

A Test Mastery Inclusion Resource for ASWB Test-Takers: Needs Analysis and Self-Coaching Resources

RESEARCH STUDY

FifthTheory Research Report



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Research Summary: Key Findings Presented in this Report:

- In 2023, ASWB administered more than 70,000 licensing exams. There were 8,866 test-takers who were unsuccessful on a licensing exam and who then completed the FifthTheory *TestPrep Profile™* questionnaire as part of the ASWB Test Mastery Inclusion™ program.
- These test-takers that completed the FifthTheory *TestPrep Profile™* questionnaire were examined to document their test preparation and test readiness mindset.
- Around 83% of ASWB participants could use support and guidance in their test preparation and/or test readiness mindset as they prepare to retake the ASWB exams.
- Many participants tended to have a strong Test Preparation mindset (54%).
- A small percentage of ASWB participants (21%) tended to have a strong Test Readiness mindset.
- Approximately 42% of ASWB participants scored below average on both the Test Preparation and the Test Readiness Composite scores (i.e., Style 1), indicating an important opportunity to work on strengthening their Test Mastery Mindsets.
- Overall, for the ASWB test-takers, development of the Test Readiness Mindset dimensions of Confidence and Resiliency is more of a priority than development of the Test Preparation Mindset dimensions (i.e., Motivation and Responsibility).
- From a test-taker experience perspective, Test Preparation and Test Mastery overall scores were higher the more a social work program or school discussed licensing and the exam.
- Test Preparation scores were associated with the number of study methods used to prepare for the exam (i.e., study courses, practice tests, and individual study plans). That is, higher Test Preparation scores reflect higher usage of study methods.

Who is FifthTheory?

FifthTheory, LLC, is a minority owned business that is located in Chicago. FifthTheory offers educational and career assessments that are used to identify individual and group strengths and growth opportunities related to high-stakes test taking and occupational interests. We also provide online assessments and surveys to ensure that organizations and their employees engage in safe and responsible behaviors that promote a strong customer experience. FifthTheory's leading brands include Test Mastery Inclusion™, The Talent First Inventory™, and the Campbell™ Leadership Index, among others.

FifthTheory has been certified as a minority owned business by the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, one of the 24 affiliates of the National Minority Supplier Development Council. We believe that we are strengthened as a company when the unique views and perspectives of all people are brought together. FifthTheory has experts in social science research, assessment development, and coaching with advanced degrees in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. FifthTheory's assessments are developed to comply with all relevant standards developed by the American Psychological Association, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and the Association of Test Publishers, among others.

The ASWB Test Mastery Inclusion™ (TMI) Program

FifthTheory is collaborating with ASWB on our research-based Test Mastery Inclusion (TMI) program, which is designed to help test-takers be successful on high-stakes exams. This initiative benefits both test-takers preparing to retake the licensing exam and ASWB in its work to better understand the test-taking mindset and provide test-takers with evidence-based resources on their licensure journey. Beginning in January 2023, ASWB test-takers who were unsuccessful on the exam were given an opportunity to participate in the ASWB TMI program. The program includes the ASWB *TestPrep Profile*™, a validated self-discovery questionnaire. The *TestPrep Profile* is a voluntary, low-stakes assessment of test mastery.

The TMI program is a self-development program for test-takers preparing for high-stakes exams. Specifically, the program is designed to increase test-takers' awareness of their high-stakes testing mindset, in addition to providing them with self-coaching strategies and tools to help them strengthen their mindset where needed. The *TestPrep Profile* questionnaire is the foundation of the program and provides participants with a personalized report on their Test Mastery Mindset and free access to self-coaching resources. Research has demonstrated the importance of Test Mastery Mindset to the performance on high-stakes exams (Jones & Dages, 2022¹). Therefore, the questionnaire is valid and reliable, and the program has a significant impact on passing rates.

