



# **CITY OF PITTSBURGH**

**DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL  
AND  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

**POLICE OFFICER RECRUIT  
ORAL EXAMINATION**

**CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE**

**2012-2013**

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## GENERAL TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

To do your best on the Oral Examination, here are some general test-taking strategies you should remember:

- Arrive early on the day of the examination. You may need extra time to locate the building or to offset delays due to traffic, parking or weather. It is important to arrive on time.
  
- Be rested. Try to get a good night's rest before taking the examination. Experts agree a good night's sleep is the most sensible preparation anyone can make before an examination. Fatigue is recognized as one of the most serious deterrents to success.
  
- Read the instructions given to you when you check-in at the Oral Examination. Make certain you know how much time you have to complete each exercise.
  
- Reach each exercise carefully. Be sure you understand what you are being asked to do.
  
- If you have any questions regarding the examination be sure to ask an administrator.

## INTRODUCTION

This Candidate Preparation Guide has been distributed to help you prepare for the City of Pittsburgh Police Officer's Oral Board Examination process. We are providing this information in recognition of the fact that a considerable amount of the anxiety associated with participation in examinations is related to the novelty of the procedures that candidates encounter. This Guide covers the Oral Board Test.

The Oral Board is an oral test designed to assess candidates' verbal abilities. Candidates will be presented with several situations and asked to respond to a series of questions related to each of those situations. In addition to verbal abilities, the Oral Board also is designed to assess the cognitive ability of reasoning.

From the information presented in this guide, you should be able to get a good feel for the testing situations, the types of questions you will encounter, and a systematic method of study and preparation for your use in preparing for the oral board.

**You are encouraged to review this Guide as many times as necessary to become comfortable with the information and test-taking strategies presented.**

The Oral Board will be administered during the second phase of testing. The guide is divided into two major sections as follows:

**Section I:**                    **General Description:** This section provides an overview of the Oral Board Test including an explanation of the ability areas that are to be assessed in the Oral Board as well as a sample question.

**Section II:**                   **Preparation Strategies:** This section provides tips and strategies for preparing for the Oral Board Test. The strategies are based on the procedures that will be used to evaluate candidates' performance in the Oral Board Test.

**Note: Any times mentioned in this preparation guide are approximate and are not to be taken as definitive and final.**

# ORAL BOARD TEST

## SECTION I: GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ORAL BOARD TEST

You will be presented with written descriptions of problem situations. These situations will be designed to allow for the assessment of a series of abilities identified, through the job analysis, as critical to job performance. These situations will NOT require technical knowledge of police work, since the technical aspects of the job are learned in training. Because the Oral Board will be administered over several weeks, alternate forms of the exercise will be used. While every form of each exercise will involve the same type of problem, the specific details of the problem will vary.

### **Overview of Administrative Logistics**

You will be given some time to review the information provided to you about the Oral Board problems and a set amount of time to respond to each situation. Although you will not be required to use the full time allotted to respond to each situation, you will not be allowed to exceed this time limit.

**Preparation:** You will prepare for the Oral Board exercises in a special preparation area where you will NOT be observed by the raters. You will be permitted to take notes on the test materials or extra paper provided during this preparation period.

**Participation:** You will be permitted to use any notes you generate during the preparation period while participating in the actual exercises. You will also be permitted to take notes while participating in each exercise, if you so desire. You should be aware, however, that any notes prepared or used during the oral exercises will NOT be considered by the raters when making evaluations. In fact, such notes will be collected and destroyed following your participation to ensure they cannot be made available to any other candidates who have not yet participated in the Oral Board Test. The raters will judge you only on your oral response.

During the Oral Board exercises, the Oral Board raters will provide instructions and answer any procedural questions that may arise before each exercise begins. You will be given cues indicating when each Oral Board exercise is to begin and end, but it will be your responsibility to work within the specified time frame. Therefore, we recommend that you wear a watch to keep track of time. Participation in the situations will be back-to-back and take approximately 21 minutes.

**Raters:** A board of raters will observe and evaluate your performance with respect to the series of abilities identified through the job analysis as critical to effective police officer performance. These raters will participate in a day-long training session tailored to the City of Pittsburgh Police Officer Oral Board Test. During this training session, each rater will be trained to observe, record and evaluate your behavior and will be advised how to avoid making evaluation errors.

**Procedure:** While each exercise (see example on the following page) proceeds, the raters will be observing and recording your behavior. After the raters have had a chance to observe, they will evaluate your effectiveness with regard to each of the performance dimensions. These evaluations will be made using a 5-point scale where 5 is high and 1 is low. The result is that each rater will independently generate a set of dimension ratings. The ratings of the individual raters will be combined to obtain your overall Oral Board score.

