

Sergeant Written Examination Study Guide

THE PUBLIC SAFETY SELECTION SPECIALISTS™



State Universities Civil Service System

Industrial/Organizational Solutions, Inc.
March 2010

Introduction to the Promotional Process

I/O Solutions has been retained to develop the items for the sergeant written exam for the State Universities Civil Service System. I/O Solutions is a public safety consulting firm located in the suburban Chicago area. The firm works exclusively with public safety clients (police, fire, sheriff's departments, correctional facilities, etc.) to develop, validate and implement promotional and entry-level selection processes. Our clients include the Massachusetts State Police Department, New York State Police Department, Minneapolis Police Department, San Diego Police Department, Houston Police Department, Austin Police Department, Cook County Sheriff's Office, Dallas Police Department, Washington D.C Metro Police and the Jacksonville County Police Department.

This *Orientation and Preparation Guide* has been prepared to introduce you to the written promotional examination for the State Universities Civil Service System. This guide will familiarize you with the written examination process. Following are the sections that this guide will cover:

- Information on the format of the exam
- Advice on the importance of reading specified study materials
- Advice on how to study for the written examination
- The development of a study plan
- General preparation guidelines
- Test-taking principles
- Helpful hints about the test

Format of the Job-Knowledge Examination

A job-knowledge exam consists of questions/items that are based on prespecified resource materials and cover material that is deemed important to successful performance on the job. Job-knowledge items are typically constructed in a multiple-choice format. In the case of this exam, this means that there is one correct answer option and three incorrect answer options. Your goal is to select the correct response from among the four possible options. The following is an example of a job-knowledge item:

1. Eyewitness identification and description are regarded to be the most _____ form of evidence due to the fact that human perception and memory are _____ functions.
 - a. reliable; selective
 - b. accurate; constructive
 - c. valid; focused
 - d. unreliable; selective

Answer:

Eyewitness descriptions are not considered to be very reliable forms of evidence in criminal proceedings. If you know that eyewitness descriptions are unreliable, you have a good chance of answering this question correctly. In order to fill in the first blank, you must find a word that indicates that eyewitness descriptions are unreliable, inaccurate or “flawed.” You can immediately eliminate answer options “a,” “b” and “c” because these imply the opposite concerning the reliability of eyewitness descriptions. You are left with answer option “d,” which indicates that eyewitness descriptions are “unreliable” and that this is caused by “selective” memory functions. This answer makes the most sense and is therefore the correct answer

Importance of Reading the Study Material

It is critical for candidates to read all of the study material thoroughly. One goal in the test development process is to identify the relevant job knowledge someone needs upon promotion. Therefore, this study material was chosen by subject matter experts within the State Universities Civil Service System to target important job-knowledge areas associated with successful performance. Subsequently, I/O Solutions develops all examination questions directly from the identified source material. Thus, becoming familiar with the source material can significantly improve your exam score.

Many candidates simply fail to read (or study) the examination material and conduct little or no preparation for the written examination. I/O Solutions has conducted extensive research on the relationship between candidate study habits and test performance. The single greatest factor impacting candidate performance is examination preparation. In particular simply reading the sources has a substantial impact on test performance. In our research, candidates who simply read the examination sources pass the examination at a rate of 80%. In contrast, those candidates who fail to read the source material pass at a rate of 30%. Simply reading the examination material can put you in a position to be promoted, depending on the specifics of your promotional process!

Please remember that the written examination is a competitive process. Your success will strongly depend on how well you prepare for the examination. You have significant control over your destiny in the promotional process. Strong, focused preparation and a great deal of effort can greatly help to ensure your success.

Studying for the Exam

As mentioned above, it will be necessary to study for the exam to improve your chances of performing well. There are many proven methods of study that can enhance your performance when applied appropriately. It should be noted that different methods work better for certain individuals. The following provides a few brief suggestions on methods of preparation for the exam.