1 Jones, J.W. & Dages, K.D. (2022a). *Advances in Test Mastery Mindset™ Research*. Chicago, IL: FifthTheory.

The TMI program consists of four parts, illustrated in Figure 1. After completing the brief *TestPrep Profile* questionnaire, participants receive an email with a feedback report of their test mastery scores and interpretations. No-cost access is provided to a self-coaching guide, guided e-journal, and informational video (webinar) designed to help test-takers understand their Test Mastery competencies and select development actions.

Figure 1. Test Mastery Inclusion Program Components



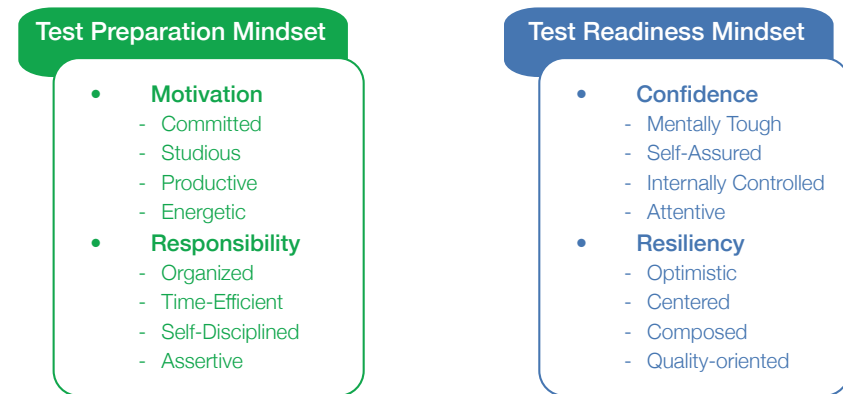
Test Mastery Mindset reflects attitudes and competencies that lead to behaviors when preparing and taking an exam. A strong Test Preparation mindset relates to being motivated and responsible when it comes to challenges of preparing for a high-stakes exam. A strong Test Readiness mindset relates to being confident and resilient when it comes to the demands of taking high-stakes exams. Most people have specific attitudes or competencies related to their mindset that need some support or improvement. A lower score on the Test Mastery Mindset is not a reflection of a person’s knowledge of the test content. Preparing for a high-stakes exam can be a stressful, time-intensive process, and most people could benefit from insight about how to strengthen or self-manage their Test Mastery Mindset.

Overview and Purpose of This Report

The purpose of this report is to share insights into the Test Preparation and Test Readiness mindsets of test-takers who were unsuccessful on the ASWB exam. In 2023, 8,866 ASWB test-takers scored below standards on the ASWB exam and then participated in the TMI program and completed the ASWB *TestPrep Profile* questionnaire. The questionnaire also asked participants questions about the methods they used to prepare and the amount their social work school discussed the licensure and exam.

This report presents tables and figures about participants’ Test Mastery Mindset dimensions and competencies. The *TestPrep Profile* yields multiple Test Mastery Mindset scores including dimensions and competencies for the Test Preparation and Test Readiness categories. Figure 2 illustrates the dimensions and competencies that are scored and displayed in the report that participants receive. Test-takers also receive an easy-to-understand report interpretation guide.

Figure 2. Test Mastery Mindset Dimensions and Competencies



The Test Mastery Mindset scores of this group of ASWB test-takers were evaluated to better understand the mindset strengths and areas of support needed for mindset development among individuals who may be preparing to retake the ASWB exam. A strong test-taking mindset for exams should ideally include traditional test preparation (e.g., extensive study and practice tests), along with mindset development (i.e., learning how to leverage strong Test Mastery competencies and self-manage weaker competencies). The participating test-takers tended to have a strong Test Preparation mindset. However, approximately 83% of the participants could use some improvement in their Test Preparation and/or Test Readiness mindset.

Assessing ASWB Test-Takers' Test Mastery Mindset

ASWB Test Mastery Mindset Styles

Based on the Test Preparation and Test Readiness scores, participants are assigned one of four Test Mastery Mindset Styles.

