

PublicServicePrep Comprehensive Guide to Canadian Public Service Exams

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Essay Writing

There are several government agencies that may require you to submit an essay on a topic of their choice. You will be given a time limit (some are as little as 10 minutes) to compose your thoughts, organize a paragraph and write an essay or paragraph. If you are asked to do this, you will be marked on:

1) Organization

Your thoughts must be well organized.

2) Comprehension

You need to demonstrate that you understand your subject.

3) Grammar

Your essay must follow grammar guidelines with few or no errors.

4) Legibility

Your hand written essays must be neat and legible.

Possible Topics

Government agencies may ask you to write about anything, so there is very little you can do in terms of preparing for the content of the essay. There are, however, general topics tend to come up often.

- What challenges are government services facing in the future?
- Is diversity in the work force a good thing?
- What is the most important characteristic an employee should have?

You could be asked to answer one of these, or any another question in essay form.

Prior to Writing

Organize your thoughts in point form on a scrap of paper before you begin writing the essay.

Example: What challenges are government services facing in the future?

- Budget Cuts
- Terrorist Threats
- Racial Profiling and Race Relations
- Aging Personnel

No matter how long your list of points is, you should focus on three at most.

Structuring Your Essay

Write an essay appropriate for the time limit you are given. If the limit is 10 minutes, you will only have time to write a paragraph. If you are given thirty minutes or longer, structure your essay into multiple paragraphs. Break your paragraphs down in the following manner:

Single Paragraph

- Introductory Sentence
- Supporting Point # 1
- Supporting Point # 2
- Supporting Point # 3
- Concluding Sentence

Example:

There are many challenges facing government agencies that will require a great deal of personal commitment and dedication from all employees. Because of past instances of inappropriate spending and allegations of corruption, government employees will have to be extremely vigilant in order to perform their duties with the utmost integrity. The continual demand for services, accompanied by the public's demand for lower taxes, force government employees to do more with less. There is pressure to perform with fewer resources. Creative thinking will be required to approach problems in new ways. Demands for smaller, more accountable government agencies have led to cutbacks in the past and may do so again in the future. This creates a sense of uneasiness among workers who fear for their future employment. These are only a couple of the challenges government employees face as they attempt to perform their duties.

Multiple Paragraphs (Keep it to fewer than five paragraphs)

- Introductory Paragraph
 - Position you are taking. This can be to agree or disagree with a statement, or to support both sides.

- Briefly state arguments you will make (in one or two sentences).
- Paragraphs # 2, 3 and 4
 - State your point.
 - Provide your evidence.
 - Comment on the point.
- Concluding Paragraph
 - Restate the position you made in one or two sentences.

Example:

Government employees across Canada will face several challenges in the coming years which will require a great deal of personal sacrifice and commitment from members of the organization. These challenges range from a demand for more government accountability, to budget cuts and uncertainty about the future. In order to solve these problems, government employees will need to work more effectively and creatively.

The Gomery Inquiry raised many issues concerning the spending decisions of politicians and government employees. Several people were found to be at fault, but the problems that existed with the sponsorship programs cast a cloud of suspicion over everybody working for the government. New rules for how decisions are made and who has the authority to make spending decisions have caused confusion and a sense of mistrust among government employees. Despite the fact that most employees are honest and hardworking, many feel threatened and targeted. Their ability to perform their jobs in the most efficient and effective manner will be undermined as they question their decisions and fear unjust persecution.

Paragraph #3– Budget Cuts

Paragraph #4 – Uncertain Future

Intense scrutiny, budget cuts and uncertainty about the future are challenges that government employees will have to overcome. By hiring and keeping dedicated people, and by working with integrity in the new system, government employees will succeed in meeting these challenges.

Summary Tips

- Time yourself appropriately. Spend a couple of minutes writing your main ideas out in point form before beginning.
- Don't write too much. You are under a time limit. Make your points simple and give yourself enough time to print legibly.
- Keep your words simple. Don't use words if you don't know how to spell them or use them properly.
- If you are writing multiple paragraphs, each paragraph should contain one idea. If you are only writing one paragraph, separate your ideas by sentence.
- Don't attempt to include too much information. Keep your points clear and simple.
- **BE ORGANIZED!** Follow the formats shown above for your essays and paragraphs.