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Entry-Level Trooper

Oral Board Candidate Preparation Guide



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ORAL BOARD CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE
TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I: GENERAL DESCRIPTION 1

- A. Content..... 1
- B. Preparation..... 2
- C. Participation 3
- D. Evaluation 3
- E. Overview of Logistics 4

SECTION II: PREPARATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ORAL BOARD TEST 5

- A. Oral Expression..... 5
- B. Comprehension and Reasoning..... 7
- C. Interpersonal Interactions..... 8
- D. Deciding and Initiating Action..... 8

CONCLUSION 9

SECTION I: GENERAL DESCRIPTION

A. Content

You will be presented with three exercises designed to allow for the assessment of a series of abilities identified, through the job analysis, as critical to the job performance of a DSP Trooper. These situations will NOT require technical knowledge of law enforcement, since the technical aspects of the job are learned in training. Because the Oral Board will be administered over several days, alternate forms of the exercises will be used. While every form of each exercise will involve similar problems or questions, the specific details will vary.

Brief explanations of the three exercises along with examples of the first two exercises are presented below. The order in which the exercises are listed is likely to be the order in which you will take them.

- 1. Work Situation Exercise** - You will be presented with a description of a work situation that you may be faced with on the job. You will also be provided with a list of regulations, including some that will apply to the work situation and others that will not. Based on the work situation scenario and regulations, you will be asked to provide a detailed summary of the exercise and answer several questions about the problems presented. (See example presented below.)

EXAMPLE: WORK SITUATION EXERCISE

The following example is presented for illustrative purposes and will not actually be used. For this example, only two sample regulations have been presented and both apply to the work situation. Keep in mind that, during the actual Oral Board Test, many regulations will be presented but only some of them will apply to the exercise.

Sample Regulations:

- Political Activity - A uniformed trooper shall not support or oppose any political candidate in public.
- Gambling - No trooper shall participate in any type of gambling while in uniform or on duty.

Sample Work Situation Scenario:

You are a new trooper 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 trooper. The other trooper is Trooper Chris Matthews who has been on the job for approximately four years. You and Trooper Matthews stop the first vehicle which approaches your checkpoint. 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 Trooper Matthews that you are going to run the motorist's license and ask the trooper 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 Trooper Matthews telling the motorist that Boone would never get elected. The motorist responds by saying that he would bet Matthews 20 dollars that Boone would win. Trooper Matthews replies, "It's a bet!"

Sample Question Topics:

1. Provide a detailed summary of the exercise scenario.
2. Identify the problem(s) in the situation by applying the regulations presented.
3. Describe the actions you would take to resolve those problems.

***Keep in mind that additional questions will be raised by raters during this exercise.**

- 2. Structured Interview Exercise** –You will be asked to provide oral responses to a series of interview questions regarding various abilities/characteristics that are important to the effective performance of troopers in the DSP. Raters will present you with a handout containing the questions and you must provide an oral response to each question. As you respond, you may consider and discuss any aspect of your past experience that is relevant to the questions – school, work, home, or personal life. (See examples presented below.)

EXAMPLE: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW EXERCISE

The following examples are presented for illustrative purposes and will NOT be used during the actual Oral Board Test.

1. Troopers must be able communicate effectively with a wide range of people. For example, a trooper must be able to testify in court cases or explain the nature of a complaint to an offender. **Describe a past experience that demonstrates your ability to communicate effectively.**
2. Troopers must be able to observe an event or hear a description of an event and then summarize the details in a report. For example, it is common for troopers to complete a report based on what they have observed or information provided by witnesses. **Describe a past experience in which you were required to summarize information in writing.**

- 3. Oral Résumé Exercise** - You will be asked to provide oral responses to a series of interview questions regarding your past experiences and qualifications for the job of DSP Trooper. Raters will read you a series of questions and you must provide an oral response to each question. As you respond, you may consider and discuss any aspect of your past experience that is relevant to the questions – school, work, home, or personal life. (Since you will NOT be permitted to prepare for this exercise, example questions have not been provided.)