## EXAMPLE ORAL BOARD PROBLEM

The following example is presented for illustrative purposes and will not actually be used. This example is closely representative of the kinds of problems that you will receive during the Oral Board Test.

During the Oral Board Test, you will be provided with a list of regulations only some of which will apply to the situation presented. You will need to apply these regulations to the situations presented to identify the problem(s) in the information presented. For this example, only two sample regulations have been presented and both apply to the example. Keep in mind that, during the actual Oral Board Test, many regulations will be presented but only some of them will apply to the problem.

### **Sample Regulations:**

- **Political Activity** - A uniformed police officer shall not support or oppose any political candidate in public.
  
- **Gambling** - No police officer shall participate in any illegal gambling or any gambling while on duty.

### **Example:**

You are a new police officer and have been on the job now for approximately 6 months. Today, you received an assignment to work a driver's license checkpoint with another police officer. The other police officer is Officer Chris Mathews who has been on the job for approximately four years now. You and Officer Mathews stop the first vehicle which approaches your checkpoint. The motorist provides a driver's license but was unable to provide proof of insurance. While speaking with the motorist, you notice that he is wearing a pin supporting a political candidate by the name of Richard Boone. You tell Officer Mathews that you are going to run the motorist's license and ask the officer to keep an eye on the motorist. You run a check on the motorist's license and everything turns out fine so no further action is needed with the motorist. When you return to the motorist's vehicle, you overhear Officer Mathews telling the motorist that Boone would never get elected. The motorist responds by saying that he would bet Mathews 20 dollars that Boone would win. Officer Mathews replies "It's a bet!"

### **Question:**

In general, you will be asked to identify the problem(s) in the situation presented and describe what you would do.

**(Keep in mind that additional questions will be raised by raters during the actual Oral Board Test)**

**Evaluation:** Your performance in the Oral Board Test will be evaluated by focusing on behaviors related to several areas or dimensions of performance critical to the effectiveness of a City of Pittsburgh Police Officer.

**Dimensions:** The following abilities will be evaluated during the Oral Board Test. Please note that these abilities were determined based upon the results of the job analysis. It is important to note that these dimensions have not been listed in any particular order. For the purpose of this assessment, they are equally important and will be weighted equally when deriving your overall Oral Board score.

**Oral Expression:** This is the ability to use language orally to communicate information or ideas to other people. This ability involves organizing information or ideas and expressing them in a clear and logical manner using a tone and vocabulary that is appropriate for the audience. The audience might include suspects, victims, witnesses, other police officers, supervisors, shop owners, or any individuals with whom the police officer might come in contact. Examples might include explaining a new departmental procedure or policy to a police officer or group of police officers and/or explaining investigation procedures to a victim.

**Comprehension:** This is the ability to understand written or spoken language. This involves receiving information not giving it. It is the ability to hear or read a description of an event and understand what happened. This ability might be used in listening to descriptions of events, places, or people, and/or reading narrative material such as an arrest report.

**Reasoning:** This is the ability to recognize or identify the existence of a problem or issue that needs to be addressed, critically evaluate the problem or issue, evaluate alternative solutions and arrive at a sound decision. This ability includes considering all relevant information, distinguishing important from unimportant information, and applying general rules or principles to specific situations or drawing general conclusions based on multiple specific situations. Examples might include identifying a particular situation as a civil or criminal case, and/or recognizing that the same pattern applies to a series of burglaries or purse snatchings.

## SECTION II: PREPARATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ORAL BOARD TEST

This section is organized around the three areas of performance that will provide the framework for the observation, recording and evaluation of your performance. For each area of performance, we will discuss some tips and strategies for preparation.

### A. ORAL EXPRESSION

This ability involves using language orally to communicate information or ideas to other people. This area of performance concerns the ability to make your messages understood by others.

One strategy that can enhance effectiveness at communicating messages is the use of an **OUTLINE**. When communicating to others, it is more likely that your thoughts and ideas will come across clearly if you take the time to organize your thoughts in your mind or on paper. When you generate an outline, we suggest you begin by setting down the broadest categories to be discussed and then create increasingly more specific sets of categories. For example, consider the way this guide is organized or outlined. The broadest categories have titles such as: "INTRODUCTION", "ORAL BOARD TEST" and "CONCLUSION". These sections contain more specific subsections. For example, the Oral Board Test section is broken down into these subsections: "SECTION I: GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ORAL BOARD TEST", and "SECTION II: PREPARATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ORAL BOARD TEST". Some of these subsections are broken down still further into an even more specific set of categories. For example the preparation strategies section is broken down into "ORAL EXPRESSION", "COMPREHENSION" and "REASONING".