- 1. Style 1 – Test Prepped (Low)/ Test Ready (Low):** These test takers need to become more engaged in the test preparation process in addition to becoming more poised when taking an important test.
- 2. Style 2 – Test Prepped (Low)/ Test Ready (High):** These test takers need to become more motivated with and engaged in the test preparation process, but they do appear to be more poised when it comes to handling the demands and challenges of taking an important test.
- 3. Style 3 – Test Prepped (High)/Test Ready (Low):** These test takers are very motivated and responsible when it comes to preparing for an important exam. However, as the date for completing the test approaches and during the testing session, these test takers are more likely to struggle with their poise.
- 4. Style 4 – Test Prepped (High)/Test Ready (High):** These test takers remain fully engaged with the test preparation process and they tend to remain extremely poised when preparing for and taking an important exam.

Of the 8,866 ASWB participants who scored below standards on the ASWB exam, the percentages that fell into each of the four Test Mastery Mindset Styles are shown in Table 1. Approximately 17% of the participants were Style 4, meaning they had high scores on Test Preparation and Test Readiness mindset. On the other hand, approximately 42% were Style 1 with low scores on Test Preparation and Test Readiness. Overall, approximately 83% of the ASWB participants were low on Test Preparation and/or Test Readiness.

These results were significantly different from the general population of high-stakes test-takers norm group². The ASWB participants had a higher Test Preparation mindset than the norm group, but the Test Readiness mindset for ASWB participants was lower than the norm group. This suggests that for this group of ASWB participants, the Test Readiness dimensions of Confidence and Resiliency may need additional support and development.

Table 1. Frequencies of Test Mastery Mindset Styles for Participants that Failed ASWB Exam (N = 8,866)

| ASWB Test Mastery Mindset Styles | Test Readiness (Lower) | Test Readiness (Higher) |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Test Preparation (Lower) | Style 1 - Test Prepped (Low)/ Test Ready (Low) 41.8% (3,703) | Style 2 - Test Prepped (Low)/ Test Ready (High) 3.9% (343) |
| Test Preparation (Higher) | Style 3 - Test Prepped (High)/Test Ready (Low) 37.2% (3,294) | Style 4 - Test Prepped (High)/Test Ready (High) 17.2% (1,526) |

Note: A percentile score below 50 is categorized as low.

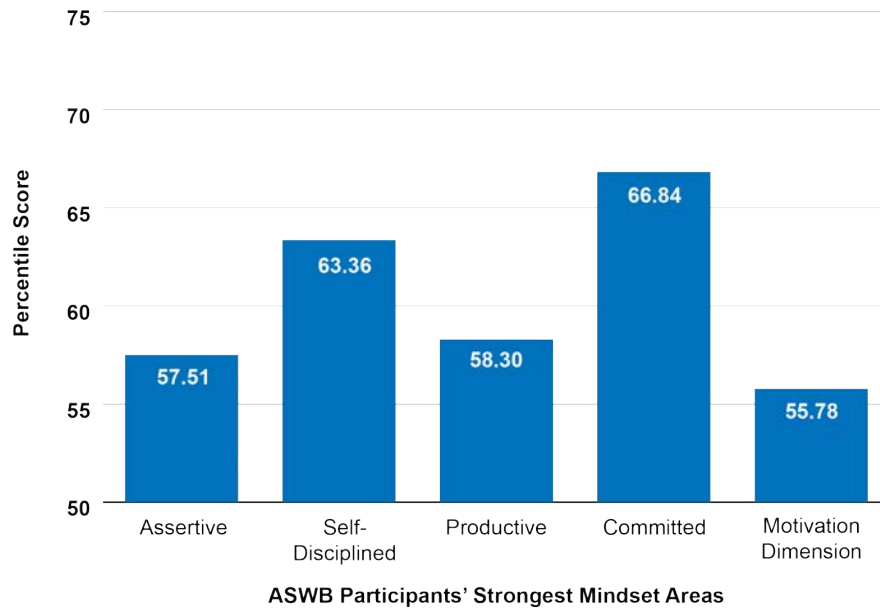
ASWB Mindset Competency and Dimension Strengths

ASWB test-takers that participated in the TMI program had many mindset strengths, especially related to Test Preparation mindset. Specifically, these test-takers had a strong Motivation to prepare for the exam by being committed and productive. They also showed strong Responsibility during exam preparation by being self-disciplined and assertive. Figure 3 has the competencies and dimensions with average scores of 55 or higher (scores are in percentiles).

