

Study Tips for the Municipal Clerks Certification Program

The following is a list of study tips that is intended to help you successfully prepare for taking the tests for each level of the Clerks Certification Program, which is co-sponsored by the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center (TMCEC), the Texas Municipal Courts Association (TMCA), and the Texas Court Clerks Association (TCCA). If you find other practices that helped you prepare for testing, please contact TMCEC at 800.252.3718 and we will add those to this list.

1. Relax! You can do this. After all, there are many clerks who have already passed and say that the experience has added greatly to their confidence in their abilities and to their career.
2. Be pleased and proud that you have a program that recognizes your professionalism and the complexities of your work. You now have a means of developing a career path that should make you more valuable to your city.
3. Keep a positive focus: success includes reaching retake status. This is a professional program that requires effort on your part. You already know that you deal with a set of complex, complicated laws that require much thought and analysis to administer.
4. If you are concerned about having to tell people that you did not pass the first time, avoid telling anyone that you are taking the exam. Announce your success after you pass. However, some people do better with motivational support from others. Get together with other clerks to study. This support from other clerks may help throughout your preparation. The cost of taking Level I, Level II, and the complete Level III tests is \$50 for each level. If you want to take Level II or III in parts, the cost is \$25 for each part.
5. Register within the time deadline for the test. (Registration and check must be received five days before the test date. If TMCEC does not receive this in time, you will be assessed a \$25 penalty.) This will alleviate stress and cost you less. Do not postpone the date you take the exam because you get nervous. (The money is not refundable.) Everyone has second thoughts. Just take the exam anyway, even if you haven't studied as much as you planned. If you do not pass and get into a retake situation, then you can focus your study on the areas of the test that you experienced the most difficulty.

6. Remind yourself as you study that you will reap rewards though your increased knowledge. Also, you will earn the esteem and respect of your colleagues and others in your profession. Keep this in mind when you may be tired and discouraged.
7. Cities are beginning to recognize the importance of the program and are making the certification program a requirement for performing the job. To encourage clerks to participate, some cities are giving merit raises for achieving each level of the program.
8. Study guides for Levels I and II and study questions for Level III can be purchased from TMCEC for \$25 each or downloaded from TMCEC's website for free (www.tmcec.com). The management books for Level III can be purchased or obtained through loan from TMCEC and local chapters of TCCA. If you attend a preparation course sponsored by TMCEC, TCCA, or TMCA, the cost of each preparation course is \$25 and includes the study guide for that level. Study sessions are only provided for Levels I and II.
9. Become a "smart reader." Being a "smart reader" means reading faster, improving reading comprehension, and improving reading recall. "Smart readers" read long phrases instead of words; pre-read as a filter for deeper reading; scan documents for key words; skim material for structure; and deep read for comprehension when necessary. The following are tips to help you become a "smart reader": (1) skim each topic in the study guides by reading the table of contents; (2) scan each chapter by asking yourself, "Do I already know this?"; (3) review legal terminology before reading the text of each chapter; (4) prioritize the information in each chapter into the following categories: completely understand, general knowledge, or no knowledge; (5) after prioritizing the information, generally review information that you understand, read information that you have general knowledge of for concepts, key words, and issues, and for information that you have no knowledge of, learn definitions and then break information into smaller segments and master each segment before moving on to the next.
10. Develop a study plan, breaking up your focus areas into weekly exam sessions. Take all the practice questions in the study guides and the study sessions. Do not get discouraged if you score poorly on the practice questions—remember that practice makes perfect. Retake the practice tests until you are comfortable with the knowledge and the types of questions that you will encounter on the test.

11. Reading the material and answering the questions in each guide will make a big difference in understanding the questions on the test. **Just studying the answer key in each guide and not reading the material may cause you to fail the test.** To understand principal legal concepts and procedural issues, you must read the material.
12. Review the definitions in the glossary. This will help you to understand the content of the study guides. When taking a test, if you understand the definitions and underlying principles of the area of focus, this will help you to logically figure out the answer to many of the questions.
13. Attend preparation courses provided by TMCEC, TMCA, and TCCA. They only cost \$25 a course. You can attend as many as you want and obtain credit toward your educational requirement of the certification program for each course.
14. Attend educational programs provided by TMCEC, TMCA, and TCCA. Along with the knowledge that you gain, you also receive credit toward your educational requirement of the certification program for each program attended.
15. Reserve at least three to four months prior to the exam for studying. Commit to concentrated study each day for 60 to 90 days prior to the exam. Prepare a schedule of two to three hours each study period several times a week.
16. Adults do not all learn the same way. Determine how you learn best (listening, writing, reading, note-taking, working with another clerk, or a combination of these methods) and organize your time accordingly.
17. Locate a book at your local library or college bookstore on general test taking strategies and apply them to your study and knowledge to improve your test taking abilities.
18. Locate someone else who is preparing for the exam and form a study group to keep you focused and to help you study. Many of the local chapters of the TCCA have already formed these types of study groups. They are motivational and a great support in this endeavor.
19. Find a clerk who has already passed the exam for which you are studying and ask the clerk to be your mentor. Everybody in the program is willing to help other clerks working for this professional designation.
20. Make recordings of difficult concepts and legal terminology and use your commute time to listen to them in your car.

21. Remember that “false” questions usually have words like “only,” “always,” “must,” and “never.” “True” questions usually have words like “may,” “generally,” “after,” and “could.” Look to match verb tense and singular or plurals when answering multiple-choice questions.
22. Prepare sets of flashcards with legal terminology and take them with you everywhere there might be a chance you will have a few free moments to use them.
23. For Level III, you have to write a journal of your 40 hours of court observations. The best way to practice writing is to write, write, write. Practice your punctuation and sentence structure. Use *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White and/or *The Elements of Grammar* by Margaret Shertzer for reference. After a while, it becomes second nature.
24. Be aware of details, logic, and reasoning when writing your journal. You will be graded in these areas. Practice by writing memorandums in your court that uses logic, analysis, and reasoning. Review policy and procedures manuals for the logic behind performing certain functions in your court.
25. Get plenty of rest and exercise as you study. Do not burn yourself out.
26. Do not give up. Keep a positive attitude. Stick to your goal and see yourself as successful because you will be.
27. Get a good night’s sleep before the examination, relax, and do your best! If you get discouraged, find a mentor clerk who has gone through the process successfully for encouragement and help.

If you are not successful when you take the test:

1. TMCEC will contact you individually.
2. Study again.
3. Consider taking the retest at the TMCEC office in Austin. It might reduce your test anxiety.