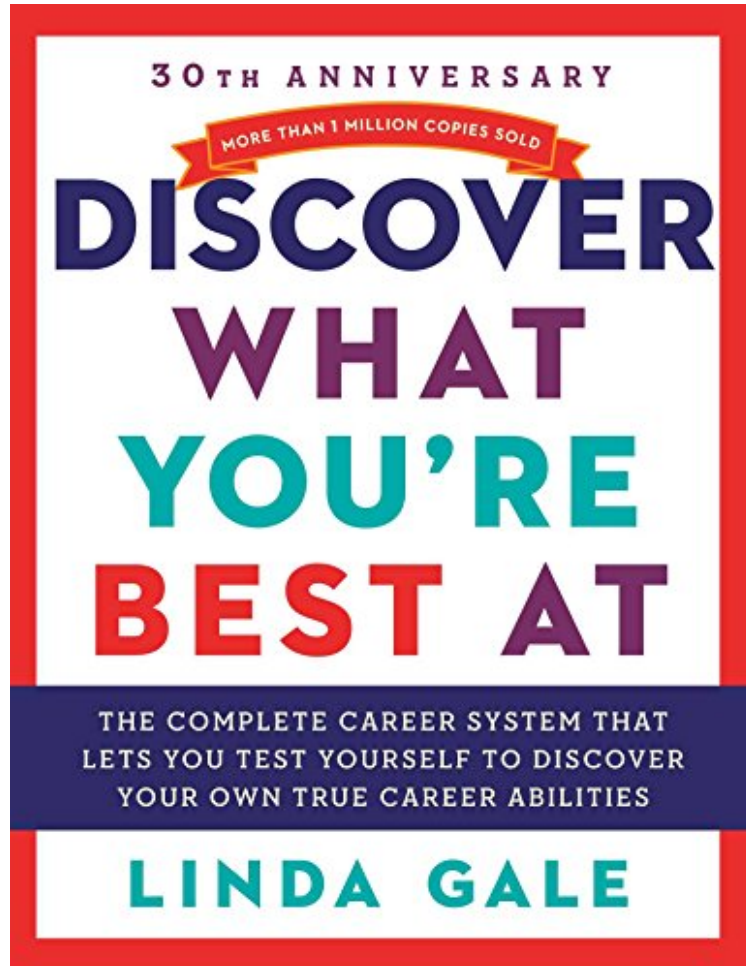


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Discover What You're Best At: Revised for the 21St Century

Linda Gale

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The bestselling career guide that has helped more than half a million people discover their true talents and make successful career choices, now completely revised for the digital age.Learn how to identify your talents and harness your potential skills and start making money doing what you love. Now revised for the digital age, Lina Galersquo;s

bestselling *Discover What You're Best At* will teach you how to set realistic and rewarding goals, save money, and learn about new areas of the job market where you could begin a fulfilling career. Complete with job listings and comprehensive tests to help you evaluate your talents and aptitude, *Discover What You're Best At* is the only career guide you'll ever need.

"In today's job market it is more important than ever for you to develop a focus, but it can be hard to know where to start. *Discover What You're Best At* guides you to work on your own to learn more about yourself and your abilities, and then discover possible career paths. An investment of time in the National Career Aptitude System is likely to reap the benefits of a more targeted (and therefore less frustrating) job search and a more fulfilling career." (Rebecca McMillan Sparrow, Executive Director, Cornell Career Services) "Job seekers are faced with the seemingly daunting task of assessing and marketing the skills they bring to the employment table. *Discover What You're Best At* provides a way to understand and better communicate one's aptitudes within a career context. This resource is also ideal for counselors and coaches who are searching for tools to assist their clients with the career exploration process." (Mike Schaub, Ph.D., Executive Director, Cawley Career Education Center, Georgetown University) "As a teacher, my students responded with enthusiasm to *Discover What You're Best At*. The book clearly defined their skill sets. Parents will find this an effective way to invest in their children's education." (Andrea Jimenez, *Jobs for Arizona Graduates*)

About the Author Linda Gale is the bestselling author and coauthor of three career books. She has twenty-three years of experience as a professional "door-opener," initiating and developing strategic business partnerships. Linda lives in New York City.