B. Preparation

You will participate in a preparation period for the Work Situation Exercise before your appearance before the board. You will be given approximately 10 minutes to review the Work Situation Exercise materials and prepare your response. This preparation period will be conducted in a separate area where you will NOT be observed by the raters. You will be permitted to take notes on paper provided during the preparation period and may use these notes while responding. Unlike the Work Situation Exercise, you will not be permitted to prepare in advance for the Structured Interview Exercise, but you will, however, be given a short period of time (e.g., about 60 seconds) to review the Structured Interview questions during the exercise before responding. During this review period you may make notes on the paper provided and may use these notes while responding. You should be aware, however, that any outlines and/or notes prepared or used during the exercises will NOT be considered by the raters when making evaluations. In fact, such outlines and/or 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. Finally, you will NOT be given any time to prepare for the Oral Résumé Exercise.

C. Participation

Groups of candidates will be scheduled to arrive at the testing site at preset times throughout the administration of the Oral Board Test. Candidates should ensure that they arrive at the testing site on the correct day and time.

You will take part in three exercises: the Work Situation, the Structured Interview and the Oral Résumé. The order in which the exercises are listed is likely to be the order in which you will complete them. You will have 10 minutes to prepare for the Work Situation Exercise, after you have completed check-in procedures. During the check-in procedures you will be given some initial exercise instructions to review and then your 10-minute preparation period will begin.

After your 10 minute preparation period, you will be escorted from the preparation area to the board of raters. The board will provide introductions and instructions and then ask you questions concerning the three exercises. The board will repeat each question once if you ask them to, but no more than once. Each board will be taking notes and evaluating your responses based on the dimensions of performance presented in the "Evaluation" section of this preparation guide. You will not be permitted to return to the preparation room or the check-in area until you complete all three exercises.

The board will first ask you to respond to the Work Situation Exercise. You will have seven minutes to complete this exercise. The board will then continue with the Structured Interview Exercise. You will have nine minutes to complete this exercise. The board will present you with a handout containing a series of questions that you will be asked to address. You will be permitted to take up to 1 minute of the 9-minute response period to review the questions and think about your responses before you begin. You are not required to use the full review period if you wish to begin your response sooner. Keep in mind that any time, up to 1 minute, spent thinking about your responses will count against the amount of time you have to respond to the Structured Interview questions. Finally, you will take part in the third exercise, the Oral Résumé. You will have nine minutes for this exercise. You will be asked to provide oral responses to a series of interview questions regarding your past experiences and qualifications for the job of DSP Trooper.

The board will tell you how many questions you will have for each exercise and when to start and stop each exercise. However, you are responsible for working within the specified time limits.

D. Evaluation

1. **Raters** - A board of raters will observe and evaluate a series of abilities that have been identified as critical to the job performance of a DSP Trooper. Each rater has been trained to observe, record and evaluate your behavior and advised how to avoid making evaluation errors.
2. **Evaluation Procedure** - While each exercise proceeds, the raters will be observing and recording your behavior. After the exercise, the raters will evaluate your effectiveness with regard to each of the abilities.

3. **Abilities** - The following areas will likely be evaluated during the Oral Board exercises. These abilities have not been listed in any particular order and will be weighted equally when deriving your overall Oral Board score.