Based on the *TestPrep Profile* results, the ASWB test-takers tend to be driven to do what is necessary to prepare for the test, they are productive with their study schedule and tasks. Further, they tend to be focused and maximize study time while also assertively protecting their study time from interruptions from friends and family.

² The norm group consists of individuals preparing for educational and professional high-stakes exams that completed the TMI during the design and development phase. The Educational group primarily includes students preparing for educational admissions exams and/or end-of program comprehensive exams. The Professional group consists primarily of graduates taking professional licensure exams, but also includes certification exam test takers. These diverse samples of test takers were combined and used as a comparison or reference group for others completing the TMI. Percentile scores for the TMI are based on the norm group.

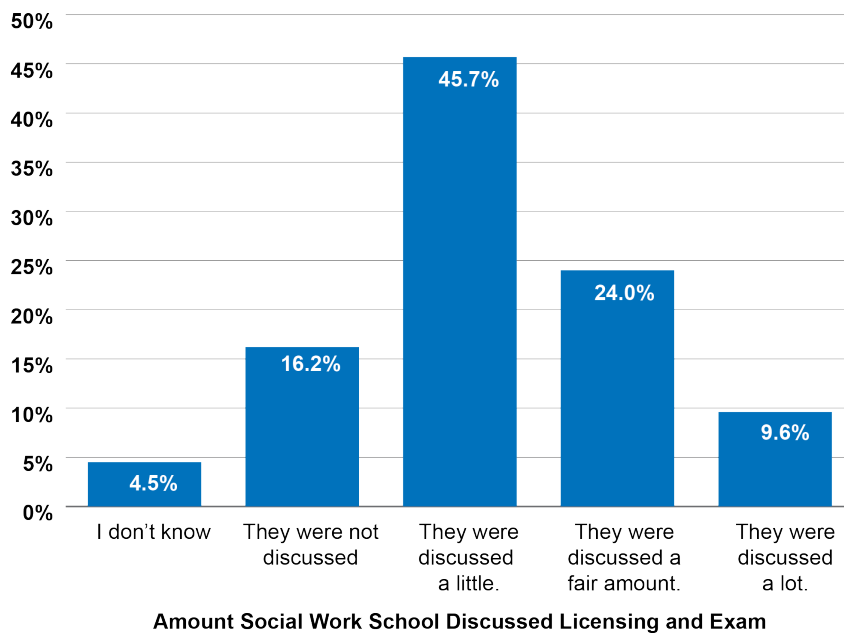
Figure 3. ASWB Participant Mean Scores of Test Taker Mindset



Amount Social Work School Discussed Licensing

Most of the respondents (62%) felt like their social work school discussed the ASWB exam and licensing only a little or not at all. Only around 34% thought their school provided a fair amount or a lot of discussion (see Figure 4).