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Chapter 1 THE NATIONAL CAREER APTITUDE SYSTEM WHY THE NCAS IS FOR YOU

We know you're reading this book because you're concerned about your future: you want to find the right job, and you know that it must happen by careful choice, not by haphazard chance. Perhaps you're recently completed your formal education and now are seeking your first or second job. All too often we find that young adults make these initial selections on a wing and a prayer and with little understanding of their potential. Well, this book will remedy that. Perhaps you're reentering the work force after several years as a homemaker. You need to translate your worthy experiences into salable skills needed in today's marketplace. Knowledge of your strengths and capabilities will direct you toward a career that is right for you. Perhaps you're contemplating a job change because your current position inhibits your personal growth, limits your ability to do your best, or does not provide sufficient recognition or rewards. Perhaps you're one of the five out of six who finds yourself in your job by accident. That's right, not by thorough career planning but by accident. You somehow stumbled into it. And now you know you're in the wrong job. Whatever your present situation, you know that the decision you're about to make is too important to leave to luck, a whim, or what your best friend thinks you should do. You'll find a professional system in this book that really works; one that will give you a new, decisive, and exciting way to clearly view yourself, to determine your career strengths and to set appropriate goals. You'll have a much better sense of which job options are available to you and which careers are apt to be the most satisfying and rewarding. After using our system you will be well on the way to making one of the best decisions of your life -- choosing the career that is most likely to guarantee your success. We want to help you select a career rather than settle for one.

YOUR VALUE SYSTEM DETERMINES YOUR JOB SATISFACTION

To help you identify what is currently important to you, here's a list of commonly held job-related values. As you look them over, you'll discover that you instinctively feel some are more important than others for your overall job satisfaction.

- Accumulating large amounts of money
- Being in an environment that involves frequent change
- Being involved in work that contributes to the advancement of moral standards I feel are important
- Belonging to an organization or group
- Creatively coming up with new ideas
- Having day-to-day contact with the public
- Having the independence to decide for myself what needs to be done
- Helping other people directly
- Performing a job that requires physical strength and stamina
- Performing similar tasks each day
- Receiving considerable recognition for my work
- Setting my own time schedule
- Taking extended vacations
- Taking risks as part of my work
- Traveling much of my working time
- Working as a member of a team
- Working primarily by myself
- Working primarily for myself
- Working where I can pursue the leisure activities I enjoy most
- Working where my abilities are pitted against those of others
- Working where there is an adequate salary and considerable security
- Working with definite deadlines

Whatever career satisfaction means to you, the National Career Aptitude System (NCAS) is designed to help you find success by putting you on the right job track. Think of this book as a unique career system, one that will help you *Discover What You're Best At*.

DO NEW TECHNOLOGIES CREATE NEW JOBS?

Neuropharmacologist, Biomedical-Engineering Technician, Laser-Beam Color-Scanner, Cardiovascular Perfusionist, Electro-Optics Physicist. These job titles describe occupations that have emerged or may emerge as a result of changing technologies. Will many of us engage in new occupations in the near future, or is the change more subtle than that? The introduction of a new technology is often accompanied by predictions of major changes in the workplace. In the past decade microcomputers were said to herald a new occupation: word processor. Yet as it turned out, word-processing software became a new tool for secretaries and other professionals. Lasers were expected to create a multitude of laser-technician jobs, but for the most part they simply became tools for welders, surgeons, and others. Certainly some new occupations have arisen, but more often

than not new technologies result in new tools for existing jobs. Virtually every occupation is changing, and what is critical is the adaptation to new skill requirements among all workers. Looking back over the past eight years since *Discover What You're Best At* was first published, most workers have seen changes in their jobs that resulted from technology. For example, the job of researcher has changed from processing scant data in a cumbersome way -- punch cards and mainframes -- to processing reams of data with nearly immediate turnaround on a microcomputer. The task is no longer finding a little information on a subject; it is sifting through too much information to pull out what is pertinent. Other people have seen the impact of new technology on managing retail inventory, diagnosing malfunctions in an auto engine, and improving methods of quality control, to name just a few examples. Although we can see technology's impact upon our work, our job title remains the same. The primary lesson is that the work of the future will involve the continued acquisition of new skills. The question is what types of skills will these be? Let's briefly look at the nature of skills needed in the emerging economy. Academic or technical skills immediately come to mind. While it is true that economists, engineers, physicians, and astronomers need much specialized training, basic literacy and numerical facility are now needed almost everywhere. Yet academic skills are only some of the skills needed. Personal-management skills are also vital today. Tardiness, absenteeism, or lack of basic grooming are handicaps in any job. Freedom from substance abuse, as well as personal integrity and honesty, are rated as critical qualifications by nearly all employers. In many companies and organizations, retrenching has eliminated many layers of supervision and raised the value of personal initiative, responsibility, and creativity. The self-starter within an organization is desired more than ever before. But we do not work alone. Teamwork skills, such as high levels of communication, coordination, and cooperation, are vital. Think about it, and you'll most likely agree: Recent high school and college graduates are least prepared in this area. The academic world is geared to reward individual performance, so it's no wonder many students find it hard to make the transition to a workplace that emphasizes teamwork. The latter is basic street smarts unfortunately not taught in high schools or on college campuses. Still, young people have to learn how to work in groups and to develop skills that involve sharing responsibilities and respecting the knowledge of others, as well as utilizing that knowledge to grow. Whether at home or at school, only the lucky few who have experienced what it takes to be a team player have the savvy to get the jobs for which they feel qualified. At work today you are graded in large part on your team's success. And you may know each other only by phone, fax, or Internet address.