- ❑ **Oral Expression**: This dimension involves the ability to use language orally to communicate information or ideas to other people. This dimension also includes the ability to organize information or ideas and express 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 troopers, supervisors, shop owners, or any individuals with whom the trooper might come in contact. Examples might include explaining a new Department procedure or policy to a trooper or group of troopers and/or explaining investigation procedures to a victim.
- ❑ **Comprehension and Reasoning**: This dimension involves the ability to understand written or spoken language in order to recognize the existence of a problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This also includes addressing the problem or issue identified by considering all information that is relevant to the problem or issue, evaluating alternative solutions and arriving at a sound decision. Examples might include recognizing that the same pattern applies to a series of burglaries or purse snatchings, sorting through information (e.g., witness descriptions, reports, evidence that is collected) to determine what had occurred at a crime scene and/or asking a suspect follow-up questions to clarify vague or conflicting information.
- ❑ **Interpersonal Interactions**: This dimension includes the ability to establish constructive working relationships with others as well as to demonstrate consideration for the feelings, needs and views of others. This dimension also includes the ability to resolve conflict among others. Examples might include interacting with community members to gather information about crimes, intervening between others to help resolve an argument and/or interviewing emotionally upset crime victims.
- ❑ **Deciding and Initiating Action**: This dimension involves taking action without being prompted. This dimension also includes the ability to work independently with minimal guidance, and to make decisions without deferring to others. Examples might include deciding how to handle a call without supervisory guidance, deciding whether to continue pursuing a violator or ending the pursuit due to public safety and/or initiating activity when not assigned to a call for service.

E. Overview of Logistics

The following schedule will likely be followed during the Oral Board Test. During the Oral Board exercises, raters will only tell you when to start and stop; they will not tell you how much time you have left. You will be responsible for keeping track of time. Therefore, we recommend that you wear a watch to keep track of your time.

Time Period	Activity Description
10 minutes	Check-in is conducted.
5 minutes	You review written instructions.
10 minutes	You review materials for the Work Situation Exercise and prepare your response.
25 minutes	<p>You participate in each of the three exercises.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ You participate in the Work Situation Exercise. (7 minutes) ❑ You participate in the Structured Interview Exercise. (9 minutes) ❑ You participate in the Oral Résumé Exercise. (9 minutes)

SECTION II: PREPARATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ORAL BOARD TEST

This section is organized around the four areas of performance that raters will be looking at to judge your performance. For each area of performance, we will discuss some tips and strategies for preparation.

A. Oral Expression

This area involves:

- organizing thoughts and ideas
- expressing these thoughts in a clear and logical manner
- using a tone and vocabulary that is appropriate for the audience

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.

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 arrested 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 brother from 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.

As you consider the above suggestion, you should keep in mind that unlike the Work Situation Exercise you will have only a limited amount of time (i.e., 60 seconds) to think about the Structured Interview questions before you respond. Rather than creating an outline for each Structured Interview question, it may be more practical due to the amount of time allotted for preparation to generate notes while preparing for this exercise. It is more likely that your thoughts will come across clearly if you take a few seconds to organize your thoughts in your mind or on paper. Therefore, it may help to briefly jot down a few words to identify some points you would like to make during your response.

Once established, you can use your notes to provide your response. To practice jotting down some notes for the Structured Interview Exercise, consider sample Structured Interview question 2. You might jot down notes such as:

- ❑ H.S. newspaper sports writer
- ❑ Take notes to remember
- ❑ Interview spectators to ensure complete
- ❑ Interview players to ensure accuracy

To make your practice most effective, you should be sure to take only 15 to 30 seconds to prepare your response to each sample Structured Interview question presented in this guide. To allow for additional practice, repeat this activity by having another individual prepare and provide you with some additional sample questions like those presented in this guide. The additional practice will help ensure that you can generate clear and concise oral responses when given minimal time to think about and prepare a response.

Finally, to do your best in this area, when you do respond, be sure to:

- ❑ Speak clearly
- ❑ Speak loudly enough to be heard
- ❑ Speak at a good pace – not too fast for others to understand but not too slow
- ❑ Be complete and organized
- ❑ Be sure you address all questions posed
- ❑ Make eye contact with the raters
- ❑ Avoid any slang or inappropriate words
- ❑ Take a breath if you find yourself getting nervous

B. Comprehension and Reasoning

This area involves:

- ❑ understanding written or oral information
- ❑ identifying important issues or problems that need to be addressed
- ❑ generating alternative solutions and deciding on the best one

Just as it is necessary for you to express yourself effectively, it is also important for you to understand information presented to you. This comes into play during the Oral Board when you are reviewing the instructions and listening to the raters read questions. You will need to pay careful attention to the questions and to the instructions regarding the procedures you are to follow when you appear before the Oral Board raters. This also comes into play whenever you are reviewing or receiving information related to a problem or issue you must address.

