker should avoid using technical jargon in making a presentation at a public meeting because many members of the audience will not understand it. Using jargon sends the message that the speaker is not concerned with the audience's response. The other choices (controversial topics, financial topics, and regulatory issues) might be difficult to address in a presentation, but that is not a sufficient reason to avoid them.
19. The answer is choice c. If you do not know the answer to a question, you should say so. Most people do not expect you to have all the answers. In a situation like this, you should probably offer to find an answer and provide it to the person who asked the question. Choice a is incorrect because it involves making a statement based on your incomplete, and possibly incorrect understanding of the subject. Choice b, discussing a related subject, is really ducking the question, and it may appear evasive. Choice d, saying that the question is not really related to your subject, shows a lack of respect for the questioner. It also makes you appear unhelpful.

20. The answer is choice d. Beginning a letter by thanking the recipient sets a positive, respectful tone. Choices a and b are incorrect because they use the word “complaint.” This word sets a negative, even adversarial tone. Choice c is incorrect because it does not address the subject of the letter.
21. The answer is choice c. Explaining how your department intends to correct the error is the most positive, forward-looking response to this situation. Choice a, providing a detailed explanation of what caused the error, would probably not be of interest to the recipient of the letter. Choice b is incorrect because there is no reason to identify the person responsible for the error. Doing so would make it seem that you are trying to escape blame by putting all the fault on one individual. Choice d is incorrect because it sounds defensive. It sounds like you are making excuses for your department.
22. The answer is choice b. This question concerns the appropriate way to point out an error or omission. Choices a and d are incorrect because the word “failed” sets an unnecessarily negative tone. This word makes the message seem like a personal criticism. The same is true of the word “neglected” in choice c.
23. The answer is choice a. No employee is required to put up with obscene, abusive language. Choice b is incorrect because referring the call to your supervisor is just “passing the buck.” Like you, your supervisor is not required to listen to obscenities. Choice c is incorrect because allowing the caller to “vent” does not include allowing the caller to use obscene language. Choice d is incorrect because you should tell the caller why you are hanging up. If you don’t, the caller may think that the call was disconnected for some reason.
24. The answer is choice b. The best way to deal with a “monopolizer” is to encourage other people to contribute to the discussion. Choice a is incorrect because it does not really address the problem. Ignoring the person who is monopolizing the discussion is too passive an approach. The person might not get your unspoken message. Choice c is incorrect because adjourning the meeting would serve no purpose. Choice d is incorrect because asking someone to refrain from speaking might be seen as rude, and it would probably create an unpleasant atmosphere in the meeting.
25. The answer is choice c. The best way to decide how much information to provide in this situation is to study the letter you received. This letter will probably give you a good indication of how much the letter writer understands already and how much you need to explain. Choice a is incorrect because studying similar letters your department has sent will not help you determine how much the person you are writing to understands. The same is true for choice b. Choice d is incorrect because it may be a mistake to assume that the person you are writing to has a basic understanding of the subject. If this assumption is incorrect, the person may not understand your letter.

26. The answer is choice c. It is important in this situation to point out the inaccuracy in the other panelist's statement. Choice a is incorrect because if you don't point out the inaccuracy the audience will assume that the other panelist's statement is correct. Choice b is incorrect because it is an unnecessary personal attack that may be seen as unjustified and unfair. Choice d is incorrect because it is not necessary or appropriate to turn this situation into an emotionally charged confrontation.
27. The answer is choice a. In a public meeting it is appropriate to treat all suggestions with respect, even if they are misguided and impractical. Choice b is incorrect because it sounds too personal. Rather than responding to the suggestion itself, you are commenting on the person's lack of knowledge. Choice c is incorrect because saying that the suggestion is an excellent idea would give the audience the impression that you agree with it. Choice d is incorrect because there is no reason to start a discussion about an idea that you consider misguided and impractical.
28. The answer is choice d. In a situation like this, it is best to say that you will look into the matter and call back. Choice a is incorrect because you should not make such a definite statement if you are not sure of the facts involved. Choice b is incorrect because it shows an unwillingness to listen to and learn from criticism. Choice c is incorrect because it is unresponsive and unhelpful.
29. The answer is choice b. In a situation like this, you should make the point that the interruptions are unfair to the other members of the audience who have come to hear your presentation. Choice a sounds bad-tempered. It is also probably not true that you are attending the meeting "as a favor." Choice c is incorrect because it is the sort of threatening comment that is likely to make the situation worse. Choice d is incorrect because it might be seen as rude and it would probably not improve the situation.
30. The answer is choice b. The slides used in a presentation should be uncluttered and easy to read. Choice a is incorrect because it would be difficult for people to read a printout of your department's budget projected on a screen. It would be better to distribute paper copies of the budget. Choice c is incorrect because there is no reason to project a copy of what you are saying. Choice d is incorrect because a copy of a letter would be difficult to read. Again, it would be better to distribute paper copies.
31. The answer is choice d. It's a good idea to begin a presentation with a brief statement about its purpose. Choice a is incorrect because beginning with a joke often does not work well. Often the joke is not funny and the speaker is not good at telling jokes. Choice b is incorrect because the history of your subject is probably not the most important thing about it. People have a limited attention span, so it makes sense to start with something really important. Choice c is incorrect because a call to action belongs at the end of a presentation, not at the beginning.