THE SHIFTING WORKPLACE It appears that one of the biggest changes taking place in the workplace is the manner in which people perceive their careers. For instance, many seem to be more interested in working on a precise project rather than in a distinct company. Achieving more skills, these same people are moving on to the next project rather than clawing their way up the corporate ladder. More and more corporations are looking at new ways to begin rewarding employees for how well they do their jobs and for their skills and their abilities to perform as members of a broader team. As for the downsizing you're seeing now at corporations, that's primarily caused by the elimination of people in the middle who move information. Those who produce data and those who analyze it will be directly connected to the intranets already being used by thousands of companies. In my research, I have also discovered that with the Internet as the next site of explosive employment growth, people are learning fast that they network more productively on-line and that on-line discussions result in better business decisions. Planning meetings are ideally suited to cyberspace, where you can work together interactively over time, exchanging product information and brainstorming strategies. This can even be done anonymously -- which often results in better, more honest feedback. At the same time the concept of micromarketing is evolving, and large companies as well as media and marketing players are putting a lot of money into it. And while the 'Net remains a very fragmented, specialization-centric market, it ultimately gives the private entrepreneur a huge competitive opportunity to compete with major corporations and win. As for those of you not college-bound in today's world, it isn't the end of the world, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, it's true that, on average, workers with college degrees earn more than those without such degrees. But it's possible to do fine without one. Registered nurses, sales representatives for manufacturers and wholesalers, detectives, factory supervisors, technicians, and carpenters are just a few of the many careers open for you to investigate. Careers whose rewards can include interesting work, much responsibility, and chances for advancement. To be sure, an increasing number of jobs for high school graduates like yourselves demand good math and reading skills and the aptitude to learn on the job. So perhaps you weren't brilliant in school, but you possess nonacademic skills instead, skills that can help you win in the job marketplace. For example, ask yourself: Do you have sales or athletic ability, an instinctive grasp of mechanics, fluency in a second language, or a talent for dealing with people? Last, there are two fields that may be worth your investigating: secretarial work and factory machine operation. Both areas appear to have plenty of openings, especially executive assistant positions that take on substantial management responsibility. And though demand may be declining in old-line industries, many manufacturers making high-tech products such as computer components are weeping for machine operators. Without a doubt, the role of women will change even more. There is general agreement that women are very good at networking and reaching out to others -- a fine fit in a large-scale information world, where organizations tend to be horizontal. And for those of you who want to spend more time with your children, technology today permits that. However, don't be too shocked to learn you could be expected to work harder at home than at the office. The word is -- employers may

be more likely to expect more for that special privilege.

