



**Candidate Structured Oral  
Assessment (SOA)  
Orientation and Preparation  
Guide**

**Springfield, IL  
Police Department**

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**INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL SOLUTIONS**  
PUBLIC SAFETY SELECTION EXPERTS

# Candidate Orientation and Preparation Guide

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This guide has been designed to inform you about and to help you prepare for the structured oral assessment (herein referred to as SOA) for the Springfield, IL Police Department's hiring process. In this guide, you will learn about the SOA, the types of questions you may encounter while participating in the SOA, and instructions and tips that will help you to do your best on the day of the assessment.

Be sure to read through this entire guide carefully. By understanding how SOAs work and by knowing what to expect during the process, you will be more self-confident; self-confidence, in turn, will increase your chances of performing well during the assessment.

Good luck to you as you participate in this hiring process, and best wishes for your career in law enforcement!

## **The Structured Oral Assessment**

The SOA consists of a series of questions that will assess the skills and abilities necessary to perform as a police person in the Springfield Police Department. These questions can range from hypothetical scenarios to specific questions about how you tend to deal with situations. Your answers will be rated by a panel of assessors.

During the oral assessment, a panel member will read a question to you. You will be provided with a copy of each question before it is read to you. You may read along silently while the question is presented. You may refer to your copy of the question while providing your response.

You will be allowed a fixed amount of time to answer each question. If you have completed your response before the panel indicates that your time is up for that question, you can verbally announce that you are finished with that question. On the other hand, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time, the panel will tell you that your time is up. At

that time, you will be presented with the next question. This format will continue until you have responded to all of the assessment questions. After you have completed all assessment questions and left the room, the panel will discuss your performance and provide a rating for each question.

### **The Assessors**

As stated previously, your performance during the assessment process will be evaluated by a panel of assessors, who all will be acquainted with the essential duties, skills and abilities of a police person. Assessors have been trained before participating in the assessment. You can therefore be confident that these assessors will be fair and competent judges of your behavior and your abilities.

### **Areas of Measurement**

The oral assessment is designed to assess the most critical job-related skills and abilities. Some of the dimensions that may be assessed in the oral assessment include the following: interpersonal skills, teamwork, judgment, problem-solving, community orientation, stress tolerance and flexibility. Though some questions will require you to respond to hypothetical scenarios, at no time will you be assessed on your knowledge of department procedures, or any other specific job knowledge.

### **Preparation**

Here are a few steps you can take to prepare for the structured oral assessment:

- Practice listening to questions with multiple parts and answering all parts of the questions.
- Make an audio and/or video tape of your practice session or watch yourself practice in a mirror. Identify any distracting mannerisms that you may have and try to correct them.
- Conversely, you might conduct an assessment session with a study partner. Each individual can prepare questions, and you can practice by answering your partner's questions.

## **Suggestions for Responding to the Oral Assessment Questions**

- Familiarize yourself with the roles and responsibilities of the position. This will help you learn as much as you can about the position and what will be expected of you. You may be asked questions regarding how you will handle certain hypothetical situations that relate to the law enforcement profession. Therefore, it is important to understand what duties you will be responsible for on the job.
- Ask yourself the following questions: How will I handle problematic situations as a police person? How will I communicate information to others? What do I know about important issues related to law enforcement? Where do I stand (and what justification do I have for my stance) on critical issues in the field?
- After listening to the oral assessment question, take some time to formulate an organized response. Do not be afraid to pause for a period of time to carefully consider your answer and to organize it in a way that is meaningful and that will ultimately make sense to those individuals who are rating your response. The more organized and well thought out your answers, the more favorably they will be viewed by assessors.
- Answer the question as it is asked. It is common for oral assessment candidates to answer a question other than the one posed. Oral assessments are stressful, and it is not uncommon for a candidate to misunderstand or misinterpret the question and then provide an answer that is completely off-base. Be sure to listen carefully to the question and provide an answer for that specific question. Do not go outside the bounds of the question or ramble on about unrelated issues.
- Questions are provided on paper for each candidate. Review the question to ensure you have answered all parts of the question.
- Provide a complete response to each question. It is common for a candidate to answer a question and repeat the same answer over and over. Offer an answer that is complete but do not reiterate your response multiple times. Keep your answer concise but ensure that you provide a comprehensive response to the question that is posed.
- Ensure that you answer each question fully within the time limit.
- Speak clearly. Oral communication skills are obviously paramount in an oral assessment. Oral communication is usually rated separately from your answers to the questions in the oral assessment. Thus, if you communicate poorly, the assessors will not penalize you on

your answers to each question. That said, the rating of oral communication and presentation is an important element of the oral assessment. Convey a professional demeanor by speaking clearly and demonstrating good posture and appearance. Good communication skills will only accentuate your response to a question.

- Provide an honest answer to each question and be yourself throughout the assessment.
- Often, the assessors will not repeat a question after it is read. This is why the questions are provided for you on paper.
- After a question is read, a stopwatch may be started. Thus, you will have a certain, predetermined time in which to respond to a question.
- In many cases, you will not be allowed to ask for clarification regarding a question, and the assessors will usually not ask you to clarify an answer that is incomplete or confusing. Therefore, you must be prepared to answer the questions to the best of your ability with the information given in the question.
- Many SOAs do not allow candidates to give an introductory statement and do not allow candidates to prepare or present outside material (e.g., a resume, etc.). An SOA follows a consistent script for each and every candidate.

### **Assessment-Day Instructions and Tips**

The following are instructions and advice that will help you on the day of the assessment:

- Be on time for the SOA. Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the site as this will give you one less thing to worry about that day.
- Do not bring **personal** cellular phones or paging devices.
- Bring photo identification.
- Dispose of any gum, candy or mints. You do not want this to interfere with your speech or cause an unnecessary distraction.
- Dress and prepare appropriately for this professional job oral assessment.
- It is natural to be nervous. Be sure to keep a positive attitude and an open mind as you participate in the assessment so that the assessors can see you perform to the best of your ability.

## **Security Issues**

You will be competing with a number of other candidates for the position. Any information you divulge about the structure of the assessment, specific questions or otherwise will provide another candidate with an unfair advantage—in addition, this may be a violation of policy. Keep the content and structure of the oral assessment confidential. By participating in this process, you agree not to divulge information about the nature of the questions or the manner in which they are administered.