To practice summarizing information presented in written form (such as the instructions and two of the three exercises), you could take a newspaper article, editorial, or a book chapter/section; summarize the information presented in writing; 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. Once you have generated your written summary, then orally present this summary to another individual. Ask the individual to review the article, editorial, etc., as well as your written summary, to ensure you have covered all information in your oral presentation. Preparing both a written and oral summary will be particularly good practice for the two exercises that you will be allowed to prepare for.

To practice summarizing information presented orally (such as the questions from the raters), you could listen to another individual speak about a particular topic at a lecture, on an educational videotape or on an educational television program. After listening to the presentation, orally summarize the information presented, identifying what you perceive to be the central points. If you have another individual independently listen to the presentation and orally present a summary too, you can check your understanding by comparing your oral summaries. If you both identified the same points, you can confirm that you understood the information being presented. Preparing only an oral summary from information presented orally will be particularly good practice for responding to the questions from the raters.

Whenever you are faced with an important issue or problem, in addition to understanding information about the problem that is presented to you, it is important to identify key elements of the problem and evaluate their relevance and importance. This requires you to avoid taking information at face value and to thoroughly review available information to determine what details are missing or needed. Once you have identified relevant/important issues and have sought additional information, you need to consider alternative ways to resolve these issues and decide on the best solution. One way that you can develop this skill is to consider, discuss, and resolve an issue of current concern. When doing so, you should:

- ❑ Generate and consider alternative courses of action or solutions to a problem or issue. 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.
- ❑ Choose the best option.
- ❑ Anticipate any obstacles that might be encountered and develop contingency plans to overcome anticipated obstacles.
- ❑ 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.
- ❑ Take steps to minimize any potentially troublesome "side-effects" of the chosen solution.

During the Oral Board, you may be asked to discuss the steps you have taken, or would take, to identify and fully understand important issues or problems and to resolve them. Be prepared to describe past situations of relevance to the area of comprehension and reasoning and the steps you have taken to ensure you are able to effectively resolve problems.

C. Interpersonal Interactions

This area involves:

- establishing constructive working relationships
- demonstrating consideration for others' feelings and opinions
- resolving conflicts with and among others

Listed below are some examples of behaviors that contribute to constructive and effective interpersonal interactions with others.

- eliciting the input of others, particularly those individuals who are directly affected by decisions
- giving others your full attention when they speak and avoiding interruptions
- complimenting or giving credit to others for good ideas or performance
- disagreeing with others in a non-threatening manner
- offering support and assistance to others experiencing problems

You should think about situations where you have displayed effective interpersonal interactions and be prepared to describe these situations. Also consider situations where you have had to deal with difficult working relationships and be prepared to discuss what you have done to handle them in an effective manner.

D. Deciding and Initiating Action

This area involves:

- taking action without being prompted
- working independently with minimal guidance
- making decisions without deferring to others

Listed below are some examples that illustrate effective Deciding and Initiating Action behaviors.

- committing to a course of action
- taking action quickly
- dealing with problems in a timely manner
- handling problems with minimal guidance
- taking ownership of problems
- actively seeking opportunities to develop skills necessary to perform the job of trooper

You should think about situations where you have displayed initiative and be prepared to describe these situations. Also consider situations where you have had to act with minimal guidance and be prepared to discuss what you have done to handle them in an effective manner.

CONCLUSION

This preparation guide represents an attempt to familiarize you with all aspects of the Oral Board, including the content, 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 and on the job.

GOOD LUCK!