APTITUDES VS. INTERESTS

The NCAS is a complete program for evaluating your job potential and for using that evaluation to point yourself toward the career in which you will be most likely to succeed. Now, of course there are plenty of books and tests geared toward career planning. Some probe your personality; others evaluate your general intelligence; still others examine your attitudes and values; some survey your interests. A confusing array, to be sure. When we first mention career tests at our seminars, we usually hear, "A career test? Oh, I took one of those and it told me to be a forest ranger because I like to work outdoors," or "That sounds like the one I took years ago. It told me to be a psychiatrist because I liked to work with people." It's possible that you have had a similar experience. Well, what you most likely had was a career-interest inventory and not a career-aptitude test. They are commonly confused. The NCAS measures your aptitudes -- what you are capable of doing now and what you will be able to do in the future if given the opportunity to learn. It is very different from an interest inventory, which samples what you think you might like to do. An interest inventory tends to deal only with the present, too -- what you think you might enjoy now -- and it can't possibly predict whether your interests will stay the same or change as your life experience broadens. So don't choose your career just on the basis of your present interests; they will most likely change. Another weakness of interest inventories is that they're very subjective, based upon your own image of yourself. This self-perception is often inaccurate and will tend to limit your knowledge of yourself to only those characteristics you want to discover and perceive. But most important, we think, is the fact that interest inventories don't assess your actual ability to learn or perform certain tasks. Unfortunately your interest in a subject doesn't necessarily indicate that you could have a successful career in it. The mere fact that you are interested in something doesn't mean that you will be good at it, much less successful. Now, our aptitude-testing system not only evaluates how much knowledge you have and the present status of your abilities, it also predicts the career areas in which you are most likely to develop and succeed in the future. And while no aptitude test can tell you what you must be, we believe that if you know what your strengths are, you can find advantageous ways to use them; and when you understand your weaknesses you can avoid being trapped by them. Decisions based on this awareness will help you go beyond your present horizon; choices derived from self-understanding will help you realize more nearly your full potential. Ross, a high school senior who was taking this test when we met him, is a good case in point. During a break in the testing session he approached us to talk about his desire to be a mechanical engineer. As we chatted, it was obvious that he had a pretty good idea of what mechanical engineers do, and he sounded really confident about his ability to handle the courses leading to an engineering degree. We were impressed. But were we in for a surprise! Of the forty-three mechanically oriented questions, Ross answered only four correctly. He ranked near the bottom of the national norm. Another poor showing in the numerical section resulted in a similar low ranking. Obviously these were not the results you'd expect of a future mechanical engineer. Later a conversation with his father, a mechanical engineer, revealed that he had expected his son to be a "chip off the old block" and for years had let his wishes be known. Ross, wanting to please his father, verbalized his father's wishful thinking as if it were his own. After seeing the results of the test and engaging in some further counseling, Ross decided to switch to business, for which his aptitudes were much stronger. We saw him recently, and he is doing well in his studies. But you can see how Ross might not have fared so well if he had simply followed his expressed interests in selecting a college major. Of course in planning your career you should consider your personality traits, attitudes, interests, and so on. But the most crucial area is still that of your aptitudes. You'll have to discover what you're best at before you can proceed, and that is what this book is going to help you to do.

HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT?*

- * Save time: You can save precious years, in fact, if you use this system to determine your aptitudes before you choose your college program or seek employment by trial and error.
- * Save money: You may save thousands of dollars by using the NCAS to guide you in selecting the right college or technical-school program. And for the price of this book you will have information otherwise not available to you without an expensive evaluation at a career-testing center and hours of counseling.
- * Understand your strengths: The NCAS will help you identify and measure your career potential objectively and will show you the areas in which your abilities can best be developed. It will help you discover your capacity for learning new skills and help you realize what you are capable of achieving.
- * And your weaknesses: You will understand your weaknesses so that you will not fall victim to them.
- * Gain encouragement: The NCAS can supply you with information that may encourage you to change your job and pursue a career in a different direction from the one you now follow, or it may suggest that you continue with your current pursuits. A high-school secretary who took our test says, "My test just affirmed what I felt my directions were going to be. I have thought for a long time I would do well as a guidance counselor. By having something valid saying I am good in what I feel I want, I now have the courage to go ahead in what I want to do. I'm so glad I took this test. I feel very good about the results." She went on to take night courses at a local college to complete her degree as a counselor.
- * Be able to set appropriate goals: Preparing for your future means setting appropriate career goals. While it may be true that you want to "do your own thing," you should first find out what your own thing is. An employment agency counselor from White Plains, New York, Dianne Kleinmann asked that her son Paul be tested in his last year of high school. Paul, a bright young man, didn't have any career direction at that time. His testing results indicated considerable strength in business. Several months later we received this note from Ms. Kleinmann: "Your test, and its results and suggestions probably did more to give Paul a

career direction than any other influence! Can't wait for my next child to be tested." By the way, we recently learned that Paul was an honor student at Northeastern University School of Business Administration and now is an executive salesperson at IBM.* Be guided in selecting a career: Once you know your aptitudes, the Career Clusters will provide you with a realistic base from which you can make an intelligent choice of careers or course of study. A clinical counselor, Carla Adams, from Michigan, writes, "I am much impressed with your test and the system you have developed. Your aptitude approach in assessing career goals and potential is certainly effective. I see many who have grandiose notions of what their career should be, but have no special driving force other than that they heard a certain career was currently providing wellpaying employment. Your testing system could alleviate a lot of future disappointment, open new areas of thought, and help me to do my job better."* Be opened to new areas: The Career Clusters and the Career Directory will suggest many opportunities you may not have known exist or have realized are within your reach.

