The State of Louisiana Literacy Test

(This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)

Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the longest word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the alphabet in this line.
6. In the space below, draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.

7. Above the letter X make a small cross.
8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S B D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

Z V B D M K T P H S Y C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L."



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

10000000000

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 29 53 47 22 37 98 26 20 25

14. Draw a line under the first letter after "h" and draw a line through the second letter after "j."

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q

15. In the space below, write the word "noise" backwards and place a dot over what would be its second letter should it have been written forward.

16. Draw a triangle with a blackened circle that overlaps only its left corner.

17. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

2 4 8 16 _____

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 _____ 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.

20. Spell backwards, forwards.

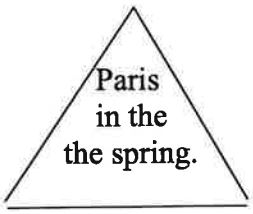
21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

22. Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in the sentence, and a circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence.

23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.

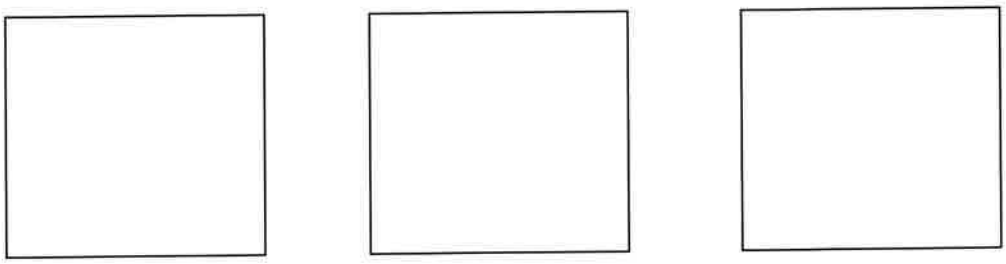
24. Print a word that looks the same whether it is printed frontwards or backwards.

25. Write down on the line provided, what you read in the triangle below:



_____

26. In the third square below, write the second letter of the fourth word.



27. Write right from the left to the right as you see it spelled here.

28. Divide a vertical line in two equal parts by bisecting it with a curved horizontal line that is only straight at its spot bisection of the vertical.

29. Write every other word in this first line and print every third word in the same line, [*original type smaller and first line ended at comma*] but capitalize the fifth word that you write.

30. Draw five circles that one common inter-locking part. [*sic*]

Source:
http://rights.teachingmatters.org/files/images/african/1965_test.html

Grading The Louisiana Literacy Test

The Louisiana Literacy Test was designed so that the test-takers would pass or fail simply at the discretion of the registrar who administered the test. The questions were so imprecisely written that the examiner could decree almost any answer correct or incorrect, at his whim. The reality was that registrants the county commissioners wanted to prevent from voting – primarily black applicants, but also certain lower-class whites in disfavor with county officials – were destined to fail the test, regardless of the answers they gave.

Black applicants could be failed for something as simple as a single spelling or punctuation error. However, many examiners chose to deceive test-takers by changing the rules or interpreting paradoxical questions in different ways.

- For example, although question 5 says to "circle" something, questions 1 and 4 say to "draw a line around" something. If the examiner insisted a circle was not a line, the applicant failed.
- Question 10 asks for something to be done to "the first word beginning with 'L'" – does it mean the first word in this sentence, or the first word on the page?
- Question 24 wants the applicant to "print a word that looks the same whether it is printed frontwards or backwards." One would assume that a word like BOB would work just fine, but if the examiner expected "backwards" to be in mirror-writing, the B's would be inverted and thus incorrect.
- The solution to question 25, in spite of the trick question in the triangle, could be that the examiner expected the word "down" to be written on the line!
- In question 27, does the examiner expect only the word *right* to be written, or does he want the word *right* plus all the words that follow it? And if the test-taker printed his answer instead of using cursive ("I said *write*, not *print*!"), he would fail.

Another factor in passing or failing the test was the time requirement – registrants had to respond to 30 complicated questions in 10 minutes, a time frame which could easily be waived for white voters.

There were limitless ways to fail this test, and the registrar, with the blessings of a white-controlled county government, exercised complete power over the success or failure of every applicant.