



**CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE
FOR
ORAL INTERVIEW EXAMINATIONS
(QUALIFICATIONS APPRAISAL PANEL)**

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INTRODUCTION

This Candidate Preparation Guide is designed to help you prepare for an oral examination. Selection Standards and Examinations Section is providing this information in recognition of the fact that a considerable amount of the anxiety associated with participation in examinations is related to the unfamiliarity of the procedures candidates will encounter.

Please note this guide is for informational purposes and does not include suggestions on what to study. This guide is intended to provide you with some general guidance in preparing for and taking oral examinations. It is not meant to provide absolute procedures which will apply in all situations and to all applicants. It is suggested you read the information in this guide carefully and incorporate the material with any test-taking strategies you have found to be successful in the past.

Please keep in mind these materials are designed to provide an overview on how to prepare for an oral examination; they are not designed to prepare you for any one state employment examination. The Department does not endorse any specific study materials, test preparation publishing organizations, or test preparation courses.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Qualifications Appraisal Panel (QAP) oral examinations are conducted to formally evaluate if a candidate has the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the job of the testing classification.

The QAP examination consists of a series of structured questions which are related to specific critical knowledge, skills, and abilities for the testing classification. These questions can range from hypothetical scenarios to specific questions about how you intend to deal with situations. The candidates' answers will be scored by a panel of raters.

In a QAP examination, a panel of subject matter or job experts ask candidates a set of predetermined questions, and listen to and evaluate their responses. Panel members take detailed notes of each applicant's responses, usually using rating sheets which contain the answers or suggested responses to the questions. A structured procedure is used to score candidates' answers to the examination questions. In a QAP examination, all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order.

Communication in a QAP examination is highly structured and mostly one-way; candidates are not given an opportunity to present information not specifically requested or to ask questions of the panel.

It is important to note a QAP examination is not the same as an employment interview. Employment interviews are conducted with the purpose of making a final selection of a candidate to fill a specific position. Although interviews are structured, they are often more informal than oral examinations. Employment interviews are typically conducted so the employer can meet with candidates to ask questions about their prior work history, to provide candidates with information about the organization and work unit, and to assess the level of fit between the candidates and the specific position being filled.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATION

There are several things candidates can do to put themselves at ease when taking a QAP examination:

- Learn everything you can about the position you want.
- Read the examination bulletin carefully. Examination bulletins normally include a description of the purpose of the job classification and a list of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in the job classification. Use this to determine the subject areas which are likely to be represented in the QAP examination.
- Direct any self-studying around the knowledge, skills, abilities, and tasks outlined on the examination bulletin for the classification in which you are testing.
- Read the Classification Specification for the testing classification. (This is available on the California Department of Human Resources Web site). Classification specifications include a list of the typical duties performed by employees in a job classification. This may also be useful in suggesting the subject areas likely to be represented in the QAP examination.
- Read policy appropriate to the classification.
 - Is this an administrative classification?
 - Is this a supervisory/managerial classification?
 - Is this a technical classification?
- Talk with individuals in the target job to gain more details and insight about the classification.
- Develop mock questions and practice interviewing with others. Try using a recording device or practice in front of a mirror. Candidates often find it helpful to simulate the environment they will face during the oral interview.
- Form or participate in a study group specific for the classification. Participating in a study group will allow you to improve your notes, fill in any gaps in your understanding, more fully explore complex concepts, maximize your time, cover more material, gain additional knowledge about what might be on the examination, and provide you with a support system.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN TAKING AN ORAL EXAMINATION

Below is a general outline of how a QAP examination may be conducted. Each QAP examination is different, and all the information listed may not apply.