The outlining strategy described above has been suggested as an aid to enhancing the effectiveness with which you communicate your messages to others. The question still remains as to how you will know if this strategy does, in fact, result in improved communication. This is where the assistance of friends or family can come into play. To assess the effectiveness of communications, you could provide an oral response from an outline, have another individual listen to the response, and ask that individual to generate the outline, or list the key points, on which your response was based. You could then compare the individual's perception of the message with the message you had intended to convey. If there are areas that were not correctly identified by the individual, you should re-work those areas until they are correctly identified.

To practice generating outlines, think of a problem that you are aware of, generate an outline for your response regarding how you would handle that problem, and generate your oral response from your outline. For example, assume that you have received a phone call indicating that your younger brother was picked up for underage drinking. Your parents are out of town and you were left in charge. You might generate a broad outline consisting of headings such as the following:

- I. Discuss brother's behavior with law enforcement personnel.
- II. Determine why brother is drinking and the circumstances of the situation.
- III. Take steps to prevent underage drinking in the future.

A more specific set of headings could then be generated for each of the components. For example, "Discuss brother's behavior with law enforcement personnel" could be broken down as follows:

- I. Discuss brother's behavior with law enforcement personnel.
  - A. Ask law enforcement personnel to recount your brother's actions.
  - B. Ask law enforcement personnel about the ramifications of your brother's behavior.

You could try other problem ideas like, "car breaks down on side of the road at night", or "responsible for planning a neighborhood picnic." Simply outline the steps that you would take to handle these situations.

An alternate method for preparing an outline is to "talk out" the presentation in the order that comes naturally. Record the flow of ideas or topics while talking and work from that record in preparing a final outline. Some people are more comfortable using this method rather than generating an outline and forcing your flow of ideas to fit the outline.

## **B. COMPREHENSION**

This is the ability to understand written or spoken language. This ability deals with understanding messages and information that others attempt to convey. This ability area initially comes into play when you are reading the Oral Board exercises. You will need to pay careful attention to the information provided in the exercise descriptions and to the instructions regarding the issues you are to address when you appear before the Oral Board Raters. The outlining strategy mentioned for Oral Expression is also helpful in practicing Comprehension. Specifically, the outlining strategy can be reversed to practice and assess the ability to understand messages. To practice and assess your ability to understand written information, you could take a newspaper article, editorial, or a book chapter/section; outline the information presented; and identify what you perceive to be the central points. While it's difficult to check your perceptions of a newspaper article, the summary at the end of a book chapter can be used to check your understanding of the material within the chapter.

Comprehension also comes into play when you listen to the questions of the raters during the Oral Board exercises. You will need to identify the key points in the questions asked by the raters. To practice and assess your ability to understand information presented orally, you could listen to another individual speak about a particular topic by going to a lecture, listening to an educational videotape or watching an educational television program. After listening to the presentation, create an outline of the information presented, identifying what you perceive to be the central points. If you have another individual listen to the presentation and create an outline too, you can check your understanding by comparing your outlines.

## **C. REASONING**

The definition of this category of performance can be broken down into two basic components:

- a. Identifying the problem or issue in the situation.
- b. Deciding on a solution to a problem or issue on the basis of the evaluation of that problem/issue.

One way that you can prepare for this area of performance is to consider, discuss, and resolve an issue of current concern. When doing so, you should:

- a. Identify the key components of the issue that should be considered.
- b. Generate and consider alternative courses of action or solutions. When evaluating potential solutions to problems, you should consider the impact of each solution on all individuals who could be affected by the solution. This would include those individuals who decide on the solution, as well as those individuals who must implement, abide by and/or enforce the solution.
- c. Consider the short and long-range implications of decisions that are made since some solutions may be beneficial only on a short or long-term basis.
- d. Take steps to minimize any potentially troublesome "side-effects" of the chosen solution.

One example of an issue that you could use to practice is to imagine that you have been offered a job in another state. The job is high-paying and you would love to take it but your spouse does not want to move. Use the steps above to consider, discuss and resolve this and any other such issues that you may think of.

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## CONCLUSION

**This preparation guide represents an attempt to familiarize you with all aspects of the Oral Board Test, including logistics and evaluation procedures, as well as to provide some suggestions for preparation. The suggestions provided here are not exhaustive -- we encourage you to engage in whatever additional preparation strategies you believe will enhance your chances of performing effectively on the Oral Board Test.**

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