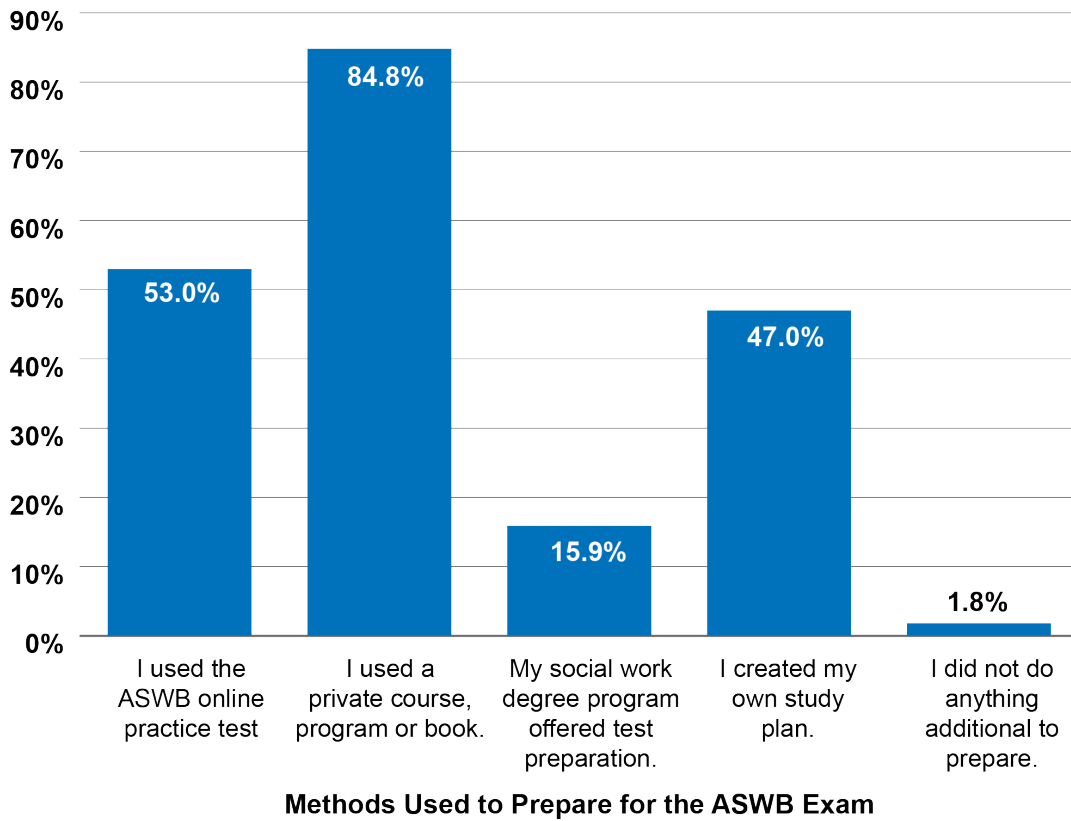
Figure 4. Amount Social Work School Discussed Licensing and Exam



Methods Used to Prepare for ASWB Exam

Test-takers tended to use more than one approach to prepare for the ASWB exam. The average respondent used about two methods to prepare for the exam. Figure 5 presents the different methods of preparation and the percentage of test-takers that used those methods. The most frequently used methods were a private course or program and the ASWB practice tests. In fact, 44% indicated that they used both of these methods. Additionally, 47% of test-takers created their own study plan. A little less than 2% indicated that they did not do anything additional to prepare. However, over half of that 2% also selected another method of preparation.

Figure 5. Methods Used to Prepare for the ASWB Exam



Mindset Differences and Test-Taker Experiences

There are many things that can affect a person's Test Mastery Mindset. These can include background, personality, previous testing experience, study habits, among others. We were able to look at some factors that may impact mindset using the ASWB testing experience questions.

Statistical comparisons revealed that Test Preparation mindset was stronger/higher:

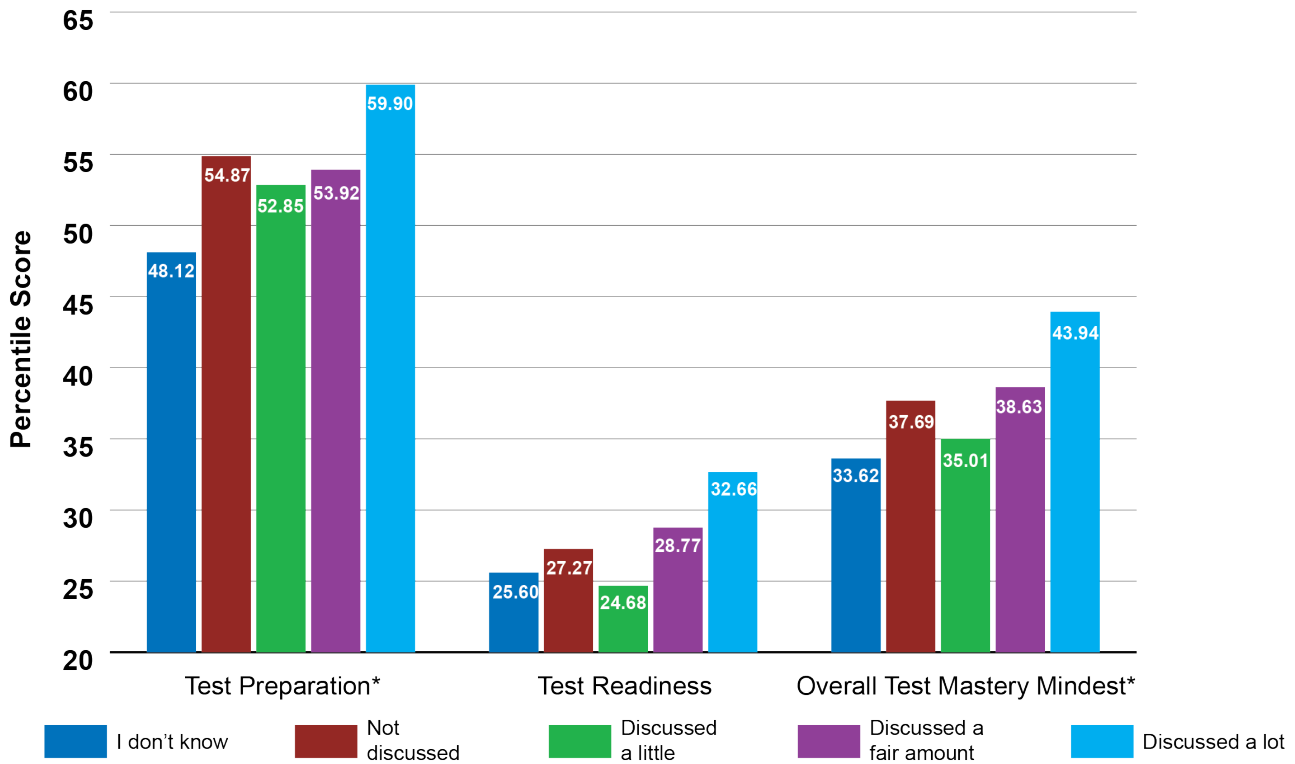
- The more the social work school talked about the licensure
- The more methods a participant used to prepare for the exam

These factors did not have the same level of impact on Test Readiness or overall Test Mastery. Those findings are detailed below.

Mindset by Amount Social Work School Discussed Exam

The more a participant's school discussed the exam and licensing, the higher their Test Mastery Mindset tended to be. Test-takers who went to a school that discussed the exam and licensing a lot had higher mindset scores than test-takers from schools that discussed it less. The mean mindset scores for Test Preparation, Test Readiness, and overall Test Mastery are provided in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Amount Candidate's Social Work School Discussed Licensing and Exam