BEFORE THE ORAL EXAMINATION

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early to allow time for the check-in process.
- When you arrive to the test site for your QAP examination, inform the receptionist of your arrival. You will be asked to show picture identification (ID) and your Notice of Oral Interview (i.e., admission letter).
- You will be provided all materials during the examination process.
- You will not be allowed to bring any outside notes or study material in with you once the examination begins.
- Preexposed Interviews. Some QAP examinations may include a component where the structured interview questions are preexposed to candidates before the interview begins.
 - If preexposure is permitted, you will be placed in a special preparation room for a predetermined amount of time where you will be able to review all the structured questions and take notes pertaining to each question.
 - An examinations proctor will give you instructions, provide you the examination materials, and tell you when to begin and end the examination.
 - NOTE: Candidates may not be observed by raters during this preparation period; however, the examinations proctor will monitor the preparation room.
 - The proctor will ensure the examination is administered fairly to all candidates. Although proctors cannot answer questions about the examination itself, they can assist you if something goes wrong, if there is a defect in your examination materials, or if you must leave the room for a legitimate reason. If something is distracting you, bring it to the proctor's attention.
 - Read the examination directions carefully and pay attention to details.
 - It is suggested you review all the structured questions first to familiarize yourself with the subject matter you are being tested on.
 - Begin by documenting basic notes for each question which will assist in your responses to the questions when you go before the panel. If time permits, you may document talking points in more detail.
 - Ensure you address all parts of the question.
 - Candidates will be permitted to use any notes they generated during the preparation period, while participating in the interview.

- You should be aware, any notes prepared or used during the interview will not be considered by the raters when making their 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 QAP examination. **The raters will rate you only on your oral response.**

DURING THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Introduction.

- When the panel is ready, the chairperson will escort or call you into the interview room to begin the examination.
- The panel typically consists of two to three members: one chairperson who directs and controls the interview process and one or two state service representatives who serve as subject matter experts for the classification being tested.
- Panel members will refrain from casual or friendly conversation with candidates during and between interviews.
- Candidates will be advised the panel members will be taking notes while they respond to a question. Do not let this distract you. The panel will use the notes to assist in rating you.
 - Panel members will not give any indication of correct or incorrect responses (e.g., frowning, smiling, raising eyebrows, nodding).

Questioning.

- The panel will ask every candidate the same questions, in the same order.
- A panel member will read a question to the candidate aloud, verbatim. You will be provided with a candidate's copy of the questions at the time of the interview, which you may read along silently while each question is presented to you.
 - You may refer to your copy of the questions when providing your responses.
 - Be sure to direct your responses to all the members of the panel, not just the panel member who asked the question.
- Oral examinations have a time limit. It will be the candidate's responsibility to manage their time within the specified timeframe.
 - Determine how much time you have to respond to each question. For example, if you are given a 30-minute preexposure timeframe and six questions to answer, you have approximately five minutes to dedicate to each question.

- You will need to be short but concise with your responses.
- If a preexposure component was included, you may refer to your notes while providing your response to each question.
- If you have completed your response for the question posed, you can verbally announce to the panel that you are finished with that question. This will signal the panel that you are ready for the next question to be presented.
- After the last question is presented, and there is time remaining, the chairperson will ask the candidate if they would like to go back to any of the questions to add to any of their responses.
- There is no penalty for finishing early if you feel you have completely answered all the questions to the best of your ability.
- The chairperson will close the interview and excuse the candidate when the candidate has responded to all the questions or at the expiration of time, whichever occurs first.

AFTER THE ORAL EXAMINATION

- After the candidate leaves the examination room, the panel will begin the rating (scoring) process.
 - The panel will discuss the candidate's performance and provide a rating for each question, based on the predetermined rating criterion.
- All candidates who pass the QAP examination will be ranked according to their score.
- Selection Standards and Examinations Section, Examination Services, will typically notify candidates of their examination results within three to four weeks after the QAP examinations conclude.
 - The Notice of Examination Results will usually include your final score and placement on the eligible list.

NOTE: Passing the oral examination does not mean you will be offered a position. It determines what rank you are in on the eligible list. Depending on your placement on the eligible list, your name may appear on a certification list from which you may receive an inquiry letter and be considered/interviewed for a position. Likewise, you may apply to job announcements for positions in the testing classification.

GENERAL TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

To do your best on the oral examination, here are some general test-taking strategies and suggestions to remember:

- Be sure to confirm the date, time, and location of the oral examination.
- Arrive early on the day of the examination. Allow yourself extra time to locate the building or to offset traffic delays, parking, or weather. It is important to arrive on time.
- Be rested. It is unwise to stay up all night studying prior to the oral examination day; you never want to show up to an examination tired, as this can impact your ability to focus. Try to get a good night's rest before taking the examination. Being rested and having a clear head on the day of the examination typically results in better test performance.
- Read instructions given to you when you check in at the examination site. Make certain you know how much time you have to complete the exercise.
- Read each question carefully. Be sure you understand what you are being asked.
- Review the examination announcement and your admission notice to identify everything you need to bring with you to the oral examination (e.g., driver's license or picture ID, your admission notice).
- Be aware you are not permitted to bring any of the following materials/devices with you into the examination room: books, manuals/guides, binders/folders/envelopes, briefcases, backpacks, carrying bags, recording or filming devices, radios, computers/laptops, iPads/tablets, cellular phones, smart watches, or other mechanical or electronic devices. The use of such materials and/or devices in the oral examination is strictly prohibited and can result in your disqualification. Your admission notice will tell you what materials/devices, if any, you should bring with you.
- Convey a professional demeanor by demonstrating good posture and appearance. Your body language should be deliberate; it should exude confidence and communicate you are happy to be there. Your body language will either reinforce your message or contradict it. Refrain from fidgeting during the oral examination and avoid slumping, crossed arms, leaning backward, etc. Likewise, avoid displays of nervous mannerisms, such as nail biting, hair twisting, knuckle cracking, etc.

- Dress appropriately for the type of oral examination you are taking; typical dress for an oral examination is business attire or the formal uniform (uniformed employees). The type of attire should depend on the classification for which you are testing. Professional management classifications typically call for traditional business attire, such as business suits, whereas entry level professional classifications call for business attire, such as slacks, skirt, collared shirts, and/or blouses. Very casual dress, such as wearing t-shirts, jeans, shorts, or flip-flops, are not recommended.

TIPS ON HOW TO ANSWER ORAL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

- Answer the question being asked. Stay on topic.
 - It is common for interview candidates to answer a question other than the one posed. Interviews are stressful, and it is not uncommon for a candidate to misunderstand or misinterpret the question and then provide an answer which is completely off base. Be sure to listen carefully to the question and provide an answer for that specific question. Stay on topic. Do not go outside the scope of the question or ramble on about unrelated information.
- Answer the question from the level and point of view of the classification you are testing for.
- Do not be afraid of silence. You may take a moment to collect your thoughts before you begin each response.
 - Pause briefly after a question is asked. Take a few seconds to compose your thoughts – quickly review in your mind the parts of the question or the main areas of information you need to cover and organize how you will go through this, before you begin to answer the question. Carefully consider your answer and organize it in a way which is meaningful and will ultimately make sense to the panel who is rating your response.
- Be clear and concise, but provide detailed answers that are as complete as possible.
 - It is common for a candidate to answer a question and repeat the same answer over and over. Offer an answer, which is complete, but do not reiterate your response multiple times for the same question.
- If you do not know or are unsure of the answer to the question, stay calm. Outline a methodology you would use to find the answer or solve the problem. Give the best answer you can for the question. Be direct, stay on topic, answer questions thoroughly but concisely. Try not to ramble.
- You may be scored on your overall communication skills, so be aware of such things as tone of voice, grammar, clarity, rate of speech, and the organization of your answer.
 - Oral communication skills are vital in an oral examination. Speak clearly and avoid rambling, mumbling, or speaking in a monotone voice. Good communication skills will only accentuate your response to a question.
- Slow down and take your time. Depending on the length of the interview and number of questions, you have approximately four to six minutes to respond to each question, though there is no time limit on any one question.

- A timer is used during the interview and will be placed in a location visible to the candidate, so you may stay on pace to self-time.
- You may use the entire time; it belongs to you.
- Cover all the steps you would follow, methods you would use, and actions you would take. Do not skip or overlook information because it seems too simple or obvious.
- Address the panel as though they do not know you and have no knowledge of the subject matter presented in the question.
 - The panel will not make inferences or assumptions of what you mean from what you say.
 - Answer questions as if the panel members do not know who you are, your work experience, or what you have accomplished, even if they do.
 - Supplementary information (i.e., your application or résumé) is not made available to the panel. Therefore, it will be up to you, by way of your responses to the questions to demonstrate you possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the duties of the testing classification.
- Consider using an acronym technique to help you structure your responses to oral examination questions. An example of an acronym to follow/use when formulating your response is PANDA (policy, action, notification, documentation, after action/follow up).

NOTE: The PANDA method presented below is intended as a helpful tool. It is not required nor necessary for you to use the PANDA method when answering oral examination questions.

- POLICY.
 - Is there a policy to follow?
 - What publication(s) should you refer to?
- ACTION.
 - What steps need to be taken to address this situation?
 - If applicable, describe supervisory and/or managerial methods you would use.
 - How does the situation effect morale?
 - What is the immediate impact of the situation to consider and how can you address it?
 - Are other personnel involved or affected by the scenario?
 - What types of support or benefits are available?
 - Assess training needs.
 - Is this something you can delegate? Do you need approval?

- NOTIFICATION.
 - What immediate notifications need to be made, if any, and to who?
 - Are there any Offices of Primary Interest who need to be made aware? Outside entities?
- DOCUMENTATION.
 - What type of documentation does the situation warrant?
 - Is this an informal discussion?
 - Are there any forms to be completed and approved?
 - Who reviews/approves them?
- AFTER ACTION/FOLLOW-UP.
 - Who needs to be notified of the outcome?
 - What is the status of the situation? Has it been resolved?
 - What is the long-term impact of the situation and actions taken to resolve it?
- Do not be afraid to repeat responses, if applicable to multiple questions. Treat each question independently. The panel will not apply any response universally. They are only able to score you based on your responses to the question you are answering at that time.
- It is okay to use general acronyms, but utilizing acronyms, which are too specific or may have multiple meanings, may lead to uncertain interpretation of your response.
- Avoid the use of slang and phrases, such as “um,” “ah,” “you know,” and “like,” to fill in between your statements.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS COMMON TO ORAL EXAMINATIONS

There are two distinct types of interview questions which may be used in an oral examination: job knowledge-based and situational-based. Some oral examinations include just one type of question and some include both types of questions.

NOTE: The following examples are presented for illustrative purposes and may not actually be used as an examination question. These examples are closely representative of the kinds of questions you may receive during the oral examination.

Job Knowledge-Based.

Job knowledge-based oral examination questions ask the candidate to demonstrate a level of familiarity with the terminology, practices, concepts, and theories related to the career field of the testing classification. For example:

- *What are the steps of conflict management for a team leader to follow when team members are engaging in conflict themselves?*
- *What is the Department's Injury and Illness Prevention policy?*
- *What accounting practices would you use to ensure budget reporting obligations are fulfilled?*
- *What are the most important factors for a Social Worker to consider when attempting to establish a working relationship with a client, and why?*

Situational-Based.

Situational-based oral examination questions pose hypothetical situations which may occur on the job and ask the candidate to describe how they will handle the situation. For example:

- *Imagine you are the leader of a work team and you find out one of the team members is not doing their share of the work, and instead is relying on the others to pick up the slack. How would you address this situation?*
- *You are the supervisor of a very busy unit. Your immediate supervisor assigns your unit several high priority assignments. You realize your staff's current workload prevents the completion of the new assignments by their due dates. As the supervisor, what would you do to remedy this situation?*
- *An important client arrives at the office and demands to see your supervisor without an appointment. How would you manage this situation?*
- *You disagree with your supervisor about a decision or practice. What would you do to remedy this situation?*

EXAMINATION CONFIDENTIALITY AND SECURITY

You will be competing with a number of candidates for the testing classification. The oral examination process is competitive, and all examination content shall remain confidential. Any information you divulge about the way in which the QAP examination is structured, or the nature of the examination materials/specific questions, will provide another candidate with an unfair advantage. If you are found to have discussed content related to the QAP examination, you will not only put yourself at a disadvantage, but you may be disqualified from participating further in the examination process or have your name withheld from the eligible list. Furthermore, the Department may take adverse action against you. A breach of examination security may lead to invalidating an entire examination.

All candidates testing with the Department will be required to sign a CHP 151, Examination Security Agreement, acknowledging they received and understand the information regarding examination security and the provisions relating to the misuse of confidential examination information.

CONCLUSION

Keep in mind the Department wants you to succeed when taking state examinations. We do not tolerate biased grading or develop examinations which favor a specific racial, ethnic, gender, or age group.

The intent of our examinations is to identify the best qualified applicants for state positions based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the duties of the job.

Best of luck!

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ANNEX A

SAMPLE QUESTION

The following mock interview question and accompanying suggested responses have been drafted for illustrative purposes. The examples of suggested responses are closely representative of the kinds of answers a candidate may provide during the oral examination.

NOTE: The 19 suggested responses provided in the example below demonstrate how a candidate may answer an oral interview question utilizing the PANDA approach as described on page 10 of this guide.

Mock Question:

You are working at the return desk for a nationwide retail chain. A customer approaches you and wishes to return a stereo which they say is not working. The customer does not have the original sales receipt for the purchase. How would you handle this transaction?

Suggested Responses:

How to handle the transaction.

Policy.

1. Review the retailer's return policy on merchandise returns without receipt or proof of purchase.
2. Review the return policy to identify if there are special rules for returning certain items (e.g., electronics).
3. Recognize the number of days (return window) to return in-store, online, or post-holiday purchases.
4. Review the conditions for which an item must be in to be valid for return (e.g., original tags, original packaging, all parts/accessories included).
5. Review the exceptions to the return policy (e.g., discounted, as is, final sales, or custom items cannot be returned).
6. Recognize the type of refund(s) the customer is eligible to receive (e.g., exchange, store credit, full/partial refund).

ANNEX A

SAMPLE QUESTION (*continued*)

Action.

7. Provide excellent customer service; stay calm and polite through the process.
8. Verify the stereo is one sold by the store.
9. Offer to test the stereo to see if it can be made to function.
10. Check if item is under warranty.
11. Offer to look up the sales receipt on the automated system if the stereo was purchased by a traceable method (e.g., check, debit/credit card, gift card).
12. If the sales receipt is traceable and the transaction date is within the return policy window, offer to exchange the stereo, give a store credit, or issue a refund based on the original method of payment.
13. If receipt cannot be located and the stereo is sold at the store, offer to exchange it for an identical item.
14. If the form of payment was not traceable (cash) and the exact stereo is unavailable, offer to exchange it for a like or similar item. Explain to the customer they will have to pay the difference if the item is more expensive.

Notification.

15. Notify the floor/department supervisor/manager of the situation.

Documentation.

16. Document the return transaction in the automated system (record the customer's identification information, return reason, remedy/compensation – exchange/store credit/refund).
17. Obtain the store supervisor/manager's authorization/approval to process the return.

After Action/Follow Up.

18. Ensure customers are verbally informed of retailer's return/all sales final policies before the purchase transaction is made.
19. Discuss the store's policy with employees as part of training and ensure employees understand and are appropriately trained to process returns.

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