1. *Read the material:* As stated above, it is absolutely critical for candidates to read the study material. There is no substitute for this method of preparation.
2. *Highlight important information:* When reading the source materials, you may want to highlight information that you think is particularly important with a highlighter/marker. Later, as the exam date approaches, you can review the highlighted material.
3. *Take notes/make flashcards:* Many individuals find it helpful to take notes on the important material during the course of their reading. With this method, you can put the author's ideas into your own words, which will be easier for you to recall at a later date. Another similar study method involves making "flashcards" on 3" x 5" note cards. The goal of either method is to condense the amount of

- reading material to the most important and relevant aspects of the source. Also, your goal should be to make this material understandable in your own words. For example, read a section of the criminal code and take some time to decipher the meaning of the code. Then, in your own words, explain the nature and meaning of the code in your notes or flashcards. With either method, you should be prepared to spend some time studying the notes or flashcards in the weeks prior to the exam.
4. *Study with a partner/group:* Many individuals find it helpful to study with a partner or group of individuals who are also preparing for the exam. This way you can discuss the material with them, determine what the most important material is and analyze difficult concepts. In addition, study groups can divide duties and prepare brief summaries on the reading material to share with other group members. You might try preparing brief summaries or having various group members verbally describe a particular issue or section of the reading material in an informal presentation. Explaining and describing material to others is a great way to learn the material yourself!
 5. *Answer practice questions:* If a practice test is available on a particular subject, you should take the time to complete it. If there is not one available, there are several other methods of preparation to help you in answering exam questions. First, if the source material has “questions for review” at the end of each chapter, you should try to answer these questions immediately after reading the material. In addition, once you have completed a section of material, you can review the material and try to determine what questions might be asked of you on an examination. You should be able to answer these questions once you have read the material.
 6. *Study the material:* This may seem rather obvious, but there are two steps to studying. First, you must read the material. Then, you must review the material at a later time. This may involve reviewing notes, highlighted portions of the material, flashcards, group study sessions or completely re-reading the source. Regardless, there should be at least one review of the material to gain understanding and help with recall when the actual test occurs. It may go without saying, but if you spend time taking notes, making flashcards or highlighting during your initial reading/study phase, you should then spend time reviewing this material before the exam. For example, if you choose to highlight important material from the text, you should spend some time the week before the exam reviewing the highlighted passages. This may involve reading the highlighted sections several times.
 7. *Memorize:* There is certain material that must be memorized for an exam. While we advocate reading and taking notes in your own words, it is important to understand that some material must be memorized directly from the source. I/O Solutions writes exam questions directly from the source material and often uses the wording as it appears in the source material. Thus, recalling the specific information from the passage can be critical in determining your success on the exam.

Developing a Study Plan

It is recommended that candidates study for a **minimum** of 30 days for this exam. Typically, a candidate will use the initial portion of the study period to read the material and highlight, take notes or make flashcards. Thus, for a 60-day study period, a candidate may spend the first 40-50 days reading all of the source material. The final two to three weeks might be spent reviewing notes or other study material and re-reading important sections of the source material.

The study plan outlined above represents the minimum of what might be required of you to obtain a “reasonable” score. In a competitive process, such a study plan for an “average test-taker” may not result in a score sufficient enough to move forward in the promotional process.

General Preparation Guidelines

Diligently studying for this exam will be the best method for ensuring your success; however, there are other considerations that can affect your performance on the day of the exam. Your attitude on the day of the exam, the test-taking strategies you utilize, and your ability to avoid common test-taking errors will all affect the outcome of the exam. These issues are discussed in detail below.

- **Preparation for the exam.** You will increase your chances of obtaining your best score if you spend a lot of time preparing for the exam. This includes carefully reading and studying the materials listed. It is also important that you avoid becoming overly anxious about the exam and implement good test-taking strategies.
- **Your physical well-being.** Get a good night’s sleep before the exam. Try to ensure that you are in the best possible condition both physically and mentally on the day of the exam.
- **Arrive early.** Make all necessary arrangements to ensure that you arrive early at the test site. It would be wise to anticipate traffic delays in traveling to the test site and to allocate extra travel time to ensure an early arrival even with delays. Give yourself ample time to settle in at the test site.
- **Confidence.** The more confident you are in your abilities, the more likely you are to do well on the exam. Try to stay focused so that you don’t end up reading sentences and answer choices over and over again. You want to take control of the exam by feeling confident in your skills. Try to relax but concentrate on the exam you are about to take.
- **Attitude.** This exam is an opportunity for you to demonstrate that you have a grasp of the job knowledge necessary to perform successfully, and a positive attitude can have an impact on increasing your test score. There are a few ways to fine-tune

your attitude about taking this exam: Look at this exam as a challenge but try not to get "stressed out" by thinking about it too much. By using this *Orientation and Preparation Guide* and practicing your strategies, you can be more prepared for the exam.