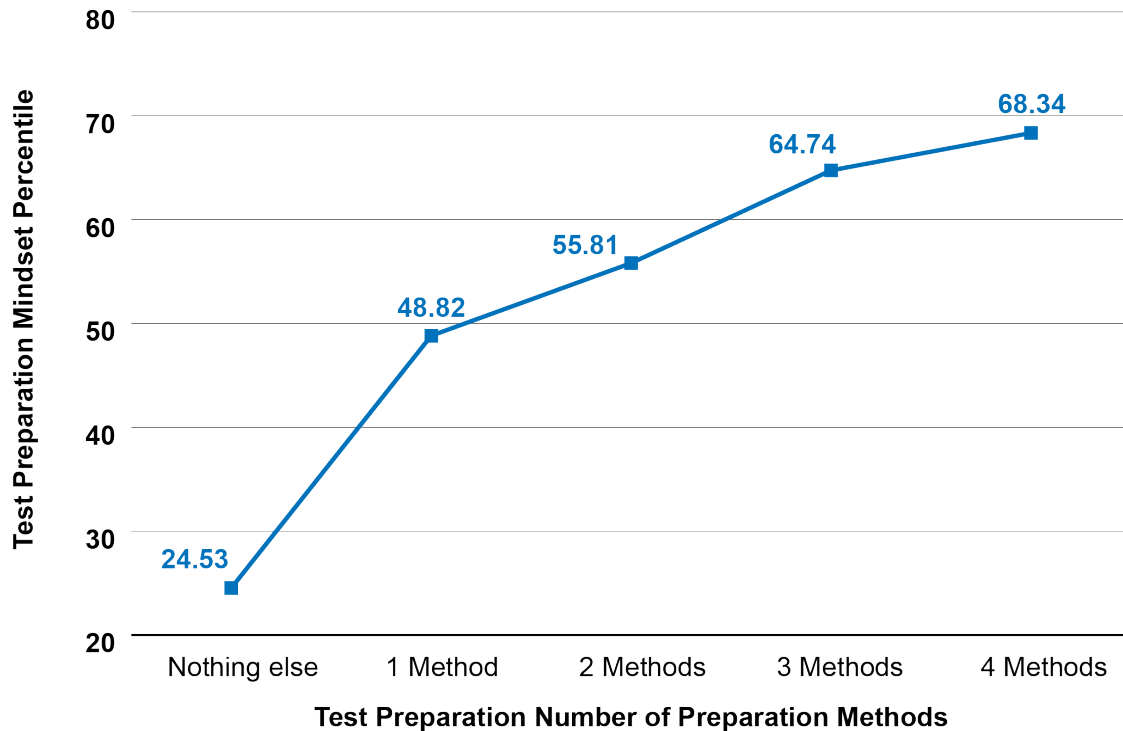
Test Mastery Scores by Amount Social Work School Discussed Licensing

* The mean scores of Test Preparation, Test Readiness, and Overall Test Mastery Mindset were statistically different ($p < .05$) based on an ANOVA statistic.

Mindset by Number of Method Used to Prepare for ASWB Exam

Test Preparation mindset increased with the more methods used to prepare for the ASWB exam. Figure 7 graphs the mean Test Preparation mindset scores by the number of methods used to prepare.

Figure 7. Test Preparation Mindset by the Number of Methods Used by Candidates to Prepare for ASWB



Overall, the Test Preparation mindset tends to be strong for these ASWB participants. However, factors such as social work schools discussing licensing and exam more and test-takers using more standard preparation methods may improve the test-taker's Test Preparation mindset. Additional focus on test-takers' Test Readiness mindset competencies is an important area for future ASWB initiatives.

Strategies to Help Address Participants' Mindset Needs

ASWB test-takers can benefit from using the TMI program to identify Test Mastery Mindset needs and develop weaker competencies by engaging in self-coaching using one or more of the coaching strategies. Test-takers that participate in the ASWB TMI program have access to self-coaching resources to help them understand and address Test Mastery Mindset needs. The resources provided to participants include broad strategies for self-coaching along with specific interventions or behaviors that a test-taker can implement to help improve a specific mindset area. Table 2 lists micro-interventions for specific Test Readiness competencies that test-takers can use to begin preparing their mindset.

At a general level, a few broad coaching strategies that can improve a test-taker's overall mindset are summarized below.