32. The answer is choice a. Eye contact is an example of nonverbal communication. All of the other choices involve words.
33. The answer is choice c. Paraphrasing a question is an effective way to ask for clarification. It shows that you are making a serious effort to understand the question. Choice a is incorrect because it involves answering the question without attempting to gain a better understanding of it. Choice b is incorrect because it avoids the question altogether. Choice d, asking the person to repeat the question, is a possible way of dealing with the situation, but it is not an effective way to ask for clarification.
34. The answer is choice b. Most business letters begin with a clear statement of the purpose of the letter. The recipient should be able to tell from the first paragraph why you are writing. Choice a is incorrect because providing some background information about the subject might be helpful, but it is probably not the main purpose of your letter. Choice c is incorrect because explaining your role in state government is probably not necessary, or of interest to the person who receives your letter. Choice d is incorrect because this type of information belongs in the body of a letter, not the introduction.
35. The answer is choice c. It is essential for a speaker to have some understanding of what the audience knows already and what might need to be explained. This information will have a major effect on the content of the presentation. Choices a and d, the political affiliation of your audience and their attitude toward state government, may affect the way you introduce certain points in your speech because they may influence the audience's receptiveness to what you have to say, but they don't change the points you have to make. Choice b, the average educational level of the audience, might also have an important effect on your presentation, especially if that level is very low or very high, because certain explanations might be more or less necessary in the two cases. Choice c is a better answer, though, because it refers specifically to the audience's knowledge of your topic, as opposed to the wide variety of subjects different members of a large audience may have studied.
36. The answer is choice b. This is the question that is most likely to yield useful suggestions about improving your agency's customer service. Choice a is incorrect because it would not provide any ideas about what your agency might do differently. The same is true for choices c and d. Choice d has an additional problem. It is actually asking about two different things — courtesy and helpfulness. If people thought your representatives were courteous but not helpful, how would they answer this question?
37. The answer is choice a. Choice a deals with the visitor in the most courteous manner possible. We are not told which question is more important, the visitor's or the caller's. We also don't know if the conversation can or should be shortened, or if shortening the conversation would mean calling the person back and wasting time. Given the information we have, it's better to finish up with the caller before handling the visitor.

38. The answer is choice c. Of these choices, the most important reason to provide handouts is to give people detailed information they may not remember from the presentation. Choice a is incorrect because, while it is true that providing handouts can allow a speaker to shorten a presentation, this is not their main purpose. Choice b is incorrect because there are other, more effective ways for a presenter to remember key points. Choice d is incorrect because there is no value in making life easier for people who choose to ignore a presentation.
39. The answer is choice a. Most people find the question and answer format helpful and easy to understand. Choice b, posting the regulation, would provide no explanation. Choice c, posting a message from the commissioner, does not address the issue directly. A message from the commissioner will probably not be focused on explaining the effects of a new regulation. Choice d, posting a list of businesses affected by the regulation, is incorrect because it provides no explanation of the effects.
40. The answer is choice c. Building consensus means winning support for decisions even if they do not reflect the preferences of everyone involved. Choice a is not correct because consensus is different from majority rule. Consensus involves coming up with decisions that will be acceptable to as many people as possible. This is different from making decisions based on the will of the majority. Choice b is incorrect because delegating decisions to a subcommittee has nothing to do with consensus. Choice d is incorrect because it reflects a misunderstanding of the idea of consensus. In building consensus, a leader does not avoid issues that might lead to objections, but tries to find common ground.

Points to Keep in Mind

Making Presentations

- In preparing for a presentation, spend some time thinking about your audience. What is important to them? What questions are they likely to have? How much do you need to explain about your topic?
- Reinforce your main points with repetition and emphasis.
- In most cases it is most effective for a presenter to speak from notes rather than read from a prepared script.
- If you are presenting detailed, complex information, prepare handouts so that audience members will not have to take extensive notes.
- Treat every question with respect, even if you think it is not worthwhile.
- Don't duck a question. If you don't know the answer, say so. Offer to get back to the questioner when you have the information he or she has requested.
- Be prepared to respond to criticism. Respond in a positive, respectful way.

Leading Meetings

- When dealing with a complex, controversial topic, begin the meeting by determining whether all the parties agree on the facts involved.
- When dealing with a controversial issue, try to build consensus by emphasizing common interests and goals.
- Ask everyone to refrain from side discussions so that they can focus their attention on the meeting's agenda.
- When leading a meeting, do not allow one individual to dominate the discussion to the extent that other participants cannot express their opinions.

Responding to Requests for Information

- Do not give out information if you are not sure of its accuracy.
- If you do not have the information someone requests but you know how to get it, tell the person when you expect to have the information and offer to provide it then.
- When providing information on complex topics, summarize the main points and refer people to the source of the information.
- If you know some of the information a person has requested, tell the person what you know and offer to provide the rest of the information as soon as you have it.

Responding to Phone Calls

- When dealing with an angry caller, allow the person to vent for a brief time and then respond calmly and unemotionally.
- If an angry caller does not calm down and keeps repeating nasty remarks, say that you understand the caller is upset and try to turn the conversation to an unemotional discussion of the caller's problem.
- If an angry caller uses offensive language, say that you cannot continue the conversation if the caller continues to speak that way.

Responding to Letters

- Letters from the public can provide an agency valuable insight into how well it is meeting the public's needs.
- When responding to a letter, begin with a brief restatement of the issue or question raised in the original letter.
- When responding to a letter, use the letter you have received as a guide in determining how much you need to explain about the topic being addressed.