General Strategies for Taking the Promotional Examination

- **Listen carefully.** The exam administrator will provide you with complete instructions for taking the exam. Be sure that you pay close attention to all test instructions. It is extremely important that you completely understand the directions before the exam begins.
- **Ask questions.** If there are instructions that you do not understand or if something is not clear, please feel free to ask the exam administrator any questions that you may have before the exam begins.
- **Note start and end times.** The E-Test System will track the time of your examination. Instructions are provided on-screen prior to beginning the examination.
- **Keep track of time.** It is important that you keep track of your time so that you are able to pace yourself throughout the exam. You do not want to run out of time and have unanswered questions. It is important that you allot a few minutes of time to guess on unanswered questions at the end of the exam.
- **Remain calm.** It is important that you remain calm throughout this exam so that you are able to work most effectively. You can't allow yourself to become nervous or confused by a few difficult or challenging questions. There are going to be times when you are not going to know the answer and neither will other individuals taking the exam.
- **Read each question carefully.** Be sure that you understand what the question requires of you.
- **Try to answer the question before you look at the answer options.** If you know the answer, compare it to the available choices and pick the choice closest in meaning to the answer you have in mind.
- **Answer easy questions first.** It is important that you answer the easy questions first on this exam. By doing so, you will afford yourself more time to spend on the difficult questions if necessary. Seek out questions you can answer. If there are particular kinds of questions with which you feel most comfortable, answer those questions first. For example, if you are particularly good at reading comprehension, then find those items first and complete them.

- **Don't waste time on questions you can't answer.** If you believe that you are not able to answer a question, then skip it. It is better to skip a difficult question than to spend a lot of time on it and not be able to complete other exam questions.
- **Mark for Review.** Highlight for review those questions that you have skipped so that you are able to return to them later in the exam. Marking questions that you have skipped will help to ensure that you have answered all of the questions by the time the examination period has ended.
- **Use a process of elimination.** If a situation presents itself in which you are unable to answer a question, use a process of elimination to narrow your options. First, eliminate any answers that are clearly wrong. Then determine how you feel about the remaining choices. If you believe that some answers are more correct than others, highlight for review for that test question. Later in the exam, you may have an opportunity to return to these questions and answer them without having to search through the entire examination again.
- **Guessing.** It is important that you try to get as many points as possible on the examination. Points are given for correct answers only. Because there is no penalty (i.e., points deducted) for guessing on this exam, you should try to answer every question. By leaving yourself enough time at the end of the test to fill in unanswered questions using your "best guess," you will increase the possibility of getting a few of them correct.
- **Extra time.** If you finish the exam before the time period is over, review your answers and make any changes that are necessary. Also, make sure that you have 'marked' your answers correctly.

Helpful Hints about the Exam

This section describes a few helpful hints to remember when preparing for the exam and in regard to answering questions on the examination.

- Exam questions are written directly from the source materials. Questions are often written "word-for-word" from the source to avoid confusion. Thus, the correct answer is also drawn directly from the sourcebook. In many cases, the distracters, or incorrect answers, are also drawn directly from the source. Thus, the information may "look familiar" but still be incorrect.
- Since questions are drawn directly from the source material listed in the Police Sergeant Exam Reference/Reading List, it is important to note that the correct answers (and hopefully your answers) will be taken directly from this source material. If there is a conflict between "how things are done in the department" and what the source indicates, the source is the deciding factor! In many cases, such items are removed during the review process. In some cases, these items remain in the examination to reinforce "how things should be done."

- Generally, we avoid questions on sentencing, penalties, and related areas (i.e., “trivial items”) that are not relevant to the work of sworn officers. At a minimum, you should focus your preparation efforts elsewhere. That said, some items may be more difficult and test your knowledge of the details of a particular policy.

Examination Allocation

The examination will consist of 69 job knowledge items. The time limit will be 2 hours. The following table provides guidance as to how many items will be drawn from each source.

Rank of Sergeant	
Source	Approximate % of Exam*
Supervision of Police Personnel	30
Police Administration: Structures, Processes, and Behavior	15
Crime Scene Investigation	15
Police Field Operations	20
Legal Guide for Police	20

* The above percentages are approximations of the final item totals. Final percentages may vary slightly.

Examination questions will be drawn directly from the above sources. Correct answers to test items are also identified directly from the above source material. For more detailed information about the specific source materials please refer to the respective reference/reading list for the examination.