- **Increase self-awareness:** Test-takers can use the TestPrep Profile questionnaire to become self-aware of Test Mastery strengths and opportunities to improve. Test-takers will gain insight into their test-taking competencies and can learn to leverage strengths and self-manage weaknesses. It may be helpful for test-takers to write about which strengths and weaknesses were a surprise and which were expected.
- **Reaffirm self-worth:** It is important to reinforce high-stakes test-takers' self-worth. For example, before a high-stakes exam, test-takers might want to spend a few minutes writing about their interests and activities in life. This type of writing reaffirms the test-taker's positive sense of self and promotes strong feelings of self-worth. Test-taker's confidence is boosted and test taking performance increases.
- **Express any worries:** Researchers at the University of Chicago have documented experimentally that writing for 10 minutes about any worries related to taking an upcoming high-stakes exam can mitigate test anxiety. The anxieties and debilitating worries that might emerge in a high-stakes testing situation can be reduced by expressing and working through worries ahead of time using a brief self-coaching writing session.
- **Meditate away negative thinking:** Meditation training can help high-stakes test-takers to learn how to not dwell on their test-taking worries and instead discard negative thoughts. Therefore, meditators have a higher potential for harnessing their mental power and knowledge for accurately completing high-stakes exams.
- **Practice under pressure:** Peak performance researchers have documented that repeatedly testing oneself on relevant material helps high-stakes test-takers remember the material better in general. Ideally, the practice testing sessions will be timed with no study aids so that they accurately simulate the eventual exam day.
- **Reinterpret physiological reactions:** When under pressure from high-stakes testing, test-takers can learn to interpret their physiological reactions (e.g., racing heart, sweaty palms, and muscle tension) positively as opposed to negatively. That is, test-takers can learn to interpret their heightened physiological reactions as being indicative of being "enthusiastic" about the high-stakes exam as opposed to being "panicked."
- **Focus on the positive:** A key coaching intervention is learning to remain positive. Test-takers who focus on the negative run the risk of not studying as hard and failing to reach their goal of passing the exam. High-stakes test-takers need to learn to stop any negative thoughts and quickly replace them with positive thoughts. The ongoing use of positive test taking affirmations is highly relevant here.

Table 2. Mindset Interventions to Address Mindset Development Needs

| Mindset Competency | Micro-interventions |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Confidence Dimension | |
| Mentally Tough | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize positive self-talk and affirmations to reinforce ambition of being “winning” test takers. Utilize positive visualizations, viewing self performing as successful test taker. Complete many different types of practice tests under simulated test-day conditions to learn to cope with the pressure associated with high-stakes exams. |
| Self-Assured | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take many practice tests to gain confidence from seeing scores improve over time. Instead of getting discouraged or demoralized when taking high-stakes exams, view the entire test preparation and test taking process as a meaningful growth experience. Possibly utilize a tutor to learn how to best approach the most difficult questions on the test and to strengthen overall test taking confidence. |
| Attentive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice staying fully vigilant and attentive while taking practice tests since this skill will generalize to the actual test. Set aside some difficult practice questions and focus on concentration levels when completing these questions as well as getting the right answers. Learn to avoid getting distracted by surrounding sounds or distracting movements while striving to improve focus when taking practice tests. |
| Resiliency Dimension | |
| Centered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take various practice tests to also learn how to sit calmly, breathe deeply, and let go of any feelings of tension during the testing process. Practice entering a relaxed state of being very calm yet very attentive so that this state of mind can be used when taking the test. Keep any negative emotions in check when taking a high-stakes exams especially feelings of anger, frustration, and/or fear. |

Summary

ASWB test-takers who were unsuccessful on the licensing exam were given an opportunity to gain awareness of their Test Mastery Mindset by completing the *ASWB TestPrep Profile*. The responses of 8,866 test-takers were evaluated to better understand the Test Mastery Mindset of the ASWB candidates. The Test Mastery Mindset scores reviewed here are helping create a picture of ASWB candidates’ strengths and opportunities for improvement.

For this group of ASWB exam test-takers, their Test Readiness mindset while taking the ASWB exam tended to be lower than their Test Preparation mindset. Approximately 54% of the ASWB participants had a strong Test Preparation mindset. However, 83% of the ASWB participants had lower Test Preparation and/or lower Test Readiness mindsets and would benefit from receiving their personalized Test Mastery report with recommendations.

Many of the test-takers who completed the *TestPrep Profile* have used multiple methods to prepare for the exam. Test Preparation mindset was higher the more the social work school discussed the exam and the more methods used to prepare for the exam. However, these factors had less of an impact on the Test Readiness mindset of this sample of ASWB test-takers. The ASWB TMI program is a tool to help support and improve the Test Readiness mindset of ASWB test-takers that are preparing to retake the ASWB exam.



About FifthTheory, LLC

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