HOW DOES IT WORK?The NCAS is based on a professionally devised battery of self-administered and self-scored career-aptitude tests that has been in use for the past twenty years. The tests measure your strengths and indicate your weaknesses in the areas of understanding business situations, clerical speed and accuracy, logical reasoning, mechanical reasoning, numerical concepts, and understanding personal and social situations. After taking the tests you will score yourself, then use our charts on pages 82-85 to condense what you have learned about yourself into your own Career Cluster (more about Career Clusters on page 81). Once you know your Cluster, you will be able to go through the lists of careers for which your aptitudes are most suited and choose from among those that are most appropriate for your ambition and level, or prospective level, of education.

Now, before we go on, a few words about tests. We know how much anxiety even the word test can produce. You may have had negative experiences with tests up to this point and possibly scored low as a result. We hope you'll regard this test as simply an effective device to learn about yourself by gathering, evaluating, and measuring a relatively large amount of information in a rather short period of time. These measurements, when compared with the results of the thousands of others who have taken the test, will give you a benchmark for comparison and help determine your relative strengths and weaknesses. The NCAS is structured to measure your career potentials. It will provide you with a maximum of information about your abilities with an absolute minimum of stress. Sure, it is a test; but you're doing this for yourself, and you can choose the time and place to take the test -- whatever is comfortable for you.

A FEW WORDS OF CAUTIONThe NCAS is a pretty comprehensive program, but naturally it's not going to do everything for you. It won't tell you how to prepare your resume or what to wear to an interview, nor does it discuss the myths surrounding the job-hunting process. There are plenty of good books available on those subjects. The NCAS is also not designed to put you in touch with your feelings, nor to help you delve into your past experiences. Obviously no test -- not an I.Q., aptitude, interest, achievement, or special-abilities test -- should be rigidly interpreted and taken as the unqualified solution. Tests are tools and not end-alls. The NCAS is not an infallible predictor, nor can it promise a solution to all career problems. Its prime function is to provide an invaluable tool for discovering what you're best at and in what areas you will likely continue to do well. The NCAS does that very effectively.

But no matter how high your test scores, success in your career will also depend upon your drive, personality, ability to make contacts, motivation, and education. The NCAS is a fundamental program for heading you in the right direction, but you'll have to take it from there. For example, Barbara, a recent widow who took the test, did well on several segments but scored at a truly superior level in the numerical section. Did that mean she could run out and immediately become a statistician or astronomer? Not likely. In her case she needed to overcome some personal hardships having to do with the death of her husband and to further her education before she would be able to find the job best suited to her abilities. But she knew, after taking the tests, what her focus should be.

By the same token, aptitude tests do not tell you that if your scores are low in certain areas, it will be impossible to achieve success if you decide on an occupation requiring those skills. But the costs to you in terms of time and stress will likely be much greater, and you may not achieve the success you could have had if you had focused on your strengths.

The battery of aptitude tests in this book, when used in conjunction with the Career Clusters and the extensive Career Directory, will provide you with the most important information you'll need to plan for the right career.

TIPS FOR BECOMING A SKILLFUL TEST TAKERRelax. Remember, this is something you are doing for yourself. This is a positive step in selecting a career, and it is designed to help you, not to cause you an undue amount of anxiety. Don't jam the test into your busy schedule, taking it on your lunch break or while you wait in the doctor's office. Set aside two and a half hours, preferably on a nonbusiness day and at the time of day you usually feel most alert.

As you prepare to take the test, follow these suggestions to avoid irritating distractions and delays:

- * Have on hand a few sharpened pencils, erasers, and plenty of scratch paper for figuring problems.
- * Make sure you have a wristwatch or stopwatch handy to time yourself during the six sections of the test.
- * Ask members of your household to refrain from unnecessary noise while you take the test.
- * Take the telephone receiver off the hook.
- * Sit facing a blank wall, not a window; it's usually less distracting.

ABOUT THE TEST ITSELF* Time limits: We have often been asked, "Why are the tests timed? Isn't it what I can do, rather than how long it takes me?" Of course it is important to identify your strengths and weaknesses. But it is equally important for you to be conscious of how your results compare with those of others. For this reason we have set a time limit on each test to provide a standard for comparison. If you take an hour instead of ten minutes to solve certain problems,

then you may have more correct answers but you won't derive a realistic assessment of your abilities. And in almost all work situations you won't have an hour to solve a ten-minute problem. So be aware of the time as you work, but don't go too fast. Speeding through the questions can cause you to make too many careless mistakes. You probably won't finish all the questions on each of the six tests within the time limit. Don't worry about it. Some test takers will finish some sections, and a few will finish all of them, but don't panic if you don't get through all the questions before the time has expired. You are taking the test to determine what your strengths are, and you certainly aren't expected to excel in every area!*

Take the whole test: The NCAS test comes in six parts, and you should do all six sections. You should work on each test for the full time allotted before moving on to the next. Even if one of the six sections seems difficult, stay with it for the full time allowed and just do your best. Even though you may think you don't need certain aptitudes for the careers you have in mind, it's essential that you learn your weaknesses as well as your strengths so that you will end up with the correct Career Cluster. So do take the whole test. You just might be pleasantly surprised with the results!*

To guess or not to guess: The tests are all multiple-choice -- often called "multiple-guess" by people who take tests frequently. Therefore to guess or not to guess can be a pretty important decision. Here is the best procedure. If you read a question and haven't the faintest idea what the correct answer might be, please do not close your eyes and choose blindly. Just skip that question and come back to it if you have time. On the other hand, sometimes you will understand the question but be uncertain about the answer. Survey the four possible answers and see if you can eliminate two of them. If you can, then select one of the two remaining answers even if you just close your eyes and choose. This process of selective guessing will give a more accurate picture of your aptitudes. When you get to the scoring section of the book, you will find a Score Correction Table, in which your scores will be adjusted to allow for guessing. The Score Correction Factor does not penalize you if you have guessed prudently, as we have suggested. But if you have guessed wildly, you will lose several extra points, so we urge you to leave blank any questions for which you have absolutely no idea what the correct answer is. Often you will find that incorrect answers will have some elements of truth in them but are not correct in all respects. Here's an example: Which of the following is farthest west? a) Boston, MA b) Atlanta, GA c) Topeka, KS d) Denver, AZ The correct answer is c. Although Denver, Colorado is farther west, d is not correct because Denver is not in Arizona. The correct answer must be totally correct; it may not have any incorrect segments. Also, in multiple-choice questions you are to choose the best response from the four that are given. At times you might feel that if you could make up a fifth answer, it would be a better choice than any of those presented. This may be true. However, your task is to select the answer that is best from those given.*

Don't make it more difficult: You will avoid unnecessary errors if you read the questions carefully so that you understand all the information given. Then you can determine precisely what is asked for. If you are reasonably sure you have found the correct answer fairly quickly, don't dig deeper and deeper into a problem looking for meanings that were probably never intended. This may lead to answers never intended. Of course, you should examine each question thoroughly, but don't make it harder than it is.*

Now, relax: If you are one of those people who gets the test jitters, then breathe deeply before you begin. Keep calm. Some people find it relieves tension to stretch as much as they can, tense the muscles in their arms and legs, then suddenly relax them. A little nervousness is natural, and it may even be helpful -- in keeping you alert and on the ball.*

Use the special answer sheets: These are provided on pages 169-170. You can remove them from the book by cutting along the dotted lines. Here's a brief checklist on test taking for your review before starting the test:*

- * Choose a time and place that are best for you.*
- * Avoid distractions.*
- * Watch time limits, but don't panic over them.*
- * Take the whole test.*
- * Guess, if you can eliminate two choices.*
- * Don't overanalyze any question.*
- * The correct answer must be totally correct; it may not have incorrect segments.*
- * Relax -- you're doing this for you.*
- * Use the answer sheets provided.

We urge you to use the NCAS as we have suggested. Of course you are free to take the tests however you wish, but if you do not adhere closely to the testing and scoring instructions, then your results may not reflect your true potentials. Good luck! 1982, 1990 by Barry Gale and Linda A. Gale. Copyright copy; 1998 by Linda A. Gale