

Candidate Study-Guide
Test Development and Validation
Department of Civil Service

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This study guide is geared towards current employees preparing to take public-safety examinations. The Department of Civil Service hopes that this guide will help candidates prepare for their exams more effectively.

This guide has been developed keeping in mind the average candidate who may not have extensive test-taking experience and/or a graduate degree.

General Preparation

This section is applicable to both multiple-choice and activity-based testing.

- Carefully read information bulletins (IB) or information from the Civil Service Department. This will help you know/understand what to expect.
- Begin gathering all the reading material soon after the first IB is posted.
 - Allow yourself at least 8 to 12 weeks of solid preparation
 - Order books online as soon as you can (if you don't want to pay for expedited shipping).
 - Older versions of the book can be purchased only if the version listed in the IB is not substantially different from the old one.
 - That said, refrain from buying a "too old" version. It may be less helpful.
- Categorize reading material into high and low priority readings. To do so:
 - examine the list of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) provided in the IB
 - ask your colleagues and supervisors who have taken the test before for advice
 - think through which sections/chapters would be more applicable to the position you are taking a test for
 - think about the current affairs and priorities of your department
- Once you decide to start studying for the test, make sure you:
 - assign specific number of days/weeks to each reading resource (e.g., Policy/regulations, books, etc.).
 - manage your time well at home and work.
 - read whenever you get a chance (e.g., at work during downtime, while waiting at the doctor's appointment, while travelling).
 - read the resource at least twice (if not more times).
- Just reading is not enough, being able to reproduce what was read is important too, so:
 - try to understand the rationale behind everything you read; it helps in remembering information.
 - leave some time in your study schedule for revision and practice tests.
 - write a brief summary/note on the material you read (to check if you remember important points).
 - come up with possible questions to test yourself (check answers later).
 - ask others to quiz you on different parts of the material.

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- Explore study technique that suits you. This could be a trial-and-error process; you may have to try different study strategies before finding the one that works best for you. Here are a few strategies that you can try:
 - Use flashcards to write important concepts/information to quiz yourself later.
 - Audio-record yourself reading aloud the material and listen to them whenever possible (e.g., in your way to work/home).
 - Create process maps, flow charts, or other illustrations to remember information visually.
 - Discuss the reading material with other candidates or someone at work.
- Rely on the information your department can offer, for instance:
 - Gather samples of accurately filled out important paperwork (e.g., forms, logs, etc.) to get an idea.
 - Get trained on the tools and techniques that you don't know about or that the department has introduced in last 6 to 9 months.
 - Speak to the personnel who are mostly familiar with completing the paperwork and/or forms (to know more about paperwork, processes, and protocol).
- Try to maintain an educational mindset to build knowledge by:
 - reading journals, articles, or other resources in your field.
 - enrolling in a degree program in the job-related area.
 - attending talks, seminars, conferences, and/or other educational events.
- Be cognizant of policy vs. practice issues
 - In case of multiple choice, you need to answer the question based on the policy (i.e., what is written/printed in the official documents of the department).

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Before the test

- Recap important material.
 - Review your notes, flashcards, and any feedback you received on your practice performance.
- Visit the testing location a few days before the test to gauge directions, travel time, traffic, etc.
- Get a good night sleep before the examination.
- Dress comfortably so that you can sit and move around (if needed to) easily.
- Allow yourself enough travel time on the test day.
- Bring a thin jacket in case the testing facility is cooler than you expected.
- Bring a water bottle, non-digital watch, and a pen/pencil.
- Use the washroom/ask where it is.
- Keep all your reading material aside at least 30 minutes before the test begins.
- Calm your nerves by:
 - taking a deep breath (or meditate a bit if you know how to).
 - listening to music.
 - doing activities that de-stress you.

During the test

- Schedule your performance on the test by:
 - using the first 15 minutes to familiarize yourself with the test (getting ready).
 - answer every question to the best of your knowledge, skills, and abilities (actual answering).
 - Assigning the last 15-20 minutes for review (reviewing).

The “getting ready” time:

- Check if you have received all of the material in your candidate packet.
- Read the instructions very carefully.
- In the case of work-sample tests:
 - Read through all of the material before you respond to any items.
 - List the expected deliverables (i.e. answers).
 - Divide the total duration for each activity.
 - Write the times down where you can see them or set your watch to alert you of these times.
- Do not panic if you do not understand/know something
 - Most of the time, the more you work on the other parts/questions, the better idea you will have about the part that you don't understand/know.
 - Leave the questions you don't know/understand to come back to them later.

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The “actual answering” time:

- Read the instructions again very carefully.
- Read each question carefully.
- Answer every question entirely.
- In case of work-sample test, make a list of things you want to include in your answer.
 - Sometimes, you may need to refer to other material to form your answer.
- Keep a mental note of time as you continue working on the test.
- Take brief breaks whenever you can.
- Check if your answer includes everything asked for.
- Go back to the questions/exercises you kept aside for later.
- Seek proctor’s help if you have any procedural questions.
 - Proctors will be able to help you with any test administration confusion or issues.

The “reviewing” time:

- Read each of your answers carefully.
- Make sure your answer sheets are put together as per the instructions.
- Once the proctor announces that the time is over:
 - put all the material aside as instructed.
 - ask the proctor to check to see if everything looks fine.

Additional Tips

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)¹:

SMEs, in this case, would be individuals occupying the position you are testing for, top-performers on the previous tests, your other supervisor(s), or senior colleagues whose work style you admire. Get additional information from these individuals.

This is especially important if you are working in specialized units/divisions and the test is based on the platoon operations.

- Seek to know their study habits and tips.
- Ask questions about specific aspects of their jobs.
- Ask them (supervisors) what they needed to know going in.
- Discuss reading material with them to gain more clarity and understanding.
- Listen to them verbalizing their thought process on a particular scenario/activity.
- Get their feedback on your sample/practice answers.

¹ If these SMEs are helping the Department of Civil Service with test development, they will not be able to help you.

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Leadership and Personal Growth:

An ideal candidate is someone who has been preparing for the promotional position since day-1 on the job. Note that a candidate, who is constantly learning to get better at his/her job, will be a successful candidate. Here are some ways you can do this:

- Seek higher responsibilities from your supervisor.
- Get involved in different projects that your department is working on.
- Learn more about other divisions/units within your department.
- Seek feedback on your performance as often as you can.
- Seek additional training and education related to your field of work/job.

Healthy Lifestyle and Good Habits:

However simplistic this advice may sound, it is very important to adopt a healthy lifestyle and good habits; they help increase your attention and concentration.

- Drink a lot of water (i.e., 8-10 glasses).
- Eat healthy meals, on time.
- Sleep at least 6-8 hours day.
- Exercise at least 2